

MARKETS

The Associated Press

Indianapolis grain

Estimated grain prices Thursday at Indianapolis-area elevators: Corn: cash \$1.96, new \$2.26. Soybeans: cash \$5.54, new \$5.83. Wheat: \$3.25.

Eastern Cornbelt direct hogs

Eastern Cornbelt Lean Value Direct Hogs report for Thursday: Trend: Barrows and gilts were 23 cents lower compared with previous day's close.

Base-market carcass basis plant-delivered: 0.9 to 1.1 square inches of back fat, \$46.50-\$58.11; weighted average \$57.18. Net prices, including premiums: 0.9-1.0, \$46.50-\$61.12; 1.0-1.1, \$46.50-\$60.08; 1.1-1.2, \$46.50-\$59.04. Daily movement estimate: 6,764.

Wall Street

NEW YORK — Bullish data on inflation and the housing market sent stocks mostly higher Thursday, with the Dow Jones industrials and Standard & Poor's 500 index posting nearly five-year highs for the third straight session.

The Dow rose 43.47, or 0.39 percent, to 11,253.24, its highest close since May 22, 2001, when it finished at 11,257.24. Broader stock indicators were narrowly mixed.

Rising crude oil futures eroded some of the major indexes' earlier gains. A barrel of light crude settled at \$63.58, up \$1.41, on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

Fears of a declining housing market eased after the Commerce Department reported an annualized 2.145 million new homes under construction in February, down slightly from 2.216 million in January but a better figure than economists had expected.

First-time unemployment claims rose again, with 309,000 new jobless claims filed last week, up from 304,000 the previous week. The rising trend, while troubling to the labor market, also reassured investors that consumers' spending power would remain moderate.

"Once again, we're seeing a reaction to soft economic data," said Jeff Kleintop, chief investment strategist for PNC Financial Services Group in Philadelphia. "It seems to be the key to reducing worries about how aggressive the Fed is going to be going forward, which seems to be the catalyst for stocks here."

In corporate news, Ford Motor Co. rose 8 cents, or 1 percent, to \$7.93 despite a Citigroup downgrade to "underweight" from "equal weight," or the equivalent of a "sell" rating.

Bear Stearns Cos. continued the streak of record earnings posted by Wall Street brokerage houses this week. The company's first-quarter profits beat analysts' expectations by 59 cents per share.

ConAgra Foods Inc. fell 91 cents to \$19.50 after the food producer announced a massive restructuring plan that includes the sale of its seafood and cheese businesses and would result in unspecified one-time charges for the rest of the year.

The Consumer Price Index edged up 0.1 percent last month, the Labor Department reported Thursday. An increase of 0.7 percent in January was driven by higher energy costs.

In February, energy prices fell by 1.2 percent. Pump prices dropped 1 percent, home heating oil was down 2.8 percent, and natural gas prices fell 4.5 percent.

Food prices moderated, rising just 0.2 percent. A big increase in fruit prices was offset by declines in the prices of vegetables, dairy and poultry products.

Wall Street investors were cheered by the moderating inflation pressures. The Dow Jones industrial average rose 43.47 points to close at 11,253.24, the highest in nearly five years.

The Fed has pushed up interest rates gradually since June 2004, with the 15th rate raise expected when Ben Bernanke presides over his first meeting as chairman on March 27 and 28.

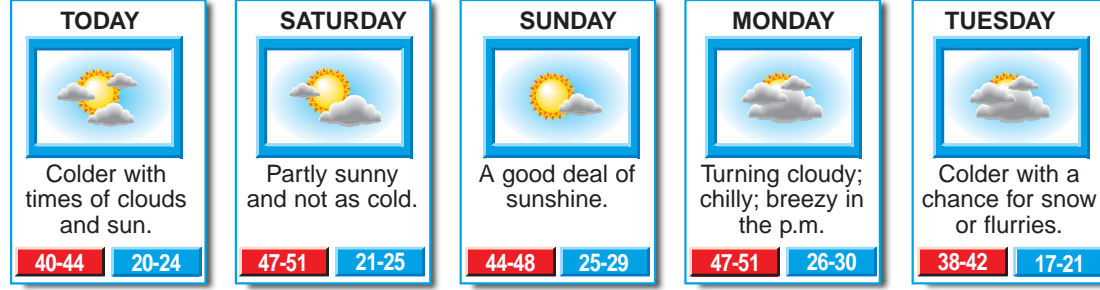
Analysts said as long as inflation remains contained, the central bank may be nearing the end of its rate increases. "The Fed can take comfort in the fact that core inflation remains tame, despite some modest inflationary pressures," said Nariman Behravesh, chief economist at Global Insight, a private forecasting firm.

Behravesh predicted the Fed would raise rates in March and one more time before moving to the sidelines. Even with the moderation in inflation, the inflation-adjusted weekly earnings of non-supervisory workers fell by 0.1 percent in February when compared with February 2005.

