

Jobless-benefits claims up

Rise of 4,000 seen consistent with modest labor-market growth. — Business, 1D



Cruise in control

Star's latest sci-fi outing, *Oblivion*, filled with gizmos, dashing hero. — MovieStyle, 1E

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In the news

■ **Eric Holder**, the U.S. attorney general, told a House subcommittee that "the impact on children" will be one factor the Justice Department weighs as it determines how to respond to the legalization of marijuana through ballot initiatives that passed last year in Washington state and Colorado.

■ **Pope Francis**, known for his frugal ways, has decided that because of tough economic times, Vatican employees won't be getting the bonus that traditionally comes with the election of a new pope.

■ **Barronelle Stutzman** has been sued by the American Civil Liberties Union in Washington state on behalf of a Kennewick gay couple, Robert Ingersoll and Curt Freed, who were denied service at Stutzman's flower shop for their wedding.

■ **Bobby Jindal**, the Republican governor of Louisiana, said he'll veto any cigarette-tax increase that wins passage from lawmakers unless it's coupled with a corresponding cut in taxes somewhere else.

■ **Ernest Moniz**, President Barack Obama's choice to serve as secretary of the Energy Department, received the backing of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and now awaits a confirmation vote by the full Senate.

■ **Corine Mauch**, 52, the mayor of Zurich who was born in Iowa City, Iowa, gave up her U.S. citizenship, one of a growing number of Americans to do so after Switzerland agreed to enact tighter asset-disclosure rules.

■ **Vladimir Putin**, the Russian president who has been widely criticized for curbing media freedoms, praised journalists as a driving force behind democracy in a message welcoming a congress of the Russian Journalists' Union.

■ **Thomas de Maiziere**, Germany's defense minister, said Berlin is offering to provide up to 800 soldiers for a NATO training mission in Afghanistan after U.S. and other foreign combat troops leave the country by the end of next year.

■ **De'Marquise Elkins**, 17, and Dominique Lang, 15, pleaded innocent in the slaying of 13-month-old Antonio Santiago, who was shot in the face in his stroller during what authorities described as an attempted street robbery in Brunswick, Ga.

■ **Hyun Lee**, a woman of Korean descent, filed a lawsuit against the CVS pharmacy chain seeking damages over her claims that a worker at a store in southern New Jersey used a phrase mocking Asians, "Ching Chong Lee," to identify her on a store receipt.



AP/LM OTERO

PLUS
Scan the photo above or go to arkansasonline.com/videos

Firefighters search through the ruins of an apartment complex destroyed Wednesday night when the West Fertilizer Co.'s plant in West, Texas, exploded, killing as many as 15 people and injuring more than 160, officials said.

Rescue crews sift blast site in Texas; toll as many as 15

COMPILED BY
DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE STAFF
FROM WIRE REPORTS

WEST, Texas — Rescue workers searched the rubble of a fertilizer plant Thursday, looking for missing firefighters and survivors of a huge explosion Wednesday night that tore through the small central Texas town of West, killing as many as 15 people and injuring more than 160 others, authorities said.

Homes and businesses were leveled in the normally quiet town just north of Waco, and there was widespread destruction in the downtown area, Sgt. William Patrick Swanton of the Waco Police Department said Thursday.

"At some point," he said, "this will turn into a recovery operation, but at this point, we are still in search and rescue."

Swanton described search-and-rescue efforts as "tedious and time-consuming," noting that crews had to shore up much of the wreckage before going in.

Searchers "have not gotten to the point of no return where they don't think that there's anybody still alive," Swanton said. He did not know how many people had been rescued.

There was no indication the blast, which sent up a mushroom-shaped plume of smoke and blew a crater in the ground, was a criminal act, he said, "but we're not ruling that out."

The explosion rained



AP/LM OTERO

A firefighter on Thursday surveys what little remains of the fertilizer plant after Wednesday's explosion.

burning embers and debris on terrified residents. The blast was so powerful that the U.S. Geological Survey registered it as a 2.1-magnitude earthquake. The landscape was blanketed with acrid smoke and strewn with the shattered remains of buildings, furniture and personal belongings.

Texas Gov. Rick Perry called the explosion "a truly nightmare scenario" and said that information about death and injury is "very preliminary." But because West is so small, he said, "this tragedy has most likely hit every family. It has touched practically everybody in that town."

The fires in the plant were still smoldering, Swanton said Thursday morning, but

"there is nothing out of control over there at this point."

At least five people were killed and scores were being treated at area hospitals, Swanton said, while emphasizing that early estimates of casualties could change. Three to five firefighters were missing, he said, mostly first responders from a volunteer fire department who rushed to the scene before the blast.

"They were actively fighting the fire at the time the explosion occurred," he said.

Perry Calvin, 37, a married father of two with a third on the way, was one of the missing volunteer firefighters. He had been attending an emergency-medical technician

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Bills slashing slew of taxes clear Senate

MICHAEL R. WICKLINE
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

A cornucopia of measures cutting state income taxes, capital-gains taxes and other taxes sailed through the Arkansas Senate and its tax committee Thursday.

The bills would collectively reduce state general revenue by \$9.9 million in fiscal 2014, \$84 million in fiscal 2015 and \$140 million in fiscal 2016, according to Senate Revenue and Taxation Committee Chairman Jake Files, R-Fort Smith.

These tax cuts are in addition to a measure that may cut the state's sales tax on groceries in the future, he said.

Files said the tax cuts would be financed in fiscal 2015 and 2016 through savings that the state expects as a result of implementation of the "private option," which uses federal dollars to purchase private health insurance for



AP/DANNY JOHNSTON

House Speaker Davy Carter, R-Cabot, on Thursday looks in on a Senate committee considering tax cuts he favors.

about 250,000 Arkansas.

But Sen. Bart Hester, R-Cave Springs, told the Revenue and Taxation Committee that he's frustrated that the Legislature is only cutting taxes by about \$10 million in fiscal 2014.

In contrast, he said, the Legislature is giving \$125 million to a steel company to create jobs near Osceola through a bond issue and may use \$100 million

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Beebe to sign private option Revised enabling bill OK'd

SARAH D. WIRE
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

More than 250,000 Arkansans who make about \$15,000 a year or less will be able to purchase private health insurance using federal Medicaid money under a bill that gained final legislative approval Thursday.

The Senate voted 27-5 to approve Senate Bill 1020 by Sen. Jonathan Dismang, R-Searcy — the Health Care Independence Act of 2013.

The House gave final approval to an identical bill, House Bill 1143 by Rep. John Burris, R-Harrison, on Wednesday night, enabling

the state to expand its health-care programs.

On Wednesday, legislators also gave the Department of Human Services authority to spend the hundreds of millions of dollars that will be needed to run the program.

Gov. Mike Beebe will sign the bills at 9:30 a.m. Monday in the Governor's Conference Room of the Capitol in Little Rock. Arkansas is the first state to propose such a model.

Whether to approve the program, known at the Capitol as the "private option," has been one of the most contentious

See **MEDICAID**, Page 6A

Budget plan antes up for Medicaid, schools

MICHAEL R. WICKLINE
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Arkansas' public schools and health-care programs would get most of the money, while state employees would receive a 2 percent cost-of-living increase under the state budget proposal that legislative leaders unveiled Thursday night.

The lawmakers and the state's chief fiscal officer said the proposed budget largely

mirrors the \$4.9 billion budget that Beebe proposed in November for fiscal 2014. The state's budget is \$4.727 billion in the fiscal year that ends June 30.

"We've tweaked it here and there, and added \$2 million for the Governor's Distinguished Scholarships [to head off cutting the number of new recipients by more than 200 in the next school year]," said

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WEATHER

LITTLE ROCK
Today Partly cloudy.
High of 57 with west-northwest winds at 5 to 20 mph.
Tonight Mostly clear.
Low 37.



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FBI appeals for help in identifying 2 seen toting bags on video

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DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE STAFF
FROM WIRE REPORTS

BOSTON — The FBI released images Thursday of two men it wants to question in connection with the Boston Marathon bombings.

The images, taken near the finish line of the 119-year-old footrace where the bombs went off, show two men — one in a white cap worn backward and one in a black cap — whom the FBI described as suspects in the bombings, which killed three

and injured more than 180 on Monday afternoon.

"Today we are enlisting the public's help to identify the two suspects," said Richard DesLauriers, the special agent in charge of the FBI's Boston field office.

The man in the white cap is seen setting down a backpack at the site of one of the blasts, DesLauriers said.

Videos and photographs of the men wanted for questioning were posted online at fbi.gov.

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Musharraf flees, is later arrested



AP/B.K. BANGASH

A sport utility vehicle carrying Pakistan's former President Pervez Musharraf speeds away from the High Court in Islamabad on Thursday after Musharraf's bail in a treason case was revoked. *Article 2A*