

U.S. Employers Add Solid 223,000 Jobs, Unemployment Rate Falls To 7-Year Low

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. employers added 223,000 jobs in April, a solid gain that suggests that the economy may be recovering after stumbling at the start of the year.

The Labor Department said Friday that the unemployment rate dipped to 5.4 percent from 5.5 percent in March. That is the lowest rate since May 2008, six months into the Great Recession.

Yet the report included signs of sluggishness: March's weak job gain was revised sharply down to just 85,000 from 126,000. In the past three months, employers have added 191,000 positions, a decent gain but down from last year's average of 260,000.

Oil and gas drillers, which have struggled under the weight of lower energy prices, shed jobs for a fourth straight month.

But in an encouraging sign, construction companies, which include many higher-paying positions, added jobs at a healthy pace in April.

The job growth isn't yet boosting paychecks much. Average hourly wages rose just 3 cents in April to \$24.87. Wages have risen 2.2 percent in the past 12 months, about the same modest year-over-year increase as in the past six years.