

Jobless Rate Jumps in HC, Across State

Written by Steve Frank
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There are people in the High Country who knew this report would be bad long before the statistics came out—that unemployment rates jumped in the area in January—just as the State Legislature was voting to decrease unemployment compensation. Some 5000 people are officially looking for work across the High Country by filing for unemployment. Every county—all 100 in the state, had increased unemployment in January as did all 14 of the state's metro areas. The January statewide not seasonally adjusted statewide rate was 10.2 percent. Graham County had the highest unemployment rate at 20.4 percent while Orange County had the lowest at 6.6 percent, while the great majority of counties now have double-digit unemployment rates. The state Commerce Department spin on the figures includes a comparison to a year ago, saying not seasonally adjusted unemployment rates dropped in 30 counties, increased in 63 and remained unchanged in seven compared to a year ago. But the numbers over the past several months are going in the wrong direction, and seem to be picking up speed. In the High Country, the Ashe County rate jumped 2.1%, now at 13.8%, while Avery almost matched that number, a 1.5% increase putting the Avery rate at 13.7%. And the Watauga rate—historically much lower—also jumped over a percent, closing in on 10% at 9.5% for January. The number of workers employed (not seasonally adjusted) decreased in January by 30,998 while those unemployed rose 37,412. Again, the state spin said that since January 2012, the number of workers unemployed increased 14,640, while those employed increased 68,375.