

Twin Falls Times News, Saturday, April 16, 2011 -- by Blair Koch

## Idaho's jobless rate holds at 9.7 percent

Idaho's unemployment rate continues to be higher than the national average, according to a report released Friday by the Idaho Department of Labor. It reported Idaho's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for March remained unchanged for the fourth month in a row at 9.7 percent.

Lincoln County continues to have one of the highest unemployment rates in the state, at 13.4 percent. Eighteen of Idaho's 44 counties recorded higher rates in March than in February while 21 saw rates drop. The other five were unchanged. The lowest rate continued to be reported by Owyhee County at 5.6 percent, down three-tenths from February.

Although job growth remains essentially flat, Department of Labor Regional Economist Jan Roeser said the latest report shows positive signs. "The civilian labor market is showing growth," Roeser said.

She pointed out that in Twin Falls County, 476 people entered the job market in March, which was more than was added in March 2010. The work force in Twin Falls County grew by over 770 people from February to March of this year. "That is a sign that people are more optimistic about the job market and the ability to find work," Roeser said. Another positive indicator is found in 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," a press release said.

Department analysts believe a stabilizing unemployment rate combined with year-over-year job growth offers evidence that Idaho's economy is moving toward recovery. "This recovery has been slow and it will continue to be a slow recovery," Roeser said. 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.

The outlook is also being effected by a report from The Conference Board, a New York-based think tank, that reported 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. Statewide, 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.

### *Unemployment rates*

Unemployment rate, by county:

Blaine 9.4%  
Cassia 7.1 %  
Gooding 6.8 %  
Lincoln 13.4 %

Twin Falls 8.8 %  
Source: Idaho  
Department of Labor