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## 'Jobs Count' tracks state employment

By [Paul J. Nyden](#)

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Last month, the unemployment rate in West Virginia dropped below 7 percent for the first time in three years. Only two job categories increased their employment by more than 1 percent in March, but no other major industry saw job losses over 1 percent.

The March issue of "Jobs Count," published by the West Virginia Center on Budget & Policy, pointed out those and several other statistics about employment in the Mountain State.

Professional and business services added about 1,000 jobs, a 1.6 percent increase in employment, while the financial activities sector added about 400 jobs, a 1.5 percent increase.

The most job losses in March, according to "Jobs Count," came in the trade, transportation and utilities industries. Together, they lost 1,200 jobs, a decline just under 1 percent.

During the first three months of 2012, mining and logging employment dropped by 1,100, a decline of 3.2 percent.

But over a longer period of time -- from December 2007 to March 2012 -- mining and logging employment rose by 16 percent, from 28,800 jobs to 33,400 jobs.

Manufacturing industries -- including industries such as steel, aluminum and chemicals -- suffered job losses of 15.2 percent during that same period of time. The number of manufacturing jobs, some of the state's best-paying jobs, dropped from 57,800 to 49,000.

Construction jobs declined from 38,100 to 34,700 jobs from December 2007 to March 2012, according to data collected by the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The Center for Budget & Policy also reported low-wage workers -- people making \$10 an hour or less -- are older and better educated today than low-wage workers were in the past.

"The share of low-wage workers with less than a high school degree fell more than half, from 36.5 percent in 1979-1981 to 15.4 percent in 2009-2011," the newsletter points out.

"The share with at least some college education doubled, from 15.8 percent to 29.7 percent."

By 2011, 8.1 percent of all low-wage workers had at least a four-year bachelor's college degree, a jump from less than three percent 30 years earlier.

But the real wages, adjusted for inflation, have remained stagnant for the bottom 20 percent of the state's workforce since 1979.

In 2011, their wages were actually lower than they were in 1979, despite the increases in those workers' educational accomplishments.

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