

OPINION

THE HUTCHINSON NEWS

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EDITORIALS

Economic Development

Survey would help learn why people work here, live elsewhere

Hutchinson/Reno County Chamber of Commerce President Jason Ball, at an annual economic development meeting last week, ticked through a list of encouraging projects for the city and county over that past year.

No announcements of big manufacturing employers – the ultimate prize of economic developers – but still, it was a year punctuated by some expansion by existing manufacturers, a new gas processing facility, the renovation of the downtown Wiley building, construction of a new bowling alley-entertainment center and a couple new restaurants. And recent new ownership at the mall is encouraging for the retail sector.

When it comes to jobs, however, the numbers aren't too exciting. Employment in Reno County is at about 20,500, which is up from a year ago but down from 2010, when it was 21,100.

Ball said that a majority of the 42 businesses reached in the chamber's annual employer survey this year reported difficulty finding qualified workers to fill jobs. The pool of applicants is shallow, and "qualified" is a relative term – the ability to pass a drug test and show up for work on time being top concerns.

Employers who struggle with the pool of quality labor also told

the chamber that impediments to attracting a larger pool included a lack of available housing, a lack of amenities such as dining and shopping, and an ability to offer competitive wage and benefit packages.

That last one is on the employers. But the housing and quality of life and retail offerings are challenges that should command the chamber's and community's attention.

The question remains why, despite the apparent availability of jobs, Hutchinson and Reno County population continues to remain stagnant? Why don't people want to live here?

A Hutchinson school district survey of its employees who work here but live elsewhere suggested that for most it was because they wanted to live in the country or had a spouse employed outside the county.

That was a small sample, however. So the chamber has applied for a Hutchinson Community Foundation grant for a larger study about why people choose to commute from outside the county into jobs here.

This is a good idea on the part of the chamber. It's a key question that needs to be answered for the benefit of those existing employers who complain about the shallow labor pool and for the benefit of recruiting new jobs to the market.

Shaky ground

Give us the twist; earthquakes just really don't belong in Kansas

It looked this week as if Kansas might be dealing with several days of fall tornadoes, but we instead found ourselves dealing with earthquakes.

That's right, tornado alley now might rightly be called Earthquake Boulevard or Shaky Street. Because Kansas – a state well-equipped to deal with the power of a tornado – is experiencing more and more earthquakes, most of which are centered in Harper County in the southern part of the state.

On Thursday, one of the state's largest earthquakes hit Harper County – a 4.4 magnitude quake that shook store shelves, rattled nearby students and reverberated as far as 200 miles away from the epicenter.

It was once an unusual occurrence but is one that Kansas is growing more familiar with each year. It's become so common, in

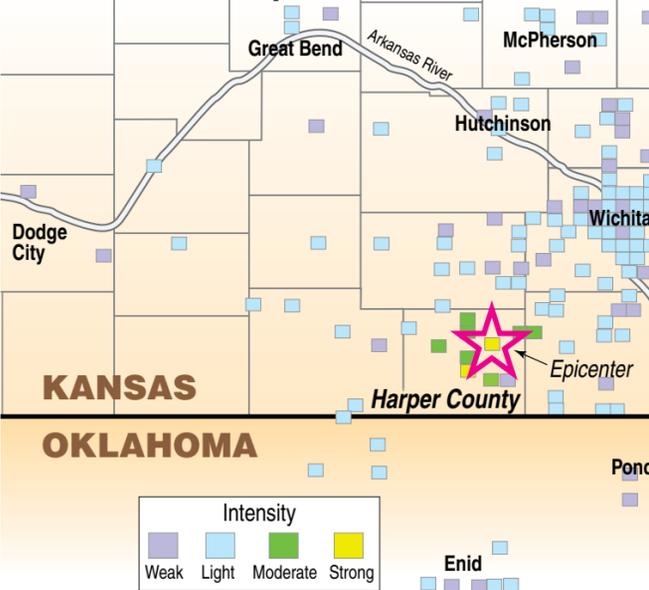
fact, the governor assembled a task force to look into the state's increased seismic activity.

According to the Kansas Geological Survey, Harper County has experienced 28 tremors with a magnitude of 2.1 or higher, while Harper and Sumner counties together have experienced 18 of a magnitude 3 or higher, so far this year.

That's about 28 tremors too many for people who are used to searching for stable ground to serve as shelter from high wind, large hail and damaging tornadoes. Kansas has put considerable effort recently in trying to act like Texas, but it seems as if we've somehow mixed ourselves up with California and picked up their natural disasters in the process.

Given the choice between tornadoes and earthquakes, most Kansans likely would accept the unpredictable weather, the bad storms and the springtime tornadoes over the uncontrollable shaking of the earth.

Public tremor reports



Source: United States Geological Survey

JOIN THE DISCUSSION

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Letters should be limited to 500 words. Poems, consumer complaints, business testimonials and group-written letters will not be accepted. Letters written in support of candidates and issues during election seasons should be limited to 150 words. Please sign your name and provide your address and a phone number so we may call to verify the letter. We strive to publish letters within one week of verification. There is a 30-day waiting period between submissions.

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Bennett Chattanooga Times Free Press

COLUMNISTS

The personal reason Brownback won't get my vote



Jason Probst

The reason I won't vote for Sam Brownback for governor is waiting to be born.

Her name is Lila Mae, and around Oct. 25 she will breathe her first breath and become my granddaughter. She will be loved and adored by her mother and father, grandparents, great grandparents, great-great grandparents, aunts and uncles.

