


Economist says Oklahoma's jobless rate rise could reflect economic strength

Oklahoma's unemployment rate grew in October, but a state economist said the numbers likely reflect discouraged job seekers returning to the labor force.

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Oklahoma's unemployment rate grew in October, but a state economist was encouraged by the numbers, which likely reflect job seekers returning to the labor force.

The state's jobless rate rose to 6.1 percent in October from 5.9 percent in September. Oklahoma was one of just five states that registered a higher unemployment rate, the U.S. Labor Department said.

The national unemployment rate dipped to 9 percent, a 0.1 percentage point decline.

While the number of unemployed Oklahomans grew, the state economy added 9,100 jobs in October, said Lynn Gray, chief economist for the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission.

“I think this is a positive report,” Gray said. “It's slow growth, but it is growing.”

Gray believes more jobless Oklahomans who grew discouraged about finding work have resumed their quest for employment. When people stop looking for a job, they fall out of the labor force and are not counted in the unemployment data. When those people resume their job quest, they again are classified as unemployed.

“Even though unemployment is increasing, I don't think it's because we're seeing an increase in job losers,” he said.

“People that were out of labor force are coming back into it, or perhaps a few people are moving into the state because of our lower unemployment rate or a more robust economy here in Oklahoma,” Gray said.

The number of working Oklahomans has been growing since July, Gray said, and initial jobless claims have been declining for the past six months.

“I think the economy is picking up a little speed here,” he said.

Much of Oklahoma's October job growth was concentrated in lower-income sectors, such as retail trade and food services, Gray said. But in the longer-term, the strongest job-creating sectors have been mining (which includes energy), construction and manufacturing.

“Over the past year, we've had fantastic growth in jobs that pay well,” he said.

Nevada had the nation's highest unemployment rate for the 17th straight month. It was unchanged at 13.4 percent. North Dakota reported the nation's lowest unemployment rate, at 3.5 percent. It was followed by Nebraska, at 4.2 percent.

CONTRIBUTING: The Associated Press



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