Jobless rates fall in 21 states

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March figures promising, despite rise in some states

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Unemployment rates fell in 21 states last month, and joblessness in 24 states was 6.0% or less, the Bureau of Labor Statistics said Friday.

The U.S. unemployment rate was 6.7% in March.

Rates increased in 17 states and the District of Columbia and 12 states showed no change from February.

Rhode Island's rate remained the nation's highest, falling to 8.7% from 9.0% in February. North Dakota, benefiting from a boom in oil and gas production there, continued to have the lowest rate — 2.6%. It is the only state whose unemployment rate has reached a historical low, based on BLS records back to 1976. North Dakota's jobless rate was also 2.6% in late 1997 and early 1998.

Three Southeastern states led the nation in job gains compared with February. Florida, where unemployment has fallen to 6.3% from 7.7% a year ago, gained 22,900 jobs. Second was North Carolina, up 19,400 jobs. Georgia was third with 14,600 more.

COMPARING JOBLESS RATES

States with lowest in March		States with highest	
North Dakota	2.6%	Illinois	8.4%
Vermont	3.4%	Nevada	8.5%
Nebraska	3.7%	Rhode Island	8.7%
South Dakota			

SOURCE BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS

Unemployment rates have fallen sharply in all three states since March 2013. Florida has dropped from 7.7% to 6.3%. North Carolina's jobless rate is 6.3%, down from 8.5%. Georgia's is 7%, down from 8.4% a year ago. A similar shift has unfolded in South Carolina. Its unemployment rate a year ago was 8.0% and last month it was 5.5%. The state's employment rose by 10,200 jobs from February.

Over the past year, the improving U.S. economy has touched almost every state's job market. Employment is up in 45 states and the District of Columbia. Forty-six states and the District have lower unemployment rates than in March 2013.

North Dakota, Nevada and Florida have the highest percentage gains in employment, year-over-year — 4.5%, 3.8% and 3.0%, respectively. For numbers of jobs, the leaders are California, with 325,100 more; Texas, 310,000; and Florida, 225,100.