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STATE, NATIONAL

Schock back home after week of controversies

PEORIA (AP) — Illinois Congressman Aaron Schock says he hopes constituents see him as “still the same person” after a week dogged by controversies in Washington.

The Peoria Republican returned to his central Illinois district Friday. It was his first visit since a watchdog group called for an ethics probe into how he paid for extravagant decorations of his Washington office, and after a staffer resigned because of racist remarks on Facebook.

Schock got a warm reception at one of his first stops. Several locals at a Peoria County Farm Bureau event said they care about his record on agricultural issues more than the color of his office walls.

The fourth-term congressman said “all’s fair” for criticism in politics. But he also said it’s important to maintain a respectful relationship with constituents.

Gov’t says fewer drivers are drinking, but more use drugs

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of drivers on the road with alcohol in their systems has declined by nearly one-third since 2007, but there has been a large increase in drivers using marijuana

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Tipping off the Casson Tourney



Pat Mullen, center, prepares to toss up the opening tip of the Kevin Casson Memorial 5th-6th Grade Tournament at St. Mary’s Friday. Jumping for St. Mary’s 6th is Casey Crowley, left, while Asa Smith jumps for El Paso-Gridley. PAUL WESTERMAYER/DAILY LEADER

LIVINGSTON COUNTY

CEDS seen as force for growth

By Cynthia Grau
Staff Reporter

Livingston County is taking another step in growth and expansion of business and job opportunities with the help of the Greater Livingston County Economic Development Council.

At its December meeting, the Livingston County Board approved a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy that is designed to bring together the public and private sectors in the creation of an economic roadmap to diversify and strengthen the Livingston County economy.



Adam Dontz, CEO of the GLCEDC, said a meaningful grant opportunity had been unlocked by the GLCEDC for public works projects connected to economic development.

“Once approved by the EDA, Livingston County communities could realize benefits well over a million dollars if their grant applications are approved,” Dontz said.

The GLCEDC, in conjunction with the North Central Council of Governments, created the CEDS, which after review and approval by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration, gives grant opportunities for public infrastructure projects, such as water, sewer and street projects.

Livingston County Board Chairman Marty Fannin said he feels this is the perfect opportunity for smaller municipalities, and the county as a whole, to receive federal funding based on what needs to be done to bring in economic development.

“If we’ve got a plant that wants to go in Dwight and there needs to be infrastructure, such as roads, sewer and water lines run, they can apply for a grant and get funding based on that, which we couldn’t do before (without the CEDS),” Fannin said.

The GLCEDC formed a steering committee
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More Americans are finally seeing a pay raise

WASHINGTON (AP) — As the U.S. economy has steadily recovered from the Great Recession, the critical missing piece has been a painful lack of pay raises for many Americans.

Their pain may be easing. Friday's jobs report signaled that raises have finally begun to flow through an economy in which, once you factor in inflation, most people earn less than when the Great Recession struck in 2007.

The average hourly wage jumped 0.5 percent between December and January — the sharpest monthly gain since 2008 — the government's survey of businesses found. The average has now risen 2.2 percent over the past 12 months to \$24.75, comfortably above inflation.

So if you've gone without a meaningful raise, should you expect one?

Skeptics still have doubts. But the quickening rate of hiring provides reason to hope.

The government's figures don't

pinpoint which occupations have benefited most from rising pay. Wages have risen at a slightly slower pace for non-managers, indicating that bosses are pocketing much of the gains. Still, corporate announcements and job postings indicate that wage growth has been extending to a broad range of industries and professions.

Job listings on Indeed.com, for example, show stronger demand for truckers, health care professionals and technology workers, all of which points to higher wages, said Tara Sinclair, chief economist at Indeed.com and a professor at George Washington University.

"America is really getting back to work, and that's the first step to getting better paychecks," Sinclair said.

