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## Virginia's jobless rate among best

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BY BILL FREEHLING  
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Virginia's 6.5 percent jobless rate in August was the fifth best in the country, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data released yesterday.

North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska and Utah were the only states that bested Virginia's unemployment rate in August. The U.S. rate was 9.7 percent.

"The spread between Virginia and the nation is widening," said Bill Mezger, chief economist for the Virginia Employment Commission.

Mezger said that's in part due to Virginia benefiting from federal stimulus spending, particularly on the state's numerous military bases. The state rate also benefited from colleges returning to session unusually early this year.

Virginia's jobless rate fell from 6.9 percent in July. It was one of just 16 states whose rate fell from July to August. Seven stayed the same, and the rest went up.

Every state had a higher rate in August compared with the year before, however. Virginia's rate was 4.1 percent in August 2008.

The local jobless rates for August won't be out for another 10 days or so. But the Fredericksburg-area rate typically runs lower than Virginia as a whole.

The jobless rate for the George Washington Regional Commission--Fredericksburg and Caroline, King George, Spotsylvania and Stafford counties--was 6 percent in July. That was nearly a full percentage point below the state rate.

Mezger said unemployment could continue to improve during the last part of 2009, as that includes the fall harvest and holiday shopping period.

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