

Good competition

Local pantry will benefit from contest between Hastings and Stuhr museums.

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Congress leaders to learn about economic plan

PHILIP ELLIOTT
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON— Barack Obama is heading to Capitol Hill to push for quick action on a broad economic stimulus package that congressional leaders are saying won't be ready until mid-February at the earliest — almost a month later than the president-elect wanted.

Obama planned to meet today with House and Senate Democratic leaders and with a bipartisan group of key law-

makers. He had hoped to have Congress enact the recovery plan in time for him to sign his when he takes office Jan. 20. But even his spokesman, Robert Gibbs, conceded Sunday night that was "very, very unlikely."

"We don't anticipate that Congress will have passed, both houses, an economic recovery agreement by the time the inauguration takes place," Gibbs said.

House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer of Maryland said Sunday he wants the

House to approve the plan by the end of the month, sending it to the Senate in time for action before Congress leaves on its mid-February break.

Obama has insisted bold and quick action is necessary if the nation is to rebound from the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression. He has said repeatedly he wants a plan that will create 3 million new jobs.

"Economists from across the political spectrum agree that if we don't act swiftly and boldly, we could see a

much deeper economic downturn that could lead to double-digit unemployment and the American dream slipping further and further out of reach," he said in his Saturday radio and YouTube address.

Obama arrived Sunday night in Washington — a place he largely has shunned since winning election — just hours after New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson withdrew from consideration as commerce secretary amid a grand jury investigation into how

some of his political donors won a lucrative state contract.

The Richardson withdrawal marked the first major hiccup in a transition that saw Obama select his Cabinet in record time, largely because of the magnitude of the economic and national security challenges facing the new administration.

Obama aides have said the package Obama has dubbed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan could

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AMY ROH/Tribune

Ashton Tackwell, 4, celebrates while participating in the Kiwanis bowling tournament Saturday at Pastime Lanes.



AMY ROH/Tribune

Children participate in the Kiwanis bowling tournament Saturday at Pastime Lanes.

Right down their alley

KIWANIS BOWLING TOURNAMENT A HIT WITH YOUTHS

TONY HERRMAN
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Whenever first-time bowler Hannah Tunks stepped up to the line at Pastime Lanes Saturday, her father Lawrence was there to provide advice.

Hannah, 6, competed in the Hastings Kiwanis Club's annual bowling tournament for Adams County 4- to 11-year-old children.

"The reason we decided to come out was it's an opportunity for her to learn a little bit about bowling and it's also an opportunity for her to be a little bit more active over Christmas

break," Lawrence said. "It's a good chance for her to try out some new things."

They learned about the free event through the newsletter from Hannah's school, Watson Elementary.

"I used to bowl, and we actually moved to town a couple years ago, but we didn't think about it until the newsletter," Lawrence said. "We thought this is a great chance for her to come down to the bowling alley, throw the ball a couple of times and see if she likes it. Hopefully, she'll have some fun with it."

About 150 children participated in the tournament. The 4- and 5-year-olds bowled one game and everyone else bowled two games.

The 4- to 7-year-olds bowled on lanes with bumpers.

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Oil rises as OPEC cutbacks take hold

Staff and wire

Evidence that OPEC cutbacks were taking hold helped support oil prices above \$46 a barrel today, with crude also getting support from new unrest in oil-rich Nigeria.

A dispute between Ukraine and Russia over gas imports and Israel's ground offensive in Gaza also kept tensions high, although analysts were split over how much the conflict in the Middle East is affecting markets.

Light, sweet crude for February delivery rose 2 cents to \$46.36 a barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange by midday in Europe. The contract rose Friday \$1.74 to settle at \$46.34.

In Hastings, prices at Casey's, Uncle Neal's and Thomsen Oil were identical this morning: \$1.69 for unleaded plus and \$1.71 for regular. The price of unleaded plus had been as low as \$1.55 at some area stations Friday.

Mitch Beaumont, spokesman for AAA Nebraska in Lincoln, said this morning that consumers should continue to focus on the positive rather than dwell on any slight increases which may occur in the coming months. With oil trading in the \$46-per-barrel range this morning, prices remain considerably lower than last year's costs, Beaumont said.

"Statewide, we're seeing stabilization, which generally can mean upticks here and there, but right now, it looks like prices are probably stabilizing a little bit," Beaumont said. "The important thing to keep in mind is the savings from the highs we had a year ago and last summer. Compared to last year, we're in a really good position."

