

NEWS RELEASE

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Idaho's Jobless Rate Holds at 9.7 Percent for Fourth Straight Month

Idaho's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate remained unchanged at 9.7 percent in March, the fourth straight month the rate has been at a record high.

But according to preliminary estimates by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of people at work grew faster than the number of people looking for work for the first in four years. Fewer than 2,200 new people joined the labor force last month, pushing it to a record 762,900, but just over 2,220 more Idaho workers were on the job in March as total employment hit nearly 689,000, the highest level since April 2010.

That combination drove the number of unemployed down from February, and while the decline was only fractional - not enough to lower the rate - it was the first decline since March 2007, nine months before the recession began.

Idaho's latest unemployment report reinforced new figures showing the state had more jobs during the first three months of this year than during the first quarter of 2010, and normal seasonal employment trends appear to be returning. The last time current-month jobs exceeded year-earlier totals was March 2008.

March unemployment insurance payments, while still extremely high, were 31 percent below last year's levels at \$43.5 million with the number of claimants down 24 percent to just over 41,000.

Department analysts believe a stabilizing unemployment rate combined with year-over-year job growth offers evidence that Idaho's economy is moving toward recovery, albeit slowly.

The same general pattern occurred during the last severe recession of the early 1980s when unemployment stabilized for three months at a then-record high 9.6 percent and year-over-year job growth resumed about the same time.

Tempering the outlook is the latest report from The Conference Board, a New York-based think tank, that there were more than four unemployed workers for every job opening in Idaho, down slightly from an all-time high of nearly five idled workers for every job in late 2009.

Although nonfarm jobs remained under 600,000 during the first three months of the year, the total was 2,100 more in January than a year earlier, 3,300 higher in February and 3,800 higher in March. Nearly every major sector of the economy performed ahead of the five-year average. Even construction, which has taken the biggest loss in this recession, picked up 1,100 jobs from February, 400 more than analysts expected.

Underperforming in March were financial services, which at the same level as February failed to achieve an anticipated gain, and education and health care, which posted gains but not as large as the average for the previous five years.

Government, which is now feeling the recession's delayed impact of greatly reduced tax receipts, muted year-over-year gains in the private sector, shedding 3,500 jobs from March of last year. Job losses were across the board - 1,300 each at the federal and local levels and 900 at the state level.

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Nationally, unemployment fell another tenth of a point in March to 8.8 percent, the fourth month in a row that Idaho's rate has been higher after more than nine years of running below the national rate.

Even with the improved picture, the number of Idahoans without jobs was still just below the record 74,000 set in February and substantially higher than the 68,000 unemployed in March 2010 when the rate was 9 percent.

Nineteen primarily rural counties posted double-digit unemployment rates. Two major urban counties remained in double-digits - Kootenai at 11 percent, down a tenth from February, and Canyon at 11.8 percent, unchanged from February but enough to keep the Boise metropolitan area rate at just over 10 percent. The other three metro areas remained in single-digits.

Eighteen of Idaho's 44 counties recorded higher rates in March than in February while 21 saw rates drop. The other five were unchanged. Valley County employment dropped significantly from February, pushing the jobless rate up three-tenths of a point to 16 percent to lead the state. Adams County, which had the highest rate, saw employment pick up dramatically, dropping its rate two points to 14.1 percent.

The lowest rate continued to be reported by Owyhee County at 5.6 percent, down three-tenths from February. Owyhee and Oneida at 5.8 percent were again the only counties with rates under 6 percent.

Seasonally Adjusted Forecast Data

	3/11	2/11	3/10
Civilian Labor Force	762,900	760,700	757,700
Unemployment	74,000	74,000	68,400
% Labor Force Unemployed	9.7	9.7	9.0
Total Employment	688,900	686,700	689,300

Unadjusted Forecast Data

Civilian Labor Force	760,000	757,400	753,900
Unemployment	78,900	80,700	74,700
% Labor Force Unemployed	10.4	10.7	9.9
Total Employment	681,100	676,700	679,200

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