

QUOTABLE: *“The regional economic outlook is quite positive. Broad-based hiring in every sector from energy to construction to services reflects the confidence employers have that the region is poised for sustained expansion.”*

—Pia Orrenius, Research Officer and Senior Economist

DEMOGRAPHICS: Hispanic Population Exceeds Pre-Census Estimates

The Hispanic population’s growth the last decade proved more significant than previous estimates had suggested.

The 2010 census showed that the nation’s Hispanic population rose 43 percent to more than 50 million. The increase accounted for just over half of total U.S. population growth. About one in six people in the U.S. identified themselves as Hispanic. Texas had 9.5 million Hispanic residents, amounting to 37.6 percent of its population. There were 1 million Hispanics (46.3 percent of the population) in New Mexico and nearly 200,000 (4.2 percent) in Louisiana.

The national Hispanic count exceeded the official Census Bureau estimate by 1.9 percent, or about 1 million, according to the Pew Hispanic Center, a Washington think tank. Pew extrapolated from the 2009 estimate to determine a comparative

2010 figure. It also found the Hispanic population was higher than the estimate by 86,000 in Texas and by more than 20,000 each in New Mexico and Louisiana.

During the decade between official counts, Census Bureau estimates are updated based on birth and death records and official immigration data. Estimates were much closer to the true population in the most recent census than in previous decennial counts. In 2000, overall population estimates were off by 6.9 million, including 3.1 million Hispanics.

Reasons for the latest discrepancy haven’t been analyzed, but the Census Bureau said the 2000 underestimate was likely related to unauthorized immigration and undercounting in prior censuses.

—Yingda Bi

NATURAL GAS: Louisiana’s Haynesville May Have Overtaken Barnett

Louisiana’s Haynesville Shale may have become the nation’s most productive natural gas field in February, surpassing the Barnett Shale formation in North Texas, which had held the title since 2008.

Pipeline flows data from energy analytics firm Bentek Energy LLC suggest the Louisiana portion of the Haