

Wash.'s jobless rate drops to 8.9 percent in July

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Washington state's unemployment rate fell for the fourth straight month, dropping to 8.9 percent in July, but more than 306,000 people are still unemployed and looking for work, state officials said Tuesday.

"Job growth is still wobbly, but the private sector is showing encouraging signs of life," Employment Security Commissioner Karen Lee said in a written statement.

July's jobless rate dropped 0.1 percentage point from June's revised rate of 9 percent. The national rate is 9.5 percent. Washington state was at 9.5 percent earlier this year but has seen its rate drop monthly starting in April.

The state added about 3,100 jobs in July but registered a net loss of 2,300 for the month from the elimination of about 5,400 government jobs, most of which were federal census jobs.

Other industries with a combined 1,600 job losses were: manufacturing; financial activities; leisure and hospitality; and other services.

Several industries added jobs in July, including transportation, warehousing and utilities, which gained 1,000, and construction, which was up 900. Education and health services also gained 900 jobs, retail trade was up 600, and wholesale trade was up 500. Information, professional and business services, and mining and logging gained a combined 800 jobs.

Washington had 14,500 fewer jobs last month than in July 2009, and nearly 240,000 people received unemployment benefits from the state in July.

The state has added more than 21,000 private-sector jobs this year. Adding in the loss in government jobs, there has been a total net gain of 19,800 jobs during the past seven months.

Dave Wallace, chief economist at the Employment Security Department, said he'd like to see stronger private-sector job growth in the coming months.

"We're having a really, really mild recovery," he said. "If we really want to climb out of this hole the recession put us in, we have to have more solid growth."

The state's highest unemployment rate in July was 13.3 percent in Clark County in the southwest, along the border with Oregon. San Juan County in the northwest had the lowest rate at 5.1 percent. King County, the state's largest county, was at 8.1 percent.

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