Lila Mae will be born to my daughter; an unwed 20-year-old who lives with Lila's father – a good young man who works hard but doesn't make much money. So Lila's prenatal care has been covered by Medicaid, and the Women, Infants and Children program has supplemented the grocery budget.

In that way, my daughter is walking the same road my wife and I traveled 20 years ago. Like her, we supplemented my \$250-a-week salary with Medicaid and food assistance to ensure our unborn daughter had a decent start on life, despite our youth and poverty.

Yet Brownback and his lawmakers act as if my daughter and Lila aren't worth much at all, that these two generations of my family have been little more than a drain on taxpayers, "takers" who have long plagued the Kansas budget.

I've never felt much like a taker. My wife and I have worked ceaselessly since our daughter's birth. For a time, I worked 70 hours a week between two jobs while attending college. Likewise, my wife worked full time and went to school, all while serving as an incredible mother. I suspect Lila's parents don't feel much like takers, either. My daughter will work almost to her due date, and her boyfriend works long hours every day. They've tightly budgeted their money and paid off their car before Lila's arrival.

Brownback has proudly slashed public assistance for poor young families like my daughter's. He has refused to expand Medicaid, saying it would help "able-bodied" adults – a term designed to make people think of a perfectly healthy man who chooses to be a bum. But "able-bodied" also includes Lila's parents. If Brownback would expand Medicaid, Lila's father would have health insurance and their family wouldn't face financial ruin if he gets sick or

people like my daughter once the real work begins.

Moreover, they've made her task more challenging. They have damaged public education and rural communities and have tried to fundamentally alter this state by bending to the state's most powerful lobbyists, who have a singular obsession with tax cuts, which are of little value to my daughter and granddaughter.

I love Kansas, and my daughter loves Kansas. I want my granddaughter to love Kansas, too. But I question what my state will offer Lila if Brownback is re-elected. I don't think Paul Davis is all Kansas needs, or that he can fix all that's wrong. But I do think he can restore the balance of power, which has been centralized among a small group of people who think far too much alike – and who are too willing to bow to the wealthiest and the strongest, even at the expense of the poor, the sick and the voiceless.

So on Election Day I will think of myself all those years ago, a 20-year-old boy, poor and scared of my responsibility for this life I helped create. And I'll remember that I've been told I'm part of the problem.

I will think of the years my wife and I spent helping our little girl grow into a strong and compassionate woman, who already shows the promise of a great mother. I'll remember that she's been called a "taker" and those who would define her entire life by her so-called mistakes and the help she needs today.

I will think of my talented and thoughtful son, who one day could face a similar situation. And I will think of those waiting to judge him harshly if he steps away from the path they would have him take.

And I will think of Lila, who has yet to see a glorious Kansas sunset. I'll remember the people who would see her suffer to increase their wealth and who have said she's a drain on the public's purse, even before she's drawn a single breath. I'll consider her future, the compassionate spirit of the people of Kansas, and the prairie I hope she will call home.

And I will vote with my heart. Jason Probst is news editor for The Hutchinson News. Email: jprobst@hutchnews.com.

You almost feel sorry for Sean Groubert

Let us give Sean Groubert every benefit of the doubt.

Let us assume he is a good person. Let us assume he is kind to children, well liked by neighbors. And by all means, let's assume he has a black friend. For good measure, let's assume he has two.

Now, with those assumptions in force, let's ponder why Groubert, a white South Carolina state trooper, shot an unarmed black man last month at a gas station in Columbia. The incident has received less notice than did the shooting of Michael Brown, probably because the victim, 35-year-old Levar Jones, survived. But it deserves attention because it promises to enlighten us in ways the Brown killing did not.

Groubert, who has been fired and charged with assault and battery, tells his side of the story in audio obtained this week by MSNBC. He explains how he stopped Jones for a seat belt violation, how Jones "jumped out" of his car, and "stared at me." Groubert says that "as I approached him, he jumped headfirst into his car" and that is when he ordered Jones out, "he jumped out of the car. I saw something black in his hands. I ran to the other side of the car, yelling at him, and he kept coming towards me. Apparently it was his wallet."

But that is not what happened. Groubert's story is contradicted by an unimpeachable witness – his own dashcam video. You can see it online for yourself. Groubert



Leonard Pitts

taught from birth that thug equals black, suspect equals black, danger equals black.

Thus has it been since the days of chains, since the days of lynch law, since the days newspapers routinely ran headlines like "Helpless Co-Ed Ravished by Black Brute."

It is the water we drink and the air we breathe, a perception out of all proportion to any objective reality, yet it infiltrates the collective subconscious to such an unholy degree that even black men fear black men.

The Groubert video offers an unusually stark image of that fear in action. Viewing it, it seems clear the trooper is not reacting to anything Jones does. In a very real sense, he doesn't even see him. No, he is reacting to a primal fear of what Jones is, to outsized expectations of what Jones might do, to terrors buried so deep in his breast, he probably doesn't even know they're there.

You almost feel sorry for Groubert, his life in ruins for a crime he probably can't even explain to himself. But let us also spare some empathy for Jones, for Trayvon Martin, for Oscar Grant, for Amadou Diallo, for all the other African-American men who have died because of – or who struggle to live through – this nation's unreasonable fear of them and their sons.

Consider that video and answer honestly: Just who should be frightened of whom?

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