With gas prices reaching \$4.10 in Grand Island in July of 2008, commuters are still paying about \$2.38 a gallon less for gasoline despite the 14-cent spike over the weekend. On a 15-gallon purchase, that equates to a savings of nearly \$36 per average tankful. And that, Beaumont said, is nothing to complain about.

With OPEC expected to meet again in February to discuss additional production cuts, Beaumont thinks it's too early in the year to speculate on

Please see OIL/page A7



AMY ROH/Tribune

The second floor of the Farrell Building in downtown Hastings is pictured Sunday. It is one of several buildings in downtown Hastings to receive renovation recently.

Turning the clock back downtown

COMMITTEE OFFERS INCENTIVES TO HELP DOWNTOWN BUILDING OWNERS RESTORE THEIR PROPERTIES

JOHN HUTHMACHER
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Some buildings in the downtown Hastings business district have been undergoing facelifts to make them look older.

Sound backwards? Not to historic preservationists like Elizabeth Spilinek, who heads the Facade Rehabilitation Design Committee. A program of the Community Redevelopment Authority, the design committee has been helping building owners in the downtown business improvement dis-

trict restore their properties to their original designs since 2007.

Since its inception, the program has doled out \$15,000 in matching funds for restoration projects for Infuze Creative, 625 W. Second St., and Shade's Classic Corner, Second Street and Bellevue Avenue. Funds for these and future projects have been secured from tax levy funds collected by the CRA.

Spilinek said the volunteer committee works with applicants to formulate plans consistent with their buildings' original designs. Using historical photographs of the buildings whenever possible, the committee provides the applicant with a conceptual drawing that includes their recommendation for the restoration project.

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Weather

Lo: 17
Hi: 38

Brisk, but not as cold. Turning mostly clear this evening.



Art by Joshua Torres, 8, Lincoln Elementary

KIDS LEFT ALONE

MADRAS, Ore. — A couple who hadn't been seen since New Year's Eve have been found dead inside their locked bedroom with their crying 9-month-old daughter, and three older children had been left out on their own.

Nation

The bodies of Hannah Crowe and Julian Wallulatum were discovered Saturday after the older children asked a neighbor to help.

Crowe, 26, and Wallulatum, 21, had both been shot, said police Sgt. Dennis Schneider. He wouldn't release any details until the investi-

gation is further along.

The three older children had been playing outside Thursday and Friday so nothing seemed wrong, said neighbor Andrew Smith.

But on Saturday, the kids knocked on his door, led by the oldest, an 8-year-old girl, Smith said.

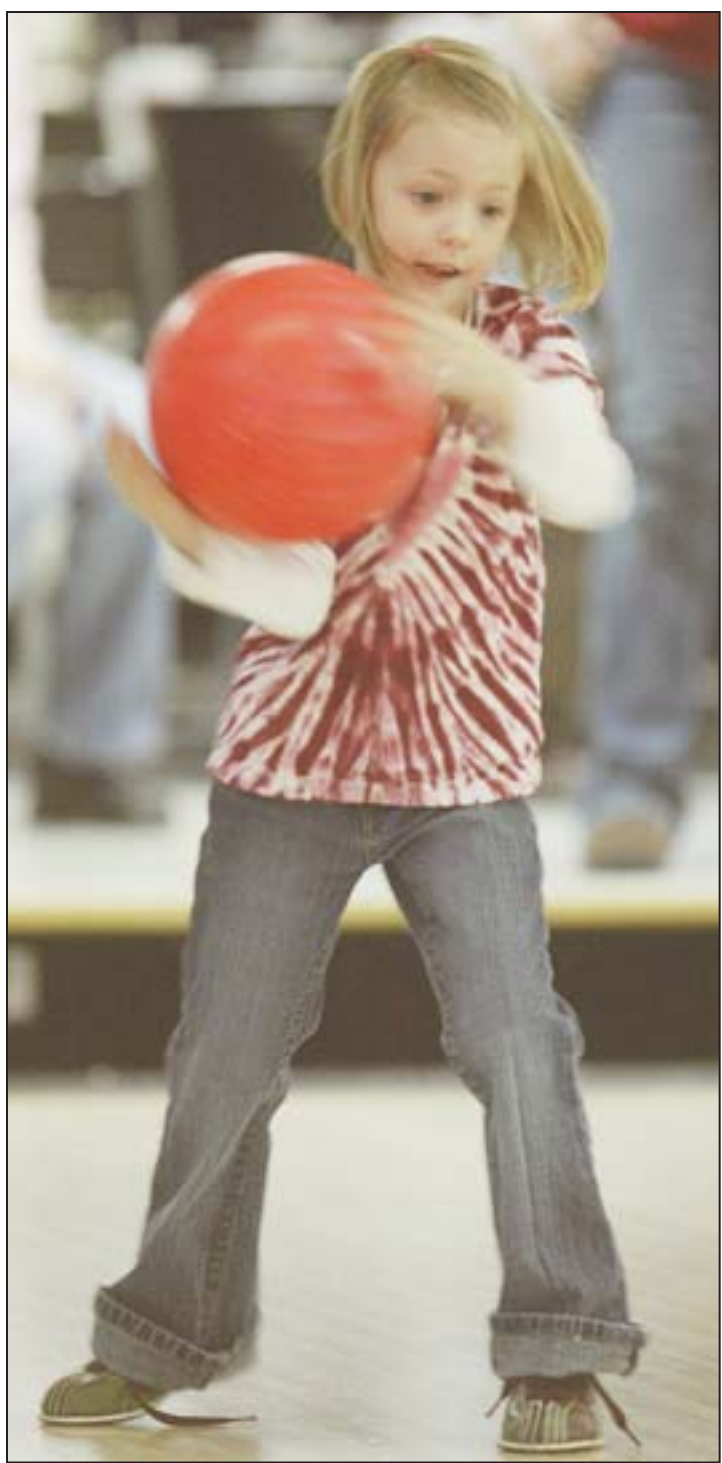
The Associated Press

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Bowling: Kiwanis tournament a hit



AMY ROH/Tribune

Taylor Wilson, 4, throws the ball onto the lane while participating in the Kiwanis bowling tournament Saturday at Pastime Lanes.

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"It's fun, you know, they have the bumpers up so there's not really a chance for her to get too frustrated," Lawrence said. "She's gonna get the ball down there and hit some pins."

Three frames into her first ever game of bowling, Hannah said she was enjoying herself. "I love it, it's fun," she said.

Providing Hannah with some activity during a slow time — since she'd been on winter vacation for about two weeks — was a big reason why Lawrence brought his daughter to the tournament.

That was one reason why tournament organizer Gail Pittz created the event eight years ago. It was first sponsored by the Optimist Club, but the Kiwanis Club has sponsored it for two years now.

"We wanted something for the kids to do, especially on their vacation — they're bored," she said. "Another thing is we try to single out kids who don't get to bowl, because it's expensive and a lot of people can't afford it."

Kiwanis Club president Mary Peterson said it was great to see all of the young bowlers interacting with Kiwanian volunteers.

"That's what our club is all about — positive role models for kids and doing things that support the youth in our community," she said. "Definitely, by seeing the place packed with a bunch of little kids who are wound up, that's a good thing."

The club paid for the whole event through fundraisers like pancake feeds and a golf tournament.

It helped, Pittz said, that Pastime owners Butch and Donna Hogan and Mike Munsterman are so easy to work with.

"They've done real well with us, they've tried to keep the price down as much as they can and they've been real easy to work with," she said.

When they checked in, all of the bowlers received a couple pencils, a bag of gummy fruit snacks and a certificate for a hot-dog, chips and a soda after bowling.

All of the bowlers received a participation ribbon and the top five finishers for each age group also received trophies.

"Believe me, they don't care if it's first or fifth, as long as they get to go home with a trophy," Pittz said.

The tournament provided an opportunity for Ashley and Megan Petr to exercise a sibling rivalry. The 11-year-old sisters placed first and second for their age group.

"Every time I've actually got second place while I was here, so it was actually good to beat my sister," Ashley said.

This is the third year the girls have participated in the tournament. Megan finished fifth two years ago and first last year.

It was a close competition between the two. Ashley had games of 86 and 82; Megan's scores of 89 and 75 narrowly missed Ashley's total 164 to 168.

"She beat me by four," Megan said. "I could have tried a smidge harder and beat her again."

When Hannah finished her second game, she had finished with scores of 76 and a 64.

"She liked it. She was having a lot of fun with it," her father said. "It was just great that the bowling alley — Pastime Lanes — and the Kiwanis Club put this all together. They're very generous and it's a great opportunity for all these little kids."

Obama: Congress to learn about plan

Continued from page A1

cost as much as \$775 billion. The president-elect has refused to put a price tag to the plan.

Congressional aides briefed on the measure say it likely will include tax cuts of \$500 to \$1,000 for middle-class individuals and couples, as well as some \$200 billion to help revenue-starved states pay for health care programs for the poor and other operating costs. A large part of the new spending would go for infrastructure projects, blending old-fashioned road and bridge repairs with new programs to advance energy efficiency and rebuild health care information technology systems.

Obama advisers told The New York Times on Sunday that tax cuts for workers and businesses could total \$300 billion.