The pace of hiring has accelerated 34 percent since 2013. That growth has reduced the number of job seekers and made it harder for employers to find talented employees. The trend, the theory goes, has finally forced companies to loosen

their grip on pay to attract and keep the best workers.

Employers have added 3.2 million jobs over the 12 months — including 257,000 in January, 329,000 in December and a sizable 423,000 in November.

Some economists note that pay figures tend to be volatile from month to month and that January's blowout average increase might be unsustainable. Still, each additional job increases the number of paychecks in the United States, which drives greater consumer spending. And that tends to fuel further hiring and higher wages.

Ford Motor Co. has announced that up to 500 of its lowest-paid factory workers will receive a 48 percent pay raise to \$28.50 an hour. Only 20 percent of its employees can be in the lowest tier, so Ford had to raise wages to hire 1,550 workers to make pickup trucks in Missouri and Michigan. Other major companies have also announced pay increases.

CARS

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will be set up here in Pontiac.

"It's just another way of getting people into town to see the museum and other downtown establishments. We already have commitments from people outside of the state, like Kansas City and Indianapolis," Dye added.

"We may try to do some other model-specific days in the future, but we also have to keep in mind that there are car clubs who want to request time to visit the museum as well."

The museum has also added a new tour to its presentation. This one takes groups to the areas that go otherwise unseen by the casual viewer. Dye explained there are a lot of artifacts and cars that do not make it to the museum because of space limitations. For \$5 a person, a group can set up the guided tour.

"These things just naturally develop when you get more stuff in storage than

you can display in the museum," Dye said. "In addition to showing them all the props and items we store in the basement, there is also a car shop across the street from the museum where I work on cars."

"I have taken people there and word of mouth spread so much that groups were requesting specifically to see the cars in the shop. We thought we might as well turn that into part of the presentation to raise money for the museum."

When asked about his feelings on giving people a tour of areas that aren't as orderly as the museum, Dye said simply, "People like seeing the projects. If they decide they want to have a behind-the-scenes tour, although it isn't as tidy as the displays in the museum, people don't have the same expectations when you take them to a shop. They expect there to be parts and tools laying around with a few cars that are half finished; they seem to really enjoy it."



This 1965 Pontiac GTO was one of more than 200 vehicles displayed in downtown Pontiac during the GTO Automobile Association Regional All Pontiac Cruise and Show last year. PHOTO PROVIDED

REPORT

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and other illegal drugs, a government report released Friday found.

The report by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said the share of drivers who test positive for alcohol has declined by more than three-quarters since the agency first began conducting roadside surveys in 1973.

But the latest survey also found that nearly one in four drivers tested positive for at least one drug that could affect safety.

The anonymous surveys have been conducted five times over the last 40 years. They gather data in dozens of locations across the country from drivers who agree to participate.

Mark Rosekind, head of the safety administration, credited anti-drunk driving efforts for the decline, but said "there is no victory as long as a single American dies in an alcohol-related crash."

About 8 percent of drivers during weekend nighttime hours were found to have some alcohol in their system, and 1.5 percent were found with .08 percent or higher breath alco-

hol content. The number of drivers with any alcohol in their systems is down by about 30 percent from the previous survey in 2007 and 77 percent from the first survey in 1973.

At the same time, the number of weekend nighttime drivers with evidence of illegal drugs in their systems climbed from 16.3 percent in 2007 to 20 percent in 2014. The number of drivers with marijuana in their systems grew by nearly 50 percent over the same period of time.

"The rising prevalence of marijuana and other drugs is a challenge to everyone who is dedicated

to saving lives and reducing crashes," Rosekind warned.

A second survey assessed whether marijuana use by drivers is associated with greater risk of crashes. The survey found that marijuana users are more likely to be involved in accidents, but that the increased risk may be due in part because marijuana users are more likely to be part of demographic groups at higher risk of crashes generally. In particular, marijuana users are more likely to be young men — a group already at high risk.

CEDS

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to develop the CEDS.

