

## **A tale of two U.S. economies**

by Matthew Rusling WASHINGTON, March 31 (Xinhua) -- As the U.S. economy struggles to get back on its feet after the worst downturn since the Great Depression, Washington and the surrounding suburbs have avoided the sting. A recently released Gallup poll found that residents of the Washington metro area expressed the most confidence in the U.S. economy among the largest 50 metro areas in 2012, just as they did in the previous year. Indeed, the area surrounding the U.S. capital boasts seven of the nation's wealthiest 10 counties. Nick Sorrentino, a Washington-based consultant and co-founder of government watchdog website [AgainstCronyCapitalism.org](http://AgainstCronyCapitalism.org), noted that average pay in nearby Loudoun county is 120,000 U.S. dollars per year in a locality filled with federal employees and government contractors. With so much cash floating around, it is not uncommon for renters in the area to pay upwards of 2,500 dollars per month for a one-bedroom, 700-square-foot apartment. Median home prices in the Washington area are around 400,000 dollars, according to Zillow, an online real estate database. A new condo development near the city's center serves as a prime example of the city's wealth, with one-bedroom units starting at around 470,000 dollars for 700 to 1,000 square feet. A 2,200-square-foot unit with two bedrooms and a roof terrace runs up to 3 million dollars. Proponents of government spending say the trend is an example of how Keynesian economics can benefit the economy, but critics say the spending benefits mostly the well-educated and well-connected. Meanwhile, most working families nationwide continue to fare poorly in the aftermath of the downturn. The Economic Policy Institute, a Washington-based think tank, predicted "stagnation" in an unemployment forecast for 2013 released last month. There remain 12 million unemployed Americans, and long-term unemployed -- those jobless for 27 weeks or more -- stands at about 4.8 million. Millions more are underemployed -- those who cannot find full time work and must settle for part-time jobs. In a Gallup poll released earlier this month, 74 percent of Americans now say this is a "bad time" to find a quality job, and 22 percent say it is a "good time." The pace of job growth remains sluggish, and has barely been strong enough to begin to restore the damage done by the recession, said Heidi Shierholz, an economist at the Economic Policy Institute.