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THE ECONOMY

Berkshire jobless rate rises again

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PITTSFIELD — The Berkshire County unemployment rate rose slightly for the second straight month in February, but at 5.3 percent it is now almost a full percentage point higher than it was in December.

The local rate rose threetenths of a percentage point in February, which followed an increase of six-tenths of a percentage point in January, according to figures released Tuesday by the state Executive Office of Labor

and Workforce Development. Berkshire unemployment was 3.4 percent in December.

This is the first time Berkshire unemployment has been at five percent or over in consecutive months since February and March of last year.

However, local unemployment is almost half a percentage point lower than the 5.7 percent registered in February 2016.

Unemployment in the Berkshires typically increases at the beginning of each new year as seasonal hiring ends and some companies complete their fiscal years.

A total of 3,466 county residents collected state jobless benefits in February, topping the 3,000 mark for the second straight month.

It is the highest total since last March when 3,526 county residents were collecting benefits. The county's total labor force and number of employed also increased in February.

In the Pittsfield metropolitan area, total employment dropped by 100 jobs from January, a decrease of 0.2 percent, but it has increased by 300 jobs, or 0.7 percent, from February 2016.

Unemployment in the

Great Barrington, North Adams and Pittsfield workforce areas also increased slightly in February, but those numbers are all lower than they were 12 months ago. The state's unemployment rate is 4.2 percent, slightly under the national rate of 4.7 percent.

The numbers released on Tuesday are not seasonally adjusted which means they take into account seasonal construction jobs and positions in the travel and tourism industry.

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