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## **Labor Department receives \$1.2 million in stimulus funds for unemployment administration**

**PIERRE, S.D.** – The South Dakota Department of Labor (DOL) has received \$1.2 million in federal stimulus funds for the administration of the unemployment insurance system.

South Dakota is eligible for \$28 million for workforce programs through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

“The Department of Labor’s top priority is to put these dollars to use immediately,” said State Labor Secretary Pam Roberts. “We are geared up to deliver enhanced services to our unemployment claimants.”

The funding is being used for additional staffing needed to process claims. “Since the economy took a downturn in October, we have used temporary staff, retrained and reassigned existing staff, added two new staff in the Call Center and three more to review claims and make payments to unemployed workers,” said Secretary Roberts. “We also extended our hours and have 12 representatives working overtime to handle the call volume.”

The number of initial unemployment claims in February 2009 was just over 2,800. The over-the-year comparison shows a 73 percent increase between the February 2009 number of initial claims and the February 2008 level of about 1,300.

Funding is also being used for automation improvements. The telephone system used in the Call Center will be modernized and expanded to provide better and faster service to callers. “New computer software for employers is near completion,” said Secretary Roberts. “It will be free of charge and provide a more convenient method for employers to file their quarterly unemployment reports.”

Unemployment insurance provides temporary financial assistance for people who have lost their jobs, through no fault of their own, until they find other jobs. South Dakota's unemployment insurance program is financed by employers through payroll taxes; workers do not contribute to this plan. To learn more, visit [www.sdjobs.org](http://www.sdjobs.org).