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Wisconsin Joins Nation in Celebrating 75th Anniversary of Federal Unemployment Insurance

Wisconsin first to enact state Unemployment Insurance program

MADISON – Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Roberta Gassman today commended the nation on its 75th Anniversary of Unemployment Insurance, a program that Wisconsin began in response to the Great Depression, providing a lifeline to workers out of work through no fault of their own.

Three years before the federal legislation, Wisconsin became the first state to initiate an unemployment insurance program. It was 1932 when then Governor Phillip LaFollette signed into law the Unemployment Compensation Act. The Depression era reform began as a “Wisconsin Idea” and has served as a model for federal and state laws across the country and world.

“Wisconsin’s contribution to nation has taken on greater significance today,” Secretary Gassman said. “During the deep national recession that began in 2007, unemployment benefits have sustained working families, providing the basics of life – food, clothing, shelter – while they prepare to return to work, using our job placement and training services.”

With the national recession, unemployment claims surged to record levels. In 2009, Wisconsin paid a record \$3.1 billion in benefits to 566,000 claimants. In addition to Wisconsin’s regular benefit program, the Department of Workforce Development’s Division of Unemployment Insurance administers six federal extended benefit programs.

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