Employment Numbers Show Break in 3-Month Holding Pattern

Local News

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OLYMPIA – After three months at 7.5 percent, Washington’s seasonally adjusted unemployment rate dropped to an estimated 7.3 percent in March, according to Washington’s Employment Security Department. While individual county rates will be released later this month, t hat’s the lowest statewide unemployment rate since December 2008.
At the same time, job numbers are mixed. February’s originally estimated gain of 4,000 jobs was revised upward to 5,500 – only to have all the gains erased in March, with an estimated loss of 5,500 jobs.“We’ve seen a lot of volatility in the job-survey results, but the trend over the past year shows we’re gaining jobs,” said Anneliese Vance-Sherman, a labor economist with Employment Security. “The unemployment-rate survey has been more stable, showing a slow but steady drop in the unemployment rate.”Industries with the most estimated job gains in March were education and health services, up 1,800; manufacturing, up 900; retail, up 500; construction, up 400; and wholesale trade, up 200.

Industries showing the most job losses last month included government, down 4,600 jobs; professional and business services, down 2,500; other services, down 1,000; financial activities, down 900; and information, down 200. Within the government sector, 1,500 of the job losses were in state agencies; 1,300 were in public higher education; 1,200 were in local government, mostly in K-12 schools; and 600 were from federal employment.In March, an estimated 254,000 people (seasonally adjusted) in Washington were unemployed and looking for work. That includes 136,524 who claimed unemployment benefits last month.Also in March, 3,161 unemployed workers ran out of unemployment benefits, bringing the total to 135,236 since extended benefits were activated in July 2008.