

CRANE WATCH

# New Mexico notches nation's highest increase in jobs in this industry

April 25, 2017, 2:20 pm MDT

CHRISTOPHER ORTIZ  
MANAGING EDITOR  
ALBUQUERQUE BUSINESS FIRST

New Mexico has the nation's highest unemployment, but at least one industry's posting some significant gains.

Between February and March, New Mexico added 1,500 construction jobs, a 3.4 percent increase, the largest percentage increase in the nation, [according to data from the U.S. Department of Labor](#).



Facebook's Los Lunas data center is being credited for New Mexico having the largest increase of construction jobs between February and March.

New Mexico was one of [17 states that added construction jobs during that time period](#). California gained the most construction jobs, 18,900, between February and March. Illinois lost the most, with 4,900.

In recent years, New Mexico saw some of the [nation's heaviest losses of construction jobs](#).

[Kelly Roepke-Orth](#), chief operations officer at the Associated General Contractors of New Mexico, said she credits Facebook's data center in Los Lunas in part for the uptick in construction jobs. The \$250 million first phase of the Los Lunas Facebook data center is under construction. In January, Albuquerque Business First reported that local Union 611, the New Mexico branch of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, was [looking to hire up to 350 by the end of April](#).

Roepke-Orth also credited the recently announced [87,000-acre El Cabo Wind Farm project](#) and other private-sector projects for the increase in construction jobs.

Avangrid Renewables is said to have filled more than 300 construction jobs for its El Cabo Wind Farm project in Torrance County. The company has invested \$38 million contracting with Albuquerque- and Santa Fe-based engineering, construction, planning and design firms, according to the New Mexico State Land Office. Slated to be the state's largest wind farm, El Cabo will include 142 turbines and produce enough energy to power nearly 61,000 homes and businesses. Transmission will use existing Public Service Company of New Mexico lines.

New Mexico's unemployment rate in March was 6.7 percent, a slight decline from 6.8 percent the month before, but still the highest state unemployment rate in the country. Albuquerque is 84.3 percent recovered from the recession, [according to Business First's Recovery Index](#).

Business First is tracking construction projects in and around the Albuquerque metro area with its new [interactive Construction Watch map](#).

***505.348.8323 / [cortiz@bizjournals.com](mailto:cortiz@bizjournals.com)***