



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Sacred Heart fifth-grade students raked leaves earlier this week as one of many service projects they are doing this year. Also pictured is their teacher, Mindy Curry, supervising the work. Leaves may be covered Thursday as light snow is forecast.

Lieutenant governor candidates face off

EMPORIA (AP) — Democrat Mark Parkinson and Republican Susan Wagle offered sharply different views on the Kansas economy Tuesday night in the only scheduled debate between the two candidates for lieutenant governor.

Taking questions at Emporia State University, they also disagreed on Democratic Gov. Kathleen Sebelius' record on illegal immigration during her first term in office. Emporia is the hometown of state Sen. Jim Barnett, the Republican nominee for governor.

Parkinson said the top challenge for the state is finding ways to continue what he called Sebelius' achievements in improving the

Kansas economy.

"Four years ago, Kansas was broke," Parkinson said. "We faced hundreds of millions of dollars in obligations."

Once in office, Parkinson said, Sebelius looked at every budget in state government and cut wasteful spending.

"She basically turned the state around," he said.

But Wagle, a state senator from Wichita, said Kansas is at a crossroads and has been rated 50th in the nation on private sector job growth.

She called for lowering the income tax, eliminating the estate tax and increasing the child tax credit.

"If every paycheck you receive

more money than the more (will be spent) and the more tax dollars will be generated and sent back to the state," Wagle said.

Parkinson disputed Wagle's characterization of job growth as poor, saying Kansas is gaining jobs faster than most neighboring states.

"Private sector employment is increasing faster around the state," he said. "Jobs have grown in the state."

Wagle agreed that there has been job growth, but said it's not enough.

"The truth of the matter is we're not growing anywhere near what other states are," she said, adding, "People are crossing the state lines in southeast Kansas to work in

Oklahoma and Missouri."

Parkinson, an attorney from Johnson County and former chairman of the Kansas Republican Party, called illegal immigration a major problem in Kansas.

"Our borders are basically unprotected at this time," he said. "We need to make sure illegal immigrants aren't attracted to Kansas and we need to crack down on employers who (hire) them."

Wagle responded that Sebelius has favored allowing people in the country to illegally obtain driver's licenses.

"This governor has promoted special (favours) to illegals coming to Kansas," Wagle said.

Fed expected to keep interest rates steady

WASHINGTON (AP) — After engineering the longest unbroken stretch of interest rate increases on record, the Federal Reserve may now keep rates unchanged for an extended period.

At least that is the view of many economists who think the Fed may leave rates alone for up to a year, preferring to remain on the sidelines and allow a slowing economy to lower inflation pressures.

That isn't necessarily the view of financial markets, which have been whipsawed between worries that the Fed will keep raising rates and periods of euphoria that the central bank might start cutting rates later this year.

Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke and his colleagues began a two-day meeting on Tuesday that will wrap up Wednesday with an announcement on rates.

"The Fed is in a holding pattern that is going to last a lot longer than the markets are expecting," said David Jones, chief economist at DMJ Advisors, an economic consulting firm. Jones predicted rates would remain unchanged until the second half of next year when he forecast two rate cuts.

After raising rates at 17 consecutive meetings over two years, the Fed in August paused and also left

rates unchanged at the September meeting.

The federal funds rate, the interest that banks charge each other, is currently at 5.25 percent.

If the Fed does keep rates unchanged for a third meeting, it would mean a break for borrowers. It also would be good news for the Bush administration, which would rather not see voters upset by rising interest rates just two weeks before they go to the polls to decide whether Republicans will retain control of Congress.

Commercial banks' prime lending rate, which responds to changes in the funds rate, is currently at 8.25 percent, where it has been since June after the Fed's last rate hike. The prime had been at 4 percent, the lowest level since 1958, when the Fed began its rate increases in 2004.

The Fed's rate increases are having the desired effect of slowing interest-sensitive portions of the economy such as housing, with sales and construction of new homes tumbling this year, contributing to a sharp slowdown in overall growth.

Many economists believe growth may have dipped to around 2 percent in the July-September quarter, even weaker than the 2.6 percent rate of the spring.

World Trade Center cleanup may have been too fast

NEW YORK (AP) — Mayor Michael Bloomberg's explanation that the city's cleanup of the World Trade Center site was done quickly out of respect for victims' families did little to quell the anger of some who fear the remains of their loved ones were overlooked.

Bloomberg said Tuesday that city officials who handled the World

Trade Center cleanup years ago worked "as fast as we could" but said they were urgently trying to get remains back to the families.

"It had very little to do with the families," said Monica Gabrielle, whose husband Richard was killed and has no identified remains. "This is another spin — it's a diversion away from the issue, which is that

management failed, not the workers, and management needs to be held accountable."

Thirty-six more bone fragments were found Tuesday as workers continued sifting debris from subterranean cavities that were apparently missed during the initial cleanup.

The Associated Press reported

Monday that some officials handling the search for remains in 2002 had urged that more time be spent searching for remains but felt rebuffed by a city agency that wanted to finish the job. The emotions and disagreements from years ago have new significance now that remains are turning up at the site, as well as atop a nearby skyscraper.

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