For Immediate Release

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Governor Hutchinson Expedites Unemployment Benefits For Those Impacted by COVID-19

WEST MEMPHIS – Governor Asa Hutchinson has directed the Arkansas Department of Commerce to expedite unemployment benefits to assist Arkansans whose employment status may be impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak, he announced at a press conference on Tuesday.

Under current Arkansas law (Ark. Code Ann. §11-10-507(4)), individuals who claim unemployment insurance must wait one week, which is not counted as a week of unemployment. The Governor has directed the Arkansas Department of Commerce to waive the waiting period. This directive will allow the department to pay claims more quickly.

Governor Hutchinson has also directed the Department of Commerce to waive current work-search requirements for 30 days, allowing the unemployed to receive benefits without seeking other employment. This exception applies only to those employed by businesses that are temporarily closed with plans to reopen.

In a third action, the Governor has directed the Department of Commerce to allow the unemployed to apply for benefits online or by telephone rather than in person in a further effort to minimize the risk of spreading COVID-19.

"These important changes will allow Arkansans impacted by COVID-19 to file unemployment insurance claims, register for work, and seek job-placement assistance in a timely manner while also protecting ADWS employees and mitigating the spread of the virus," Governor Hutchinson said.

Click <u>HERE</u> to find an Arkansas Workforce Center Location near you, or visit <u>www.ezarc.adws.arkansas.gov</u> to complete your application online.

CONTACT: Press Shop (<u>press@governor.arkansas.gov</u>)

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rt 7648 Victory Blvd., Suite B 72112-8912 870-523-3641 870-523-3678 Jackie Donaldson uld 1015 Linwood Dr., Ste. 4, PO Box 336 72450-4430/72451-0336 870-236-8512 870-236-9162 Kelly Aaron ulf 1001 S. Tennessee St., PO Box 8308 71601-5032/71611-8308 870-534-1920 870-534-7688 William Campbell ville 100 N. Dixieland Road, PO Box 99 72756-5996/72757-0099 479-636-4755 479-631-0322 Tridena Feaster ville 104 S. Rochester Ave., PO Box 777 72801-5337/72811-0727 479-968-2784 479-968-1670 Neil Golden 23 Sherwood Plaza Shopping Ctr., PO Box 774 72830-0774 479-754-8869 479-754-1166 Neil Golden 501 W. Arch Ave., PO Box 248 7213-5203/72145-0248 501-268-8601 501-268-9166 Jennifer Pike ana 1702 Hampton Road, Texarkana TX 75503-2598/71832-0151 870-216-4011 903-722-0983 Lola Smith bejanette Smith Dejanette Smith Dejanette Smith	Mt. Home	1058 Highland Circle, #20, PO Box 1945	72653-3251/72654-1945	870-425-2386	870-424-6056	Jenny Patoka	Baxter, Marion
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ASUMid-South, 2003 W. Broadway PO Box 1928 72301/72303-1928 870-400-2269 870-735-7656 Dejanette Smith	Texarkana	1702 Hampton Road, Texarkana TX	75503-2598/71832-0151	870-216-4011	903-792-0983	Lola Smith	Little River, Miller, Sevier
	West Memphis	ASUMid-South, 2003 W. Broadway PO Box 1928	72301/72303-1928	870-400-2269	870-735-7656	Dejanette Smith	Crittenden

Updated 3.17.2020

The coronavirus pandemic is already costing many people their jobs. The first proof of that came in Thursday morning, when a government report showed weekly jobless claims in the United States spiked to their highest level in two-and-a-half years.

The US Labor Department reported that 281,000 Americans filed for their first week of unemployment benefits in the week ending March 14 — a sudden 70,000 jump from the week before, and 60,000 claims more than economists had expected. It marked the highest level in initial claims since the week ending September 2, 2017, when claims spiked in the wake of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma.

Last week's sudden increase is "clearly attributable to impacts from the COVID-19 virus," the Department of Labor said in release.

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, the US job market was on strong footing and initial unemployment insurance claims had been hovering between roughly 210,000 and 230,000 a week.

The sudden jump marked a 33% increase, the biggest increase in percentage terms since 1992, and "bigger than anything we saw during the Great Recession," noted Heidi Shierholz, senior economist for the Economic Policy Institute and former chief economist for the US Department of Labor.

Meanwhile, 1.7 million Americans filed for continued claims (their second week of unemployment benefits or more) in the week ending March 7. That number was barely changed from the week before, reflecting the strong US labor market before the pandemic accelerated.

This number is also expected to jump in the near term.

The number of jobless claims will get more and more attention in the months to come as it is published on a weekly basis, tracking the real economy much more closely than monthly or quarterly government data, which is published with a longer lag.

Layoffs are expected to worsen significantly as the coronavirus crisis is forcing businesses to readjust.