

Consumer Spending Surges in March

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. consumers ramped up spending in March at the fastest pace in 4½ years, a sign the economy is gaining momentum after its winter slowdown.

The Commerce Department says consumer spending rose 0.9 percent, the largest gain since April 2009. The government also revised up its estimate of the spending gain in February to 0.5 percent from 0.3 percent.

People spent more on manufactured goods. Autos and furniture led much of the gains, according to a retail sales report released last month.

Income rose 0.5 percent after rising 0.4 percent in February.

Higher spending points to stronger growth because consumer activity accounts for 70 percent of the economy. Harsh weather curbed spending during last quarter as a whole. The economy grew at an annual rate of just 0.1 percent.

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