

Jim Doyle
Governor

Roberta Gassman
Secretary



State of Wisconsin
Department of Workforce Development

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

201 East Washington Avenue
P.O. Box 7946
Madison, WI 53707-7946
Telephone: (608) 266-3131
Fax: (608) 266-1784
<http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/>
e-mail: dwdsec@dwd.state.wi.us

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CONTACT: Jessica Erickson, Communications Director, 608-266-6753

Wisconsin Unemployment Insurance Program Celebrates 75 Years

MADISON – Governor Jim Doyle proclaimed today Wisconsin Unemployment Compensation Day in celebration of the 75th anniversary of the enactment of the Unemployment Insurance Program in Wisconsin. On January 28, 1932, former Wisconsin Governor Phillip LaFollette signed into law the Unemployment Compensation Act, establishing the first such program in the United States.

"Seventy-five years ago, Wisconsin became the first state in the nation to provide unemployment insurance, helping individuals and families who need a bridge to their next job," Governor Doyle said. "The support we give helps provide the basics of life – food, clothing, shelter – while at the same time, our job placement and training activities smooth the way to new employment. Our UI program has remained strong in Wisconsin over the past 75 years and we must work together to keep it strong in the future."

Wisconsin's UI program has gained a national reputation for sound policy and effective administration, and has served as a model for federal and state laws across the country.

Though approved in 1932, the first unemployment check was not paid until 1936, much of the delay the result of the Great Depression. Due to the economic woes of the time, it took four years to build up the UI Reserve Fund to the point where the program could confidently meet its obligations. The program has continuously paid benefits to unemployed persons ever since.

The first check, which amounted to \$15, was paid to Neils Rudd, a photoengraver on August 17, 1936. His check was the weekly maximum benefit payable at that time. Maximum weekly benefit payments today are \$355.

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