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Kansas economy erratic, unpredictable

By John Milburn
The Associated Press

TOPEKA — A mixed bag of statistics released in recent weeks suggests that Kansas, like the rest of the nation, is finding it difficult to get its economic engine firing on all cylinders. Despite rising state revenues, job growth remains flat while more residents are seeking public assistance.

For the first time since the summer of 2009, the Kansas jobless rate increased,

rising to 6.7 percent from 6.5 percent in August. This occurred despite an increase in state revenues in August, a fifth-straight monthly increase.

First-term Republican Gov. Sam Brownback said even with the monthly fluctuations, he believes Kansas manufacturing, agriculture and energy sectors are “bucking national trends” as the economy recovers.

“I feel like this is bit of a Warren Buffett-type strategy, where you’re looking at something that has long-term value, not

looking quarter to quarter,” Brownback said. “People are going to eat. People are going to use energy.”

In the coming weeks, the governor’s staff will be announcing proposals to cut taxes and repeal regulations — part of his economic agenda since the 2010 campaign. He wants to create jobs for the nearly 100,000 residents in the state who are unemployed, reduce the number of children living in poverty and raise the median household income.

“If we can get that marginal tax rate

down, then people will change their actions,” Brownback said.

Democrats argue that the state’s lack of economic momentum is a reflection of Republicans focusing more on social issues, such as abortion restrictions and eliminating arts funding, than creating jobs.

“These unemployment numbers show that job creation isn’t even close to being (Brownback’s) first priority,” said Senate Democratic Leader Anthony Hensley of Topeka.

Despite the August unemployment increase statewide, areas of Kansas are seeing improvement. A comparison of the August numbers to the five- and 10-year averages finds that a number of rural counties are within a half-percent of the historic numbers, suggesting improving conditions. The Brownback administration said the situation is a bit deceiving.

Because the rural counties have relatively stable workforces linked to agricul-

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Postal changes will not delay paper delivery

Even with the changes in how the Colby Post Office is sorting mail, most *Colby Free Press* customers will not see a change in their delivery.

As of today, outgoing mail is being sent to Salina to be sorted. For mail heading outside northwest Kansas, the new deadline at the Post Office is 3:30 p.m. to make the truck going to the Salina processing facility. The Postal Service has said the change will mean faster delivery — one day instead of two — to mail going to eastern Kansas, so some out-of-town subscribers may get their newspapers a day earlier.

When the service announced the change, the *Free Press*’ parent company, Haynes Publishing, conducted a review of current deadlines and printing schedules to see if any alterations needed to be made. Haynes Publishing owns five other newspapers including the *Goodland Star-News*, *St. Francis Herald*, *Bird City Times*, *Oberlin Herald* and *Norton Telegram*.

“After studying the new collection times and comparing deadlines, we found that all of the papers except Goodland are mailed on time to meet the new schedule,” said company owner Steve Haynes.

The *Star-News*, which prints Tuesday and Friday mornings and

is distributed in the afternoons, had its deadline moved up by two hours, so it can be printed in time to make that day’s mail truck.

The *Free Press*, on the other hand, won’t have to change its deadlines much.

“Before now we’ve had a soft deadline of 1 p.m. and a hard deadline of 2 p.m.,” said Editor Kevin Bottrell. “By then all our pages were to be sent by computer to Goodland. After that they’re printed and sent back here on a truck. Now we’re making an effort to get things done before 1 p.m. for a faster turnaround.”

Once the papers arrive in Colby, some are distributed to carriers to be hand-delivered while others are taken to the post office. Anything mailed to Thomas County addresses will be sorted in Colby so local customers who receive the *Free Press* by mail won’t see a change. Some customers in rural areas of the county get the paper by mail, as well as city routes that don’t have a carrier.

With this faster turnaround, some customers on delivery routes may get their papers earlier. Deadlines for putting advertisements or legal notices in the paper will not change. The deadline for obituaries, Briefly items or news stories that need to be in that day’s paper will remain at 10 a.m.

Oakley ethanol plant to get \$15.6 million

TOPEKA (AP) — The state plans to spend more than \$20 million in federal stimulus money on two projects to promote biomass energy.

Gov. Sam Brownback announced Tuesday that \$15.6 million will be spent on a project near Oakley to use methane from cattle manure, rather than natural gas.

The on-site power generator at the Western Plains Energy ethanol plant west of Oakley will be converted to use methane from manure instead of natural gas. Western Plains will partner with Pioneer Feeders for the manure.

Another \$4.9 million will go to a project to buy equipment that will deliver biomass feedstock to a Wichita plant more efficiently.

The Kansas Alliance for Biorefining and Bioenergy, based in Wichita, will use advanced harvesting and transportation equipment to process biomass feedstock mainly in northeast and southwest Kansas.

“These projects can have a significant beneficial impact on their sectors,” said Kansas Secretary of Commerce Pat George. “Kansas leads the nation in sorghum production and feedlot cattle production, and the biomethane project integrates two agricultural sectors to produce an advanced, renewable bio-fuel that will help reduce foreign oil dependence and completely replaces fossil fuels in the production of bio-fuels at the Oakley facility.

