

NEWS RELEASE

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Idaho's Jobless Rate Drops for First Time in 32 Months

Job gains across much of the economy eased Idaho unemployment a tenth of a point to 9.4 percent in March, the first decline in the jobless rate in 32 months. New jobs exceeded new job seekers for the first time in three years in another sign that Idaho's economy may have started to recover.

"Six key economic indicators - labor force, new hires, total employment, unemployment, job gains, weekly benefit payouts - are all headed in the right direction," said Idaho Department of Labor Director Roger B. Madsen. "I'm very encouraged and optimistic."

The number of workers without jobs retreated from February's record 71,600, slipping under 71,000 for the first decline in the number of people unemployed since March 2007. The recession began in December 2007.

While the labor force grew another 2,200 from February to March, the 10th monthly increase in a row, total employment at 686,700 rose 2,700, the highest one-month jump in the number of people working in six years. The last time more people found work in a single month was February 2004 when 3,000 workers found new jobs during the early days of Idaho's record-setting economic expansion.

Idaho's highest unemployment rate was 9.6 percent from December 1982 through February 1983 during the depths of a double-dip recession.

The national rate remained unchanged for the third straight month at 9.7 percent.

Nonfarm jobs increased 4,600 from February to March, only 1,100 short of the pre-recession average job increase between February and March. Major sectors like manufacturing, retail trade, restaurants and professional, business and financial services all posted gains above what was normal the past five years. Construction, which shed 9,200 jobs between August and February, gained 200 jobs in March.

Even the state's two largest metropolitan areas - Boise and Coeur d'Alene - posted modest job growth in March, continuing February's reversal of months of decline. Nearly half the statewide job growth was in metropolitan Boise.

Private education and health care, two sectors that weathered the recession without job losses, were both flat from February to March.

Tempering the picture were the 53,000 workers who continued to receive unemployment benefits last week - a total of \$14.9 million. About 24,000 of them had already exhausted their regular state benefits of 10 to 26 weeks and are receiving federally-financed extended benefits that can last up to 73 more weeks if they cannot find work.

Employers have been extremely cautious in the past several months since the state economy seemed to have bottomed out. But in March, they hired over 10,000 new workers, 600 more than they hired in March 2009 and the first time in 47 months that new hires have exceeded the year-earlier number.

Job prospects have also improved. The Conference Board, a business research group headquartered in New York, found there were seven unemployed Idaho workers for every two job listings in February, down from nearly 10 for every two listings last November.

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Nonfarm jobs in March totaled nearly 596,000. That was 8,400 less than in March 2009, a 1.4 percent difference well below the peak year-over-year job loss of 7.3 percent, or nearly 50,000 jobs, last July and August.

Seventeen of Idaho’s 44 counties posted jobless rates in double digits, down from 18 in February. Clearwater was the highest at 19.3 percent. Owyhee was the lowest at 4.9 percent. Both the Boise and Coeur d’Alene metro areas remained in double digits, each at 10 percent.

Only three other counties - Butte, Madison and Oneida - had rates below 6 percent.

Seasonally Adjusted Forecast Data

	3/10	2/10	3/09
Civilian Labor Force	755,100	755,600	749,300
Unemployment	71,000	71,600	53,600
% Labor Force Unemployed	9.4	9.5	7.2
Total Employment	684,100	684,000	695,700

Unadjusted Forecast Data

	3/10	2/10	3/09
Civilian Labor Force	753,800	752,900	743,500
Unemployment	74,200	79,300	60,000
% Labor Force Unemployed	9.8	10.5	8.1
Total Employment	679,600	673,600	683,500

Area Unemployment Rates

	3/10	2/10	3/09
Boise City-Nampa MSA	10.0	10.0	6.9
Burley MicSA	6.8	6.8	4.5
Coeur d’Alene MSA*	10.0	10.6	8.5
Grangeville SLMA	10.7	10.5	9.4
Hailey SLMA	9.6	9.8	5.4
Idaho Falls MSA	7.1	7.4	4.9
Lewiston MSA	7.4	8.2	7.2
Pocatello MSA	8.6	8.5	5.6
Rexburg MicSA	7.1	7.8	4.8
Twin Falls MicSA	8.1	8.5	5.5

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