

The high cost of fuel will be felt in seed and fertilizer prices, plus farmers' tractor expenses. **COMING WEDNESDAY**

## DIGEST

## LOCAL

## Students coming for Career Expo

Middle school, high school and technical college students from across Wisconsin will attend the fourth annual Career Skills Expo April 4-6 at the Alliant Center Exhibition Hall.

The event provides students with opportunities to interact with representatives from businesses, colleges and the military through seminars, competitions and other educational activities.

There is no cost to attend. For more information, visit [www.careerskillsexpo.org](http://www.careerskillsexpo.org).

## STATE

## State's credit ratings reaffirmed by Fitch

Fitch Ratings reaffirmed Wisconsin's top-tier credit ratings last week, citing the state's improving economy and "moderate, but rising" debt burden.

The state's short-term loans carry an F1+ rating — the highest possible — and its long-term bonds carry an AA- rating from Fitch.

In a news release, Fitch warned that while tax revenues have increased on pace with the economy, the state still relies too much on nonrecurring revenue and has little in reserve.

## Workshop to focus on development

The state Commerce Department will discuss state resources available for local economic development efforts at a workshop from 1:30 to 5 p.m. April 5 at the Chula Vista Resort and Conference Center in Wisconsin Dells. To register, visit [www.wisconsinplanners.org/events/events.htm](http://www.wisconsinplanners.org/events/events.htm).

## Hunters could be liable for damage

Hunters who shoot near high-voltage power lines could lose their license for up to a year and be required to pay for repairs under legislation signed last week by Gov. Jim Doyle.

The bill came at the request of the Wisconsin Public Service Corp., a Green Bay utility that said a misdirected shot could cause up to \$40,000 in damage to electric lines and cause power cutoffs.

In the past, repairs were generally paid for by the utility, supported by consumers' electric bills.

## M&amp;I Bank expects to add Janesville office

M&I Bank will open a Janesville location early next year, the company announced. Pending regulatory approval, the branch will be at the intersection of John Paul Road and Highway 26.

## Trucking firm plans to hire 350 workers

Schneider National Inc. plans to hire 350 truck drivers and office workers because of growth in its business. The Green Bay firm plans to hire 125 drivers in the Milwaukee and Green Bay areas and 100 office workers in Green Bay.

The hires are coming after the company's recent acquisitions of American Port Services and American Overseas Air Freight, spokeswoman Janet Bonkowski said.

The privately held company employs 22,000 worldwide.

— State Journal staff, wires

## Fed rate increase expected

By JEANNINE AVERSA  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — As Ben Bernanke takes the chairman's seat, Federal Reserve watchers wonder how many more interest rate increases are in store.

Bernanke and his Fed colleagues are expected to boost America's borrowing costs yet again at the end of their two-day meeting today. And analysts will be searching for clues about where the central bank is headed after that.

## Interest rate hike could be coming today

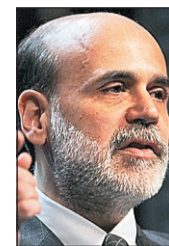
Under former chief Alan Greenspan, the Fed has been tightening credit in steady, quarter-percentage point steps since June 2004 to keep the economy and inflation on an even keel. Many economists believe the Fed will end its rate-raising campaign this year, but they don't know when and they don't think even Fed officials know.

"It is difficult for the Fed because there are all these cross-currents," said Lynn Reaser, chief economist at Bank of America's Investment Strategies Group.

For instance, the housing market is slowing. If that were to crimp consumer spending and thus overall economic activity, the Fed would move to the sidelines sooner rather than

later.

At the same time, there are concerns that an improving jobs market could lead to rapid wage gains that — if not blunted by other economic forces — could spark inflation. There's also concern that elevated energy prices could feed into higher costs for other goods and services, worsening the inflation environment.



