

Unemployment: From Page 1

jobs. After declining for six consecutive months, the unemployment rate in Texas rose slightly in January to 6.3 percent,

and was down nine-tenths of a percentage point over the year. It remained well below the nation's January unemployment rate of 7.9 percent.

"The Texas economy continues to add jobs and create opportunity, with growth in all 11 major industries over the last year," said Texas Workforce

Commission (TWC) Chairman Andres Alcantar. "I encourage job seekers and employers to visit WorkInTexas.com, or a local Workforce Solutions office, to take advantage of the quality services available to them."

In the month of January, Gaines County boasted a 4-percent unemployment rate, according to TWC figures released last month.

Despite the county's slight increase in February, Gaines County's current jobless rate remained well below the 5.1-percent jobless rate reported in February 2012.

Eight out of 11 major industries saw positive growth over the month, with Leisure and Hospitality leading the way in hiring for January with 8,900 jobs added. This industry has added 62,500 jobs over the last year for a 5.9 percent annual growth rate.

"It's good to see so many different opportunities continuing to arise here in Texas," said TWC Commissioner Representing Labor Ronny Congleton. "For example the Trade, Transportation, and Utilities industry alone has grown by nearly 64,000 jobs over the past year. That's more than any other industry in Texas."

The Mining and Logging industry, which includes oil and gas-related jobs, added 19,700 jobs from January 2012 to January 2013 for a 7.6 percent annual growth rate. The Construction industry grew by 28,500 jobs over the last year for a 5.0 percent annual growth rate. Private industries in Texas added 15,400 jobs in January, for a total

of 304,700 private sector jobs added over the past year. Over the last year the private sector has grown at a rate of 3.4 percent.

The Midland Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) had the lowest January unemployment rate in the state at 3.4 percent. The Odessa MSA came in second at 4.1 percent and the Amarillo MSA third at 4.9 percent (not seasonally adjusted).

U.S. employers ramped up hiring in February, adding 236,000 jobs and pushing the unemployment rate down to 7.7 percent from 7.9 percent in January. Stronger hiring shows businesses are confident about the economy, despite higher taxes and government spending cuts.

The government's February employment report released Friday was filled with mostly encouraging details. The unemployment rate is now at its lowest level in four years. Hiring has averaged more than 200,000 per month since November. Wages increased. And the job gains were broad-based, led by the best construction hiring in six years.

One negative detail: Employers added fewer jobs in January than first estimated. Job gains were lowered to 119,000 from an initially reported 157,000. Still, December hiring was a little better than first thought, with 219,000 jobs added instead of 196,000.

The unemployment rate had been stuck at 7.8 percent or above since September. About half the decline in February occurred because more of the

unemployed found jobs. A decline in the number of people looking for work accounted for the other half. People who aren't looking for jobs aren't counted as unemployed.

Strong auto sales and a steady housing recovery are spurring more hiring, which could lead to stronger economic growth. The construction industry added 48,000 in February and 151,000 since September. Manufacturing has gained 14,000 last month and 39,000 since November.

So far, higher gas prices and a Jan. 1 increase in Social Security taxes haven't caused Americans to cut back on big-ticket purchases.

Across-the-board government spending cuts also kicked in March 1 after the White House and Congress failed to reach a deal to avoid them. Those cuts will likely lead to furloughs and layoffs in coming weeks.

The impact of the tax hikes is partly being offset by higher pay: Hourly wages rose 4 cents to \$23.82 last month. Wages are up 2.1 percent in the past year, which is ahead of inflation for the fourth straight month.

A big source of strength has also been home sales and residential construction: New-home sales jumped 16 percent in January to the highest level since July 2008. And builders started work on the most homes last year since 2008.

Home prices rose by the most in more than six years in the 12 months that ended in January. Higher prices tend to make homeowners feel wealthier and more likely to spend.

Plea: From Page 1

by Texas 7th Administrative Judge Dean Rucker back in January.

As part of his plea agreement, Kingston was sentenced to 30 days confinement in the Gaines County Jail, which was suspended and saw the former 106th District Attorney placed on six months of community supervision.

In addition to the community supervision, Kingston will also pay a fine of \$750 and courts costs totaling \$357.

Kingston was also ordered to attend and successfully complete a 15 hour DWI education program within 181 days of the plea agreement, and pay for said program, according to Court documents.

Kingston was arrested for allegedly driving while intoxicated following a traffic stop six miles east of Seminole conducted by deputies from the Gaines County Sheriff's Dept. and Texas Dept. of Public Safety troopers on the evening of Sept. 9, 2011.

According to incident reports obtained by the *Sentinel* in relation to the incident, emergency dispatchers with the Gaines County Law Enforcement Center received a call in reference to a suspicious pick-up truck with a possible intoxicated driver traveling west bound along U.S. Hwy 180 (Lamesa Hwy), roughly 16 miles east of Seminole.

Gaines County Deputies, who were initially dispatched

to the call, made contact with the suspect vehicle roughly six miles east of Seminole on U.S. 180.

Texas DPS troopers, who were called to the scene to assist, eventually placed the driver, identified as Kingston, under arrest following their traffic stop investigation process.

According to information provided from a probable cause arrest affidavit, DPS troopers placed Kingston under arrest after "smelling alcohol on (Kingston's) breath," Kingston's "admittance to drinking alcohol," a "poor standardized field sobriety testing," "blood shot, red glossy eyes," "slow slurred speech," and a "refused intoxilyzer" evaluation.