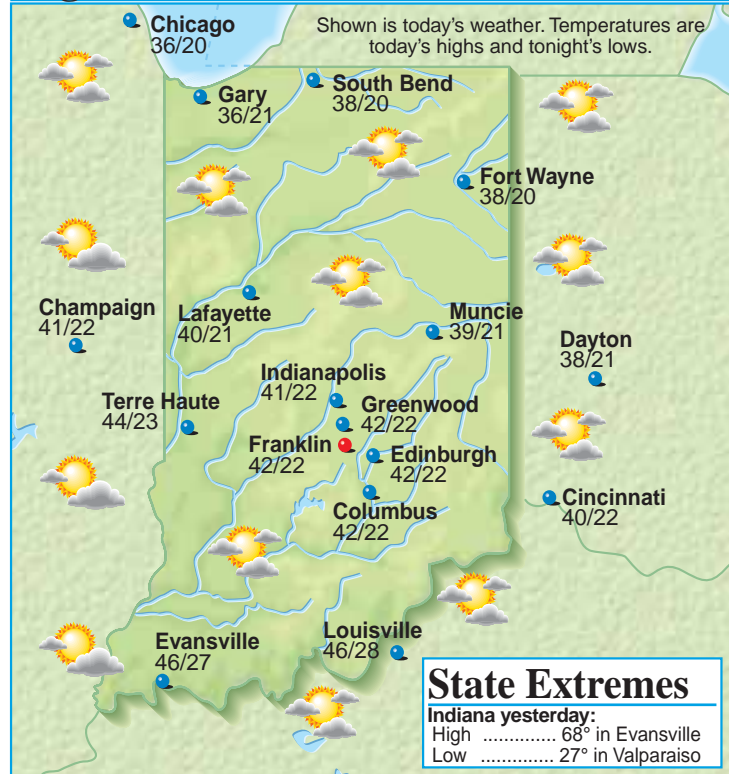
Weekly wages after adjusting for inflation have been flat or declining for 20 of the past 23 months. Jared Bernstein, senior economist at the Economic Policy Institute, a liberal think tank, said there were some signs that stronger employment growth was finally helping to boost wage growth, although he said this was occurring much later in this recovery because of the effects of increased global competition.

WEATHER

AccuWeather® five-day forecast for Johnson County



Regional weather



Regional summary

Indianapolis/Greenwood: Colder with intervals of clouds and sunshine today. Partly cloudy and cold tonight. Partly sunny and chilly tomorrow.

Edinburgh/Franklin: Colder with intervals of clouds and sunshine today. Partly cloudy and cold tonight. Partly sunny and chilly tomorrow.

Today in weather history™

The Pilgrims sowed seeds at Plymouth Rock, Mass., on March 17, 1621.

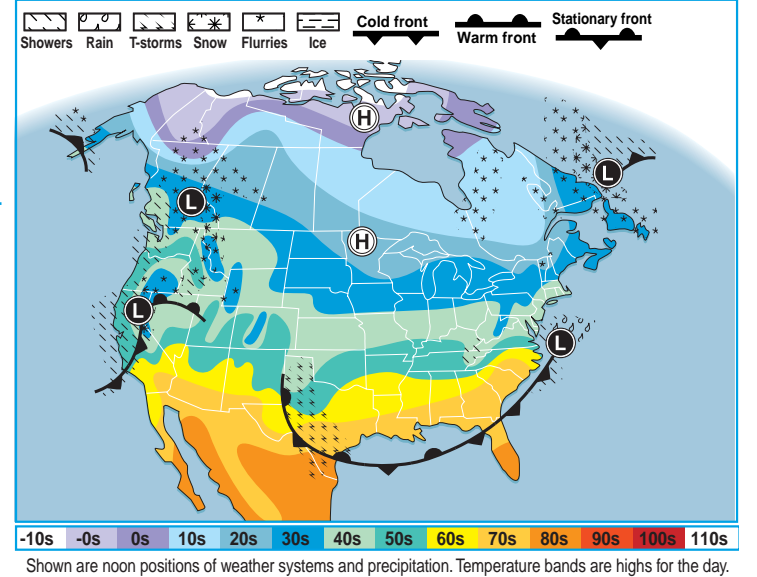
Regional cities

Table with 4 columns: City, Yest. Hi/Lo/W, Sat. Hi/Lo/W, and another set of Hi/Lo/W values for regional cities.

AccuWeather.com Almanac

Forecasts and graphics provided by AccuWeather, Inc. ©2006 Statistics for Indianapolis through 5 p.m. yesterday. Temperature: High 57°, Low 36°, Normal high 51°, Normal low 32°.

National weather today



National cities

Table with 4 columns: City, Yest. Hi/Lo/W, Sat. Hi/Lo/W, and another set of Hi/Lo/W values for various national cities.

Advertisement for Benjamin Franklin plumbers, featuring contact information and a list of services like drain cleaning and jetting.

Fuel-price drop slows inflation • Board

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE) Parsley and her parents met with the board. Because the hearing took longer than expected, Hight had not yet had her hearing by 8:30 p.m. when the board was scheduled to vote on whether to overturn the expulsions.