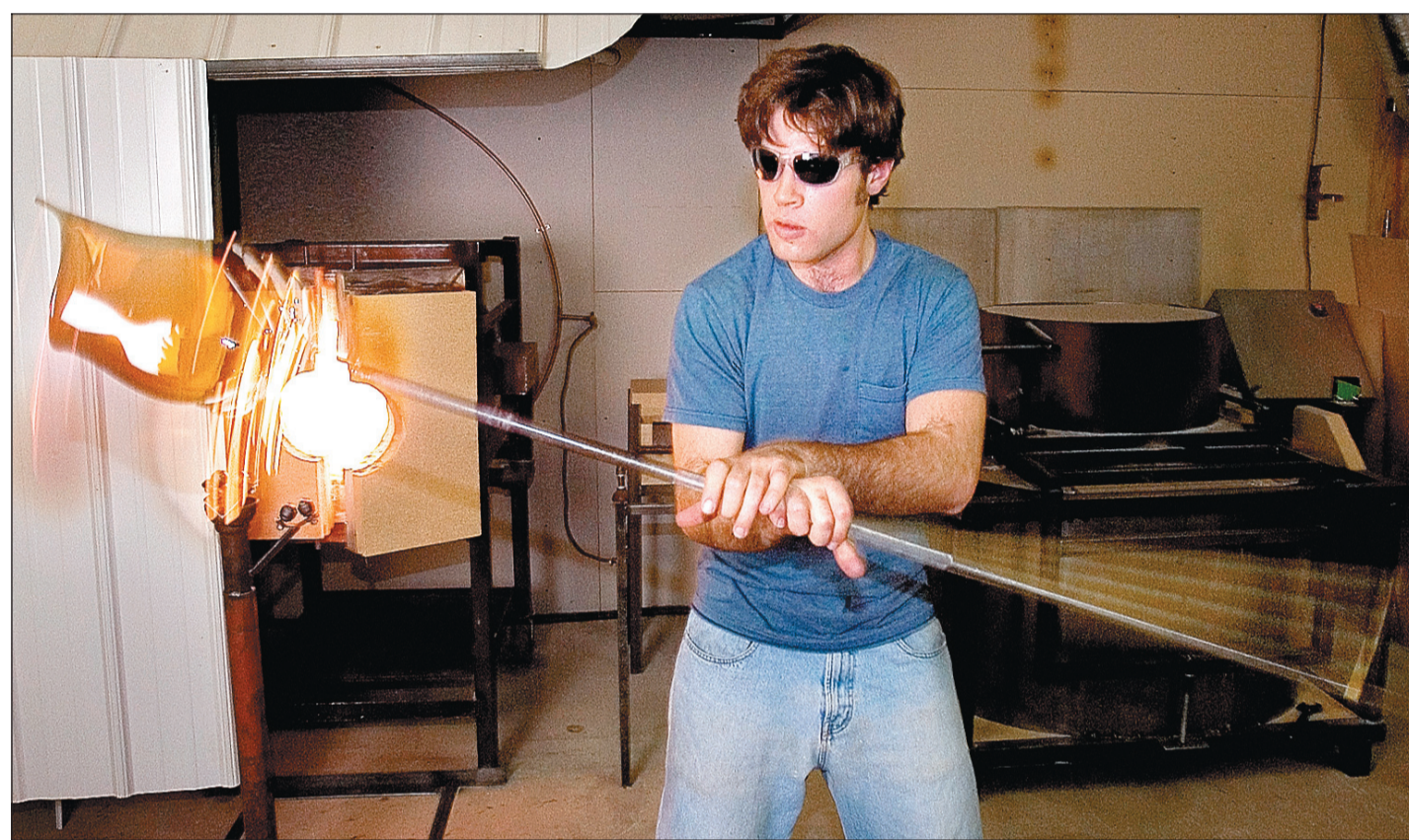
Bernanke

Under those scenarios, higher rates would be warranted.

And, there is the "conundrum," as Greenspan put it, on why mortgage and other long-term rates have stayed low when short-term rates were rising.

Please see **RATE**, Page B7

## WHAT I DO: GLASS SCULPTOR



ANDY MANIS — For the State Journal

Daniel Ostrov makes a vase by using gravity to stretch a piece of blown glass into the desired shape.

## I take heat, add glass, twist

Getting into this field was sort of a series of steps. I wouldn't say I had the goal with an end result to work in glass, but I've always been interested in art.

I was sort of the art student in elementary school who would try to do something more complex. When I got to college at Tulane University in New Orleans, I was fortunate to get into a beginning glass class my freshman year and I basically just knew the first day I worked with glass that I'd found the medium I wanted to work in.

What I do now is I'm a working glass artist.

After the hurricane in New Orleans, my parents said,

**Name:** Daniel Ostrov  
**Age:** 23  
**Occupation:** Glass sculptor

"You can't sit around and sulk. . . . You have to get to work here in Madison."

So, through a contact, I started working with an artist named Wes Hunting up north. I worked up there and assisted his own work and then he gave me studio time. I eventually stopped working with him around Christmas and then I began working with Shayna Leib. She's a phenomenal artist and she's really helped me develop a lot.

We've been sharing studio time. For three hours, we work on my work and then for another three, we work on hers.

I'm concentrating right now on blown glasswork — where I use glass, color and colored glass. I use something like a metal trash can lined with brick. You blast fire in there and it's what's used to reheat your glass work. The glass goes on the end of a metal rod. I heat it, take it out and I get between 15 and 45 seconds to work the piece and all the time it's cooling.

It's similar to a pottery wheel in that the work on a pottery wheel needs to be turning. You're constantly ro-

tating glass with the metal pipe.

Glass is a really addictive medium — if you're into art. When you're working glass, you have to be constantly aware of what your piece is doing. It's fun because it requires so much concentration. I enjoy this environment and the artists I've worked with. I love doing artwork and I've always felt it's important that artists always be taking things in. If you disconnect from the world, that can show in your work.

What I Do lets people tell in their own words what they do to make a living. It runs every Tuesday. Contact Amanda Kramer at [Kramer.News@gmail.com](mailto:Kramer.News@gmail.com) to suggest someone to feature.

## Wausau news not what he wants

By MARV BALOUSEK  
mbalousek@madison.com  
608-252-6135

What's local apparently doesn't mean the same thing to everybody.

To Ralph Jacobson, a retired state computer technician who lives on five acres just north of Wisconsin Dells, local television means Madison stations. To satellite provider DirecTV, however, local television for Jacobson's home means Wausau channels.

DirecTV recently sent notices to some subscribers that their local service will be adjusted on April 12. For Jacobson, who lives at the southern end of Adams County, that means a switch from Madison to Wausau local channels.

"I could care less about the Wausau market," he said. "If I'm going to buy a TV or anything, I'm interested in Madison, Baraboo or Portage. I'm not interested in Wausau weather."

DirecTV spokesman Robert Mercer said the company is adjusting its local channel of-

ferings nationwide using definitions of market areas by Nielsen Media Research, the same company that provides television program ratings.

"The federal legislation that allows us to provide local channels requires that we use the Nielsen Media Research designated market areas to determine which local channels we can legally offer in a given area," Mercer said, adding that a small percentage of DirecTV's 15.1 million customers are affected by the changes.

He said the law provides some flexibility but that DirecTV may not technically be able to offer Jacobson the Madison channels.

That's little comfort to Jacobson, who lives about 60 miles from Madison and 120 miles from Wausau. He said he was told that Columbia, Juneau and Marquette counties are in the Madison market, but not Adams County.

"To me, it's ridiculous," he said. "If they switch me over, I'm going to cancel the local channels."

## Buyouts tricky for both bosses, employees

By JEANNINE AVERSA  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — What would you do if your boss offered you a wad of cash to quit?

Take the dough and split or stay and live with the fear that you might be axed anyway?

General Motors Corp.'s offer last week to buy out more than 125,000 workers from GM and its auto parts supplier, Delphi Corp., put a spotlight on a tactic that many companies — and the government — use to cut costs.

"Buyouts have traditionally been a way to invite employees out the door, rather than shove them out," said J. Mark Iwry, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and senior adviser to The Retirement Security Project, a nonprofit group.

Deciding whether to take a buyout offer can hinge on any number of factors, including age, years of service with the company, skills and prospects for finding another job and whether a spouse has a job with health care or other benefits, experts say.

Thus, there's no one-size-fit all advice.

"Workers should think about it very carefully and go through a very clear evaluation," said Dallas Salisbury, president of the Employee Benefit Research Institute.

"I think many people end up taking buyout offers quickly because \$100,000 (or some other lump-sum payment) can seem like a great deal of money, only to end up realizing after the fact that it wasn't enough to justify leaving," Salisbury said. "People need to avoid the wide-eyed feeling of I'm winning the lottery and make sure they think about if I am 50 I still got decades ahead of me."

In the GM case, workers are being offered buyouts or early retirement incentives of \$35,000 to \$140,000 depending on length of employment and whether they want to keep health care and other benefits.

Even if all eligible workers

Please see **BUYOUTS**, Page B7

## New law on suing a builder

By BEN FISCHER

bfischer@madison.com  
608-252-6123

Homebuyers who discover defects in their newly built houses will have to jump through a few hoops before suing the contractors under a new Wisconsin law enacted Monday. The so-called Right to Cure Act was one of dozens of measures approved by Gov. Jim Doyle, including several more meant to fine-tune construction regulations and another beefing up penalties for crimes against financial institutions.

Under the new home-builder law, a disgruntled buyer must first complain to the builder about problems and then give them builder a chance to fix the defect, or pay to settle the complaint.

A lawsuit is allowed only after the two sides can't come to an agreement.

Supporters said the law merely codifies what is already true: If contractors are just told about a problem first, most are willing to fix it swiftly. As a result, they said, lawsuits are often unnecessary and costly.

The building industry has succeeded in getting similar laws passed in 27 other states. Opponents of the new law, which was SB448, said the new requirements could dissuade customers from working through the complaint process.

Also Monday, Doyle approved the creation of a new, more specific category of crimes and potential punishments: property crimes against financial institutions.

Under previous laws, supporters said, prosecutors could only turn to a few basic criminal codes to prosecute the wide array of potential financial crimes.

The new measure, AB986, specially describes nine crimes such as loan fraud and concealment of collateral — which are now defined as felonies.

"Prosecutors will no longer need to search for a crime that in the end will not have a stiff enough penalty," Kurt Bauer, president of the Wisconsin Bankers Association, said in a statement.

Other bill signings on Monday included:

• SB516, requiring builders to take at least 12 hours of continuing education courses in the last two years before obtaining a permit to construct one- or two-family homes.

• SB584, which removed some barriers to state-chartered banks that want to do business across state lines.

• SB484, an effort to allow out-of-state certified public accountants to practice in Wisconsin without being state-certified.

• AB620, which requires local governments to alert property owners who could be affected by proposed zoning changes.