The CEDS is the result of a yearlong process of conducting research and gathering information from the people who live and work in Livingston County.

The committee identified the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that influence the county's economic position locally, nationally and globally. Goals, objectives and action items were formulated based on that analysis.

According to the CEDS, the county's economy remains strongly based in manufacturing and agriculture, but supporting industries including healthcare, retail, finance, insurance and tourism have diversified it.

Wind energy and crude oil distribution have also expanded the county's economy. The region's multi-modal transportation network, most notably Interstate 55 and the intersection of the Union Pacific and Norfolk and Southern rail lines, broadband networks and plentiful access to quality

education, from elementary schools through universities within a one-hour travel radius, is also seen as a strength of the county.

Weakness pointed out in the study shows a lack of major employers that offer a living wage, causing local communities to potentially lose young talent or become bedroom communities.

High property taxes, difficult access to information and the presence of strong unions may discourage companies from locating in the county.

Opportunities cited in the study include all the weaknesses that can be turned around. Most economic growth within communities originates from promoting, expanding and strengthening existing companies and resources. Identifying the needs of companies and linking them to individuals with specialized skill sets is one way to support existing businesses.

"A top priority of the GLCEDC is to ensure the cost of doing business in Livingston County is competitive with other areas in the region," Dontz said. "It is critical we have the public works infrastructure to support the expansion of

our existing business and to attract new businesses.

"By applying for federal funds, we are able to leverage our local dollars into more significant capital improvement projects. Having readily available infrastructure and the recently approved property tax abatement program makes Livingston County an attractive location for businesses to invest."

Promoting tourism will also create economic opportunities, such as Route 66, which is now attracting international travelers.

Other opportunities identified by the CEDS include repurposing the closed Dwight Correctional Center, increasing public transportation in communities throughout the county and improving access to government information. This would include streamlining the process for building permit reviews and the low cost of permits and application fees.

The county's location, with its location of Interstate 55 and other roadways, provides what is perceived as an ideal opportunity to attract supply chain companies.

The threats the committee brings up include Illi-

nois politics, fiscal insolvency and corporate income tax, of which counties and municipalities have little or no control.

The top action items realized by the committee include an infrastructure goal of assisting the county and its communities with developing projects, through capital improvements planning, that are eligible for EDA funding and other state and federal grant programs.

Projects should improve the community's infrastructure and result in job creation and private sector investment.

CEDS also listed the workforce and education development goal — having a trained and ready workforce to welcome new businesses — and two business development goals — that includes a plan to attract and retain manufacturing and logistics companies.

The infrastructure goal is to work with county and local officials to maintain a list of infrastructure projects that, when completed,



Marty Fannin

will give the county a competitive advantage in attracting new businesses and industries.

As for the timeline the county is looking at to see whether or not its CEDS was approved, Livingston County Board Chairman Marty Fannin said it has been assured and is now a matter of formality.

"This will go up to federal (EDA) and we've gotten assurances that all our Is are dotted at Is crossed and so it's just a matter of getting approval," Fannin said. "Everything that needed to be done has been done."

Fannin said a few board members approached him following December's meeting voicing some excitement for the opportunity for smaller communities in the county looking to have the same opportunity to bring new economic development to their areas as opposed to the larger communities. "Here is a way to get some money to boost your infrastructure based on

the fact that you've got someone who's wanting to come in," Fannin said. "If you have a company wanting to come in and they need water and sewer, you can apply for this grant and that takes care of that piece of the puzzle. It just helps everyone."

Fannin also said this is another example of business and government leaders coming together to accomplish a common goal.

"It was a good showing of people coming together to get things done in Livingston County," Fannin said.

Dontz agreed, stating elected officials and business leaders are pleased with the CEDS and the potential grant opportunities it can deliver.

"This work demonstrates we are taking proactive measures to update and expand our infrastructure and looking for the most cost effective ways to do it by leveraging federal dollars," Dontz said.