The probable cause arrest affidavit also stated Kingston had a blood alcohol content level of .203, according to a preliminary breath test (PBT) conducted on the scene. Kingston, also according to GCLEC blotter information, was transported to Memorial Hospital for a blood alcohol content warrant, in relation to the charge.

Kingston, a one-term District Attorney for the 106th, was defeated by fellow Republican -- and current 106th District Attorney Mike Munk -- in the May 2012 Republican Party Primary elections process. Munk was unopposed in the November election and assumed the role of 106th District Attorney on Jan. 1 of this year.

Local / State News Briefs

Perry Files 'Rainy Day Fund' Bill in Texas House

AUSTIN -- Dist. 83 State Representative Charles Perry (R-Lubbock) filed House Joint Resolution 111 on Wednesday, which he says will maintain the integrity of the Economic Stabilization Fund, also known as the Rainy Day Fund, by requiring a minimum balance of 5-percent of the Biennial Revenue Estimate, as provided by the Comptroller.

Rep. Perry issued the following statement, via a press release issued by his Austin Capital office on Wednesday:

"HJR 111 will ensure Texans have money in reserve to protect against natural disasters and keep our credit rating strong," said Perry. "We should be thinking, long-term in preserving our ability to pay our bills should we face another downturn in the economy. Financial investors have long prescribed having a savings account, and Texas does with the Rainy Day Fund. This resolution ensures we protect it."

The Economic Stabilization Fund or "Rainy Day Fund" was enacted in 1989 as a savings account for the state built primarily from excess oil and gas revenues and surplus state revenues.

Perry, who represents Gaines County, as well as Borden, Lynn, Mitchell, Scurry, Terry and portions of Lubbock County, has authored 23 bills thus far for the 83rd Texas Legislature. In addition, he has joint authored 10 bills and co-authored 17 others, according to a listing available on the Texas Legislature's website.

Perry serves on the Texas House Commission on Appropriations committee, as well as the House Commission on Government Efficiency and Reform (vice chairman), and House Commission on Transparency in State Agency Operations.

Texans Will Still Travel for Spring Break Despite High Gas Prices

IRVING -- Despite the continued pressure of high gas prices on Texans' budgets, a majority of Texas residents are planning to take at least one spring vacation this year, according to the fourth annual AAA Texas Spring Break Travel Poll.

Sixty-two percent of polled AAA Texas members indicated they had made at least one significant concession in their budget because of high gas prices, compared to 61 percent in 2012 and 51 percent in 2011.

But despite that financial pressure, 55 percent of those polled said they are planning at least one leisure trip in March or April -- a 1 percent increase from last year's 54 percent who planned to travel and 7 percent

lower than the 62 percent who planned to travel in 2011.

Among Texans who are traveling this spring, more are planning multiple trips than in 2012. Last year, 44 percent of those traveling planned to take two or more spring break trips, while this year, 49 percent will take multiple March and April trips, with 21 percent planning to take three or more trips.

"A majority of Texans continue to make travel a budget priority for them despite high gas prices," said Rhonda Wilson, AAA Texas Vice President, Branch Operations.

"Gas prices have made some travel options more expensive, but there are some great last-minute values available with cruises and tours, at least for the month of April. Disney Cruises, for example, has some April availability on ships sailing out of Galveston."

Among those surveyed, members between the ages of 36 and 49 were the most likely to say their budgets are hurting from high gas prices (72 percent compared to 62 percent for all ages), and 53 percent of those surveyed in that age group are not planning any spring break trips, compared to 45 percent for all ages.

The most common ways that AAA Texas members are dealing with high gas prices include:

- Cutting back on unnecessary driving (59 percent)
- Spending less money eating out at restaurants (35 percent)
- Spending less money on entertainment (33 percent)
- Looking for discounts and specials on entertainment and travel (28 percent)
- Putting less money into savings (26 percent)
- Not taking a spring break trip (21 percent)
- Using a member discount program (21 percent)
- Spending less money on spring

leisure trips (18 percent)

- Buying a more fuel-efficient vehicle in the last three years (17 percent)

Wilson advised those who will be traveling over spring break to budget for gasoline by using AAA's Fuel Cost Calculator at FuelCostCalculator.AAA.com.

The calculator will estimate fuel costs based on the traveler's make and model of vehicle and the route they are traveling.

Travelers can also shop online for the lowest gas prices in any area of the U.S. using the free AAA Mobile app for Android and iPhone, as well as the online version at AAA.com/TripTik.

The 2013 AAA Texas Spring Break poll was conducted from Feb. 25 to Feb. 28 and surveyed 509 AAA Texas members. It has a margin of error of +/-4.3 percent.

Citywide Easter Egg Hunt Set for March 23rd

Hess Corp. will be hosting their annual Citywide Easter Egg Hunt on the morning of Saturday, March 23, at the M.S. Doss City Park.

The event, which is co-sponsored by several other local businesses, is open to the general public and will begin at 10 a.m.

Hess Corp. officials anticipate having over 15,000 plastic eggs for the event, and are currently looking for sponsors for candy and prizes for the program.

For more information about the Easter Egg hunt, or to help sponsor, contact Michelle Marquez at (432) 758-8636.

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