Despite problems, corn may be OK



By Kevin Bottrell
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With more than three quarters of the state under abnormally dry or drought conditions, the outlook for the Kansas corn crop is grim, but the local crop could turn out better than expected.

In Thomas County the corn is looking good despite the lack of moisture in the growing season, said Extension Agent Clint Milliman. The hot, dry days in August hindered pollination, he said, and some of the corn ears aren’t filling out as much, but those farmers who are already harvesting are seeing some decent yields.

“It won’t be a bin buster,” he said, “but it won’t be the worst either.”

However, he said, some of the corn crop may be facing several different kinds of damage from the hail storms in August. In addition to the initial loss during the storms, some of the stalks have been bruised by the hail and may fall over before harvest. With some of the recent wet, foggy days, there is also a chance for fungus to take hold. Milliman said some farmers are getting in the fields early to harvest the corn before this type of damage can happen.

What’s being harvested now is wet corn, with moisture levels anywhere from 25 to 40 percent. The wet corn is being harvested for sale to feedyards, Milliman said, who usually like the moisture levels at about 30 percent. Moisture levels need to be around 15 percent for the corn to be put into grain bins.

Milliman said farmers are also beginning to plant wheat.

Earlier this year, the Kansas Department of Agriculture had predicted that Kansas was on its way to harvesting a record crop, but after months of drought in the southern part of the state, it now estimates a loss of about \$966 million in corn production.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s monthly crop production report, issued on Sept. 1, predicted Kansas would harvest 472 million bushels of corn this year, down more than 110 million from last year. It also predicted yields up to 105 bushels per acre, about 15 bushels less than last year.

Last week’s crop progress report rated more than a quarter — 26 percent — of the Kansas corn crop as in very poor condition. Twenty-one percent was rated poor, 26 percent fair, 22 percent good and 5 percent excellent.

KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

This corn field in Colby was in the process of drying down last week. Moisture in most corn in Thomas County is anywhere from 25 to 40 percent, with some of the wet corn being cut and sold for feed.

Busy weekend ahead as area prepares for 25th Annual Flatlander Festival

By Tom Betz
The Goodland Star-News
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Crowds will fill the Magic Mile for the 25th Annual Flatlander Festival in Goodland beginning with car races on Friday, the street fair, Brick Top Cruisers car show and Northwest Kansas bike show on Saturday and Picnic in the Park on Sunday.

A big feature of the street fair on Saturday will be the NASCAR No. 88 of Dale Earnhardt Jr. being sponsored by the Kansas National Guard. The car sponsored in part by the National Guard will be on the parking lot at Kansasland Tire at 14th and Main.

The Sherman County Speedway will

kick off the Fall Flatlander Classic at 5:30 p.m. on Friday with races by IMCA Modifieds, IMCA Hobby Stock, IMCA Sports Modified, IMCA Stock Cars and Econos. The second night of racing will begin at 4:30 p.m. on Saturday.

The Flatlander 5K run/walk fun will begin things on Saturday starting at 7:30 a.m. The 5K is sponsored by the Goodland Activities Center and registration information is available from the center or online at goodlandgac.com. The phone number is (785) 890-7242.

Flatlander Festival on Main Ave. on Saturday begins at 9 a.m. and runs to 3 p.m. This is a change moving the start up an hour to better fit the events of the day, said Flatlander Festival Chairman Brent Wood.

Wood said he expects about 50 vendors for food, games, crafts and souvenirs to be on Main between the cars on the south and the motorcycles on the north. The Northwest Kansas Technical College will have 18 booths from campus organizations as part of the fun. The students are raising money for their annual trips.

Among the booths include food, face painting, a dunk tank and several other games. In the past one of the favorites has been the car bash where people can take a sledge hammer and beat on a car to see how much damage they can really do to the body.

Amateur radio operators from the Sherman County Amateur Radio Enthusiasts Club will have a special event station KS0GLD in operation in the 1200 block

of Main.

The Scruffy Dog Contest will be held at 11 a.m. at the grandstand at 12th and Main. The Scruffy Dog Contest is sponsored by Eagle Communication and the Northwest Kansas Animal Shelter.

The Arts Council Talent Show will follow the scruffy dog contest about noon at the grandstand. Three categories pre-teen (4 through 12), teen (13 through 17) and adult (18 and up). There are cash awards for first, second and third in each category.

All awards will be handed out on Sunday after the performances at the Picnic in the Park held at Chambers Park at 13th and Center Ave.

Kansas author Marci Penner, who wrote 8 Wonders of Kansas, will be signing her

book at 1:30 p.m. at the High Plains Museum, 1717 Cherry Ave.

The Brick Top Cruisers will be celebrating their 25th Annual Flatlander car show with early registration at Central Elementary on Friday and registration will open at 8 a.m. on Saturday.

Bob Gittinger said to provide more seating and room for the Saturday evening meal and Sunday awards ceremony, these are being moved to the Goodland Elks Lodge at 1523 Arcade Ave.

“We will be ‘Remembering the Past

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