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Could we be in a double-dip recession? Figures for western NC are mixed for the first quarter of 2012, with momentum in the economy running out of gas, according to a report out of ASU yesterday. Dr. Todd Cherry, director of the Center for Economic Research and Policy Analysis (CERPA) at Appalachian State University said that Western North Carolina's economic activity declined in April, erasing earlier job growth in the region. He said, "We are seeing a slowdown in the regional economy. There were gains in 2012, but we've not been able to sustain the momentum." Economic activity, as measured by the Western North Carolina Economic Index compiled at Appalachian, decreased by 0.3 points in April. This continued the declining trend for 2012 in the economic index, which tracks the level of economic activity in 25 western North Carolina counties. "Regional employment is down over the last two months, which reversed seven consecutive months of job growth in the region," Cherry said. "We are also seeing a slow decline in unemployment across the region, which is following the statewide trend. But the story varies a great deal at the local level." Changes in seasonally adjusted county-level employment during the month remains mixed across the region, falling in 18 of the 25 counties. Yancey, McDowell and Watauga counties had the largest employment gains, with 4.6, 1.9 and 0.2 percent increases, respectively, while Alleghany, Graham, and Cherokee had the largest losses, with 2.6, 2.3 and 2.1 percent decreases, respectively. Seasonally adjusted initial claims for unemployment insurance in the region, a leading indicator of unemployment, increased by 22.8 percent in April. Initial claims increased by 5.2 percent in Asheville and 25.5 percent in Hickory-Morganton-Lenoir.