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky

said Sunday he understands what Obama wants but doesn't want to provide a blank check.

"We want to make sure it's not just a trillion-dollar spending bill, but something that actually can reach the goal that he has suggested," McConnell told ABC's "This Week."

Obama and his allies have said they want bipartisan support for the plan.

"Mitch McConnell and (Senate Majority Leader) Harry Reid both know that we can't pass the economic recovery plan that this nation desperately needs without bipartisan cooperation," said Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill. "We've got to put aside a lot of the squabbling that in the past and come together under this new administration and new leadership, to get the American economy back on line."

Taliban claim 5,220 foreign troops killed

JASON STRAZIUSO AND RAHIM FAIEZ
The Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Taliban has long exaggerated its military successes, but its figures for 2008 may be the militia's most startling claims yet.

The Taliban claims its forces last year killed 5,220 foreign troops, downed 31 aircraft, destroyed 2,818 NATO and Afghan vehicles and killed 7,552 Afghan soldiers and police.

Though third-party observers can rarely confirm casualty claims on the Afghan battlefield from the Taliban, the Afghan government, the U.S. or NATO, the Taliban's 2008 numbers would appear to be far from the truth.

NATO's member countries announce all troop deaths, providing names, ages and hometowns and how the soldiers were killed. According to an Associated Press tally of those announcements, 286 foreign forces died last year in Afghanistan, including 151 American and 51 British troops.

The Taliban's toll is almost 20 times higher.

Despite the inflated toll, the Taliban have had more success recently. Violence in Afghanistan has spiked in the last two years, and Taliban militants now control wide swaths of countryside. In response, the U.S. is planning to pour up to 30,000 more troops into the country this year.

The insurgents' exaggerations are designed to boost morale inside the Taliban and to attract financing from donors sympathetic to their cause, a U.S. military official and a Taliban expert said.

"They put out this propaganda in order to raise capital to continue their operations,"

said Col. Jerry O'Hara, a U.S. military spokesman.

Vahid Mojdeh, the author of a book on the Taliban, said the exaggerated claims help the insurgents recruit new fighters.

"The Taliban needs volunteers to carry out suicide attacks, so they want to show they are killing a lot of people," Mojdeh said.

Propaganda has long been a key element in war, particularly in conflicts where the sides are fighting to win support from the population.

The Taliban exaggerates U.S. or NATO deaths in order to persuade average Afghans that the insurgents are winning, while U.S. and NATO spokesmen frequently highlight construction projects — roads and schools — to Afghan journalists in the hopes that average Afghans will associate foreign troops with increased development.

NATO rarely releases militant death tolls from battles involving its troops, and military spokesmen often say that it doesn't matter how many militants its forces kill, only that the Afghan government continues to develop.

But the separate U.S. coalition, which is responsible for about 15,000 of the 65,000 foreign troops in the country, releases militant tolls more frequently, leaving the U.S. open to charges of exaggeration. The U.S. relies on reports from battlefield commanders and sometimes uses sophisticated equipment such as thermal radar that can sense the body heat put off by militants — or other people — no longer moving on a battlefield.

After an operation in the western village of Azizabad in August, the U.S. military said 30 militants had been killed. A day later it revised that toll to 25 militants and five civilians.

Oil: OPEC cutbacks support rise in prices

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future market analysis. Based on current numbers, he sees no reason for consumers to expect monumental movement anytime soon, however.

"Really, it's a brand new year and I think the markets are still trying to figure out what they're going to do," he said. "We may see some instability with the Middle East tensions, but there is no oil and gas infrastructure at risk there, which is good. We'll just have to wait and see."

Analysts at JBC Energy said in a research note that prices were supported by "increasing evidence that OPEC is adhering to its agreed production cuts and the announcement of the US government to add more oil into its strategic reserves."

Prices were also buoyed by the "latest news from Nigeria that saboteurs had attacked and partly destroyed part of a pipeline," the analysts said.

Nigerian regional army chief Brig. Gen. Wuyep Rimitip said Saturday he did not know how severely the pipeline was damaged and suspected local youths rather than militants were responsi-

ble for the attack.

Nigeria's major militant group, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, declared a cease-fire in September, but has warned that attacks could resume if it is provoked.

In the oil-rich Middle East, tensions were high as thousands of Israeli troops backed by tanks and helicopter gunships surrounded Gaza's largest city and fought Hamas militants at close range Sunday, as the offensive moved from airstrikes to artillery shelling and ground fighting in a bid to stop rocket fire on southern Israel.

