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## **Payrolls Expand in February**

Washington, D.C. – The unemployment rate edged up to 4.8 percent in February, and 243,000 total payroll jobs were created. Non-government jobs grew by 205,000.

“February’s payroll gains are welcome news for workers,” said **Sen. Jack Reed** (D-RI), Ranking Democrat on the **Joint Economic Committee (JEC)**. “However, the labor market is not yet back to full strength, and the President’s prescription of bigger deficits and more debt isn’t going to help. During this recovery, the decline in the unemployment rate has not been accompanied by a recovery in the labor force participation rate and strong productivity growth still has not translated into rising real wages.”

Overall growth in payroll employment has been modest by the standards of most economic recoveries. The 5.0 million jobs created since job losses peaked in August 2003 works out to only about 166,000 per month—not much more than what is necessary just to keep up with normal growth in the labor force. Although the unemployment rate has come down, February’s 4.8 percent rate is still higher than the 4 percent rate achieved in the expansion of the 1990s.

Other indicators show continued hidden unemployment. The labor force participation rate is 1.1 percentage points lower than it was at the start of the recession and the fraction of the working-age population with a job is 1.4 percentage points lower. Long-term unemployment also persists. Nearly one in every five unemployed people – 1.4 million Americans – have been jobless for more than 26 weeks, the maximum number of weeks for receiving regular unemployment insurance benefits.

Higher prices for gasoline, home heating fuel, and medical care are squeezing the take home pay of workers. Average hourly earnings were stagnant during 2003 and have fallen during each of the past two years, after adjusting for inflation.

Overall, there are 7.2 million unemployed Americans, and 4.9 million additional workers who want a job but are not counted among the unemployed (including about 1.5 million who have searched for work enough to be considered marginally attached to the labor force). An additional 4.2 million people work part-time because of the weak economy. The unemployment rate would be 8.5 percent if the figure included those who are marginally attached to the labor force and those who are forced to work part-time because of the weak economy.

*The Joint Economic Committee, established under the Employment Act of 1946, was created by Congress to review economic conditions and to analyze the effectiveness of economic policy.*

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