

Drop in jobless claims good for stock market

By Matthew Craft
AP Business Writer

NEW YORK – Encouraging news on the labor market and efforts to get more Democrats to support the compromise on extending tax cuts had stocks edging higher in early trading today.

Before the market opened, the Labor Department reported that first-time claims for unemployment benefits dropped last week to the second-lowest level this year. Claims fell to 421,000, below the 428,000 figure that Wall Street expected.

The four-week average of claims also slid for the fifth straight week, reaching the lowest level since August 2008, before the darkest days of the financial crisis.

The Dow Jones industrial average is up 13 points, or 0.1, to 11,385.

Treasurys are inching up after suffering two days of steep losses, causing their yields to drop. The yield on the 10-year note slipped to 3.22 percent. The yield, which help set rates for a wide variety of loans, reached as high as 3.33 percent Wednesday,

the highest level in nearly six months.

President Barack Obama's compromise with Republicans would let all Americans keep Bush-era tax cuts that were set to expire at the end of the month. But it still needs approval from Congress. The White House has been pushing Democrats to back the measure, arguing that if the plan is defeated, the economy could slip back into recession. It also contains a provision for extended unemployment benefits. Several Democrats predicted the compromise would pass with widespread Republican support.

Anticipation that the tax cut proposal would pass has helped push Treasurys lower and stocks higher this week. The S&P 500 index closed Wednesday at a new yearly high of 1,228.28.

Economists expect the tax package to lead to stronger growth in the U.S. economy. They're already raising their estimates for economic growth as a result. Goldman Sachs estimates the tax proposal could add between 0.5 and 1 percentage point to economic growth in 2011. A stronger economy diminishes the appeal of ultra-safe investments like treasurys and raises the prospect of higher inflation.

A fond farewell



Dr. LaDonna Regier (left) got a hug from Dale Hershberger at a reception in the doctor's honor Monday at City Limits Convention Center. His wife Suzanne stood by. Well wishers had to stand in line to greet Regier, who is ending 36 years of practice in Colby. She will finish up her medical duties at the Family Center For Health Care on Thursday, Dec. 23, and go to Ghana, in Africa, to work as a medical missionary. Organizers said over 650 people attended the farewell.

Health department study says Kansans healthier than last year

Kansans as a whole were a little more healthy last year, with fewer deaths from heart disease and less infant mortality, state figures show. More babies are being born to single mothers but fewer to teens.

The figures were among those released by the state Department of Health and Environment in its 2009 Annual Summary of Vital Statistics.

"This report serves as a baseline document that will be used to assess the health of Kansans," said John W. Mitchell, acting secretary of the department. "Two key highlights of the report show a decrease in both heart disease and the infant mortality rate."

In 2009, a total of 290 infant deaths occurred (7.0 infant deaths per 1,000 live births), 13 less than in 2008. The age-adjusted death rate for heart disease dropped 6.3 percent from 2008 to 2009, a statistically significant decrease. Thus, for the first time in recent history, cancer passed heart disease as the leading cause of death in Kansas in 2009.

"It's certainly too early to tell

whether cancer surpassing heart disease will become a trend, but it is an area we will continue to watch," said Dr. Jason Eberhart-Phillips, state health officer and director of the department's Division of Health. "Both causes of death have been declining in recent years, with mortality from heart disease falling faster than mortality from cancer."

"A particularly troubling public health issue in Kansas is the high infant mortality rate. Despite a decline from 2007 to 2009, the rate still remains too high."

Other highlights for 2009:

- In 2009, a total of 41,388 births registered to Kansas residents, 427 less than in 2008.
- The number of Kansas mothers receiving inadequate prenatal care (14.9) decreased 5.7 percent between 2008 and 2009.
- Out-of-wedlock births followed national trends, increasing to 37.6 percent (15,572 live births).
- The Kansas 2009 teen pregnancy rate (26.8 per 1,000 female teens) has decreased 6.3 percent

from 28.6 in 2008.

- The disparity in the rate of deaths to infants and before or during birth between non-Hispanics whites and non-Hispanics blacks continues. The black non-Hispanic infant death rate (15.5) is 2.6 times higher than the rate for White non-Hispanics (6.0).
- The Kansas population increased to 2,818,747 residents in 2009 from 2,802,134 in 2008.
- In the last five years (2005-2009), frontier and rural counties continued to lose population, while semi-urban and urban counties gained.

- In the last 20 years, population increases of 71.9 percent in residents 45-54 years of age and 51.7 percent in residents 55-64 years of age reflected the aging of the baby boomers.
- In 2009, unintentional injuries were the leading cause of death for Kansas residents 1 to 4 and 15 to 44. For the first time, cancer was the leading cause of death for children 5 to 14.

The annual summary, available at www.kdheks.gov/hci/annsumm.html, contains six new tables.

- Live Births by Initiation of Breastfeeding (Table 20), reports

the number and percent of woman who started breastfeeding their infant before discharge.

Reported Cigarette Use (Table 21), provides county level statistics on smoking use before and during pregnancy.

- Live Births by the Mother's

RSC INTERNET AUCTION

Equipment Rental

Bidding starts to close Wed., Dec. 15 at 10 a.m.



Automobiles: '06 Ford Explorer Limited, (2) '04 Ford F250 XL Super Duty pickup, '04 Ford F150 XLT ext-cab pickup, '03 Ford F250 XL Super Duty pickup, '02 Ford F250 XLT Super Duty ext-cab pickup, '02 Ford F250 XL Super Duty pickup, (2) 02 Ford F150 XLT ext-cab pickup, '02 Ford F150 ext-cab pickup, '01 Ford F150 four door ext-cab pickup, (3) '01 Ford F250 XL Super Duty pickup, '00 Ford F150 XLT ext-cab pickup, '00 Ford F150 ext-cab pickup, '00 Ford Econoline E250 cargo van, **Skid Steers:** '04 Bobcat T250 skid steer, inventory added daily. 10% buyers premium applies, Aaron McKee TX Lic #16401



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INTERNET AUCTIONS

December 14 Government Internet Auction

Bidding starts to close at 10 a.m.

autos: (4) '06 Chevy Impala, '05 Ford Taurus SEL, '96 Dodge Ram 2500, +12 pickups, 7 cars, & 2 vans, **heavy trucks:** '98 Isuzu FRR 2.5-ton spray truck, '88 GMC 700 digger truck, dump truck, (3) fire trucks, box truck, **plus:** truck attachments, transit vehicles, street sweeper, manure spreader, mowers & rotary cutters, scissor lift, and more

December 15 Midwest Internet Auction

Bidding starts to close at 10 a.m.

autos: '04 Dodge Intrepid SE, '03 Cadillac CTS, '03 Chevy Silverado 1500 ext-cab, '02 Chevy Malibu, + 4 SUV, 3 pickups, 4 cars & 1 van, **box trucks:** '07 Hino 185, '96 Int'l 4700, **truck attach:** Dunbar Tico 1585T knuckle boom, **tractor:** '03 Kioti DK65 MFWD w/ loader, (3) tractor loaders/attachments, planting/seeding, tillage, mowers/rotary cutters, forklifts, scissor lift, rollers/packers, trailers, industrial soil vapor extraction unit and more



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