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JOBLESSNESS IN WEST SOUTH CENTRAL UNITED STATES WELL BELOW NATIONAL AVERAGE

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Employment and unemployment data for January 2009 released today by the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicate that joblessness in West South Central United States is far below the national average. Though these data are preliminary and subject to revision, the BLS identifies the rate of unemployment in Arkansas (6.4 percent), Louisiana (5.1 percent), Oklahoma (5.0 percent), and Texas (6.4 percent) as being *significantly* below the rate for the United States (7.6 percent).

Further, as was true last December the jobless rate in January across the entire West South Central region (6.1 percent) was lower than in any of the other eight Census regions.

Louisiana and Oklahoma stand apart from Arkansas and Texas in that neither one experienced a *statistically significant higher* rate of unemployment in January than in the preceding month. All four states, however, did have significant increases in unemployment over the one-year period ending in January as did every other state including Mississippi.

With unemployment above 10 percent in January, California, Michigan, Rhode Island, South Carolina have been especially hard hit by the current downturn. Employment in California, for example, dropped by 494,000 over the twelve months beginning in January 2008. In sharp contrast, none of the four states in the West South Central region reported *significant* year-over-year losses in the number of persons employed.

	<i>January 2009 jobless rate</i>
United States	7.6
Arkansas.....	6.4
Louisiana	5.1
Oklahoma	5.0
Texas	6.4

preliminary data seasonally adjusted

There were some unexpected positive findings in nonfarm payroll employment for the region. Payroll jobs in the cyclically sensitive construction sector in Louisiana actually increased over the year from 132,500 to 139,300. Much smaller increases were reported in Arkansas (+300) and Oklahoma (+2,200). Texas reported a year-over-year increase of 2,800 in payroll jobs in financial activities and 2,200 in professional and business services.

As has been the case for the education and health services sector across the United States in 2008, there were one-year increases in that sector in all four West South Central states. Texas led the way by adding 50,000 jobs in education and health services.

These latest data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics confirm once more what labor economists have known for a long time. The U.S. economy is not only huge, it is hugely diverse. For instance, every one of the ten states along the Mississippi River reported year-over-year losses in nonfarm employment *except Louisiana*. At the same time, year-over-year nonfarm employment in Wyoming *climbed* by more than two percent while it *fell* in every one of the six states with which it shares a border. Not one of the states *east* of the Mississippi River reported higher nonfarm employment over the year.

Measured in terms of the jobless rate, there is no denying that some states – California, Michigan, North and South Carolina, Oregon, and Rhode Island -- are especially hard hit by the current recession. At the same time and by the very same measure, the West South Central region is holding up much better.

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