

Unemployment Fell In Half Of U.S. States In May

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Unemployment rates fell in half of U.S. states last month, led by drops in California, West Virginia, New York and Hawaii.

The Labor Department said Friday that unemployment rates rose in 17 states and were unchanged in eight.

Hiring has been steady nationwide, leading to a better job market in many areas of the country. Employers added jobs in 33 states last month. The biggest gains were in Ohio, Texas and Michigan.

The unemployment rate dipped in the Northeast to 7.5 percent from 7.6 percent, and fell in the West to 7.8 percent from 8 percent. It was flat in the Midwest at 7.2 percent and edged up in the South to 7.2 percent from 7.1 percent.

California and West Virginia had the largest declines in unemployment among all states. In California, the rate dropped to 8.6 percent from 9 percent in April. West Virginia's rate fell to 6.2 percent from 6.6 percent.

Both states reported job gains.

California has also seen the largest drop in unemployment among the states in the past 12 months. Its rate fell 2.1 percentage points from May 2012. Nevada's decline of 2 percent was the second largest.

New York and Hawaii also had significant declines in May from April. New York's unemployment rate dropped to 7.6 percent from 7.8 percent, while Hawaii's fell to 4.7 percent from 4.9 percent.

North Dakota had the nation's lowest unemployment rate at 3.2 percent.

Nevada had the highest at 9.5 percent. It was followed by Illinois and Mississippi, each at 9.1 percent.

Nationally, the economy added 175,000 jobs in May, nearly matching the average monthly gain for the past year. The unemployment rate ticked up to 7.6 percent from 7.5 percent, but for a good reason: More Americans were confident they could find work and began searching for a job.

The Federal Reserve on Wednesday offered a brighter outlook for the job market and economy. And Chairman Ben Bernanke said the Fed is likely to slow its bond-buying program later this year and end it next year if the economy continues to strengthen.

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Fed officials now expect the unemployment rate to fall as low 7.2 percent this year and between 6.5 percent and 6.8 percent by the end of 2014.

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