An Iranian Revolutionary Guard commander on Monday urged Islamic nations to use crude as a weapon to exert pressure on Western backers of Israel.

Still, even Iran — among the more radical OPEC members — was unlikely to jeopardize its precious oil income, and with no oil producing nation directly involved, analysts were split over the market impact of the Gaza unrest.

"With Israeli troops going into Gaza, that just heightens

fears of the possibility of a wider Middle East conflict," said Ken Hasegawa, an energy analyst with broker Newedge in Tokyo. "Prices will likely continue to rise in the short term."

In Vienna, however, JBC Energy said that to all appearances the conflict "has not had much of an impact so far."

Victor Shum, an energy analyst with Purvin & Gertz in Singapore, said prices "will depend on OPEC's compliance with their output cuts and the health of the global economy." Shum said he expects prices to average in the low \$50s this year.

Iran's state television said OPEC countries have decided to hold an extraordinary meeting on falling oil prices in Kuwait in February. The report on Monday quoted Iran's OPEC governor Mohammad Ali Khatibi as saying the organization planned to bring forward the regular meeting in March because the "trend of oil prices" calls for holding a meeting a month earlier.

A dispute between Russia and Ukraine over natural gas

payments also concerned traders Monday. Russian gas monopoly Gazprom has cut off gas shipments to Ukraine since Thursday, and Ukraine has warned that European customers could see serious natural gas disruptions in about two weeks.

Gazprom has continued to send gas to Europe, which relies on it for a quarter of its gas. But 80 percent of the gas Gazprom sends west passes through the same pipelines that supply Ukraine, and over the past four days the pressure in the pipelines has dropped. Some European countries — including Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Romania — have reported a decline in supplies.

In other Nymex trading, gasoline futures rose nearly 4 cents to \$1.15 a gallon. Heating oil gained close to 3 pennies to \$1.48 a gallon while natural gas for February delivery was flat at \$5.97 per 1,000 cubic feet.

In London, February Brent crude rose \$1.01 to \$47.92 a barrel on the ICE Futures exchange.

Downtown: Incentives offered to give buildings facelift

Continued from page A1

Eligible applicants may receive 50 percent of the approved bill up to \$1,000 for signage and \$7,500 for facade improvement. Reimbursements are subject to review by the committee, which is comprised of architects and historians.

"We provide the applicant with guidance on the changes to their facade or sign," Spilinek said. "The intent of the program, basically, is to restore, improve or create historic architectural features to facades of commercial buildings anywhere within the downtown improvement district. That, in a nutshell, is the purpose of the program."

Randy Chick, director of the business improvement district and CRA, said the program creates a win-win situation for downtown property owners, both aesthetically and monetarily.

"Not only is it going to make their buildings visibly attractive, but it's important for property

owners to reinvest in their properties," Chick said. "You don't want the properties to get stale. Basically, a lot of those upper levels in the downtown improvement district haven't had anything done in 40 to 50 years."

By offering incentives and a viable plan, the program invites property owners to maximize their property values by reinvesting in their properties, Chick said. A more attractive downtown is far more likely to remain a viable draw for shoppers than blocks and blocks of neglected buildings, Chick said.

"It's important for these businesses to have the ability to expand and grow," he said. "This is a program that is going to impact the downtown area for years to come, just because it takes a while for each of these projects to get completed. We're going to continue to try to use these type of incentives to get people to bring these buildings back to life."

One design concept the design committee hopes to resurrect is the re-opening of upper level windows in second-story properties located above ground-floor buildings. By opening up these upper-floor windows, Chick said property owners can then utilize the second-floor structures as rental properties instead of leaving them vacant.

"Obviously, if those windows are blocked up, nobody can live up there," Chick said. "We have revolving loan funds available through the CRA to provide portions of a loan at low-interest rates to incent property owners to make improvements to their buildings."

Chick said restoration projects like the one under way in the Farrell Building, which houses Jimmy John's, among other patrons, serve as a shining example of what the rest of the downtown business district can look like if business owners choose to take advantage of the

incentives being offered.

"That is turning out to be an incredible project," he said of the Farrell Building renovation. "I think that's going to inspire some others to follow suit on preservation and restoration."

With six renovation projects currently in the works, the design committee appears to be gaining ground in its quest to create a more lucrative environment for businesses in the downtown area. Chick believes that such improvements will only serve to attract new businesses to the area, particularly first-time businesses.

"One of the positive things about the downtown area in terms of drawing niche businesses is that downtown properties have remained affordable," he said. "Even though the rents have probably gone up over the last five years, they remain affordable for small business owners who are just starting out or companies that just like that downtown feel."





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