

Tulsa-area unemployment edged up to 7.7 percent in October, remaining in a range that has persisted for several months, the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission reported Tuesday. October's job figure was above September's revised rate of 7.5 percent. Metropolitan Tulsa's unemployment rate has hovered at 7 percent or higher since May 2009, peaking at 8.1 percent in January and February. October's report was satisfactory considering its individual components, said Bob Ball, economic research manager for the Tulsa Metro Chamber. The seven-county metro area's labor force - people working and looking for work - grew by 610 individuals for the month. That indicates people have come into the market to look for work and expect to find jobs, Ball said. The unemployment rate is calculated by dividing the number of unemployed people by the labor force. Based on a smaller household survey, the area's total employment, made up of self-employed people and agricultural jobs, dropped slightly by 300 jobs, the OESC reported. The number of unemployed also rose by 900 individuals. "It's not unreasonable to think that the unemployment rate will hover right here at 7.5 percent or even upward a little more as people come into the labor force," Ball added. Eventually, as the labor force continues to rise and people move more quickly out of unemployment into jobs, the unemployment rate will start to fall, he said. Lynn Gray, the OESC's chief economist, looks for slow growth into next year and slow improvement in the labor markets for both the state and Tulsa. "I don't see any reason to think that Tulsa wouldn't also be experiencing this slow growth," he said. "It seems to be behind Oklahoma City in terms of its growth rate over the year." Metro Oklahoma City posted a 6.4 percent jobless rate in October, while Lawton's was 6.6 percent. "Some of the advantage Oklahoma City has enjoyed over Tulsa is an industrial concentration," Gray said. "Having a larger proportion of government employment in the Oklahoma City metro has helped Oklahoma City relative to Tulsa. That is probably not going to be the same type of advantage in 2011." The gap between Tulsa and Oklahoma City's unemployment rate is expected to

close in 2011, according to an economic forecast given last week at the annual Economic Outlook Conference. Gray pointed out that the Tulsa area's nonfarm employment grew faster than Oklahoma City's for the month. According to a larger survey taken among businesses, the Tulsa area gained 3,700 nonfarm jobs in October for total nonfarm employment of 410,300. That figure is down 800 jobs from the same period a year ago.

Among individual sectors, educational and health services rose by 600 jobs in October and 2,100 jobs over the year. Tulsa's mining and logging sector was unchanged for the month but was up 900 jobs, or 13.6 percent, from a year earlier. Higher oil prices help Tulsa, which sells manufactured oil and gas field and service equipment around the world, Ball said. Manufacturing was up 400 jobs over the month but was down 300 jobs from October 2009. Ball said he believes that soon manufacturing will be positive on a year-over-year basis. "Things are turning," Ball said. "That's what we suggested would happen in the fourth quarter. We're seeing more streams and sectors showing gains." Statewide, McCurtain County, located at the southeastern tip of the state, had the highest October jobless rate at 10.2 percent while Beaver County's was the lowest at 3.5 percent, according to the OESC. Nationwide, 102 metro areas reported jobless rates of at least 10 percent in October, down from 129 a year earlier. For the month, 10 metros across the country had rates of at least 15 percent, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. El Centro, Calif., again recorded the highest jobless rate at 29.3 percent, and Bismarck, N.D., had the lowest rate at 2.7 percent. Laurie Winslow 581-8466 Original Print Headline: Tulsa-area jobless rate rises slightly