• Heels

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE) how to dance reels and jigs for about four years.

This is one of the busiest seasons for Lile's feet. She will dance at three schools and a parade today, and she has three other performances this weekend.

Lile quickly summarized what makes a good step dancer: Toes are turned out. Kick your foot back until it hits your backside. Make

sure your heels don't hit the ground "We have a saying," Owens said. "Irish dancers kick butt."

Lile's looking forward to her next birthday, as 12-year-olds in the competitions can start dancing on the tips of their toes, instead of the ball of their foot.

An array of ribbons, medals and trophies decorate a shelf in Lile's room.

She's still waiting for the dance that will earn her a first-place medal to add to her shelf.

Dancers who achieve this top rating are allowed to wear a solo dress, which differs from traditional costumes.

First-place dancers are allowed to pick the colors and design for their own solo dress, Owens said. Once a dancer earns a solo dress, she can wear the frock in competitions from that point on.

Lile said it's difficult to tell which dance will earn her a first-place rating. Sometimes judges take off points when she doesn't

notice herself making errors, or they could not see a misstep.

Each year, Lile participates in about 15 fairs, the Irish world for competitions. The contests are conducted across the Midwest and around the country.

She's traveled to Ohio, Tennessee and California to compete with other dancers her age. The trips have also helped her make friends across the United States.

She has extra incentive for working for the solo dress, as Owens wants to celebrate with a trip to Ireland, the homeland of

Lile's great-grandfather. Lile's Irish heritage is proudly displayed in her bedroom.

A mural of an Irish castle covers the wall above her bed. Celtic symbols are stenciled on the wall, and a green Care Bear with a shamrock on its stomach sits on a chair.

An autographed Riverdance poster hangs on the wall. She practices her step dancing everywhere, in the living room, while she's waiting for the bus and between classes at her Center Grove school.

"She doesn't walk anymore," Owens said.

• Fire

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE) children being burned while playing with fire. Two Franklin boys still are hospitalized.

"Indiana hasn't faced this type of crisis that we can remember," Johnson said. "We need to reiterate our fire-prevention message and get it out."

Johnson said there is no common denominator in the cause of the fires, but more than half the victims died in blazes where investigators could find no sign that the burned-out homes had working smoke detectors.

Families must have working smoke detectors in their homes and make sure they discuss escape options, Johnson said.

Here's a look at recent fires in Indiana, including several on the southside: Wednesday: A father and his 3-year-old twin girls died in a house fire in New Harmony in Posey County.

Wednesday: Two children died in a house fire in Gary in Lake County. The cause is under investigation.

Sunday: A family of six, including two adults and four children, were killed in a house fire in Martin County. The cause is still under investigation, but investigators believe it was accidental.

Sunday: One adult died in a house fire in Vevay, in Switzerland County. The cause is under investigation but is believed to be accidental.

"Had they taken the time, maybe some calmness would have come to the chaos that erupts during these situations," he said.

RECENT BLAZES

Saturday: Fern Carter, 74, died in a house fire on Santiago Drive in the Center Grove area. Investigators believe the cause was a cigarette that caught her medical oxygen on fire.

March 10: One adult died in a house fire in East Chicago in Lake County. Investigators believe the fire was an arson, and the case has been ruled a homicide.

March 8: A Greenwood woman in her 60s was seriously burned after a fire started in the Cambridge Apartments. Investigators believe a cigarette she lit caught her medical oxygen on fire.

March 7: Two adults and a child died in a house fire in Scottsburg. Investigators determined the cause was a

space heater placed too close to combustibles. March 5: Two children died in a house fire in Indianapolis, and investigators determined the cause was a space heater that caught the couch on fire.

Feb. 27: Three Franklin boys were burned when a gasoline-filled bottle exploded as one boy tried to set a shoe and other items on fire. Two suffered severe burns and are still hospitalized. The third boy was treated and released.

Feb. 13: An 8-year-old boy in the Center Grove area used a lighter and hairspray to make a makeshift flamethrower and catch a friend's hair on fire.

the Fishers Fire Department. They also should be tested at least once a month to ensure the batteries and circuitry still work. Smoke detectors must be

placed in locations to provide the best protection, Lipps said. He said homeowners often install the devices too close to their kitchens, prompting some people to disable them out of irritation because the devices sound when meals are burned.

"If you pull the battery, it's not going to help you when you need it," he said. "We try to help people locate them in a much better place." The state doesn't plan to institute any new educational programs because of the recent fires, but Johnson hopes to be able to better educate residents about the programs local fire departments already offer, including free smoke detectors and installation help.

LOTTERY

Here are the winning numbers selected Thursday in the Hoosier Lottery: Daily Three Midday: 7-8-4. Daily Three Evening: 2-0-4. Daily Four Midday: 3-5-2-2. Daily Four Evening: 7-3-3-6. Lucky Five Midday: 1-3-15-22-24. Lucky Five Evening: 9-14-15-23-28. Hoosier Lotto jackpot: \$2 million. Powerball jackpot: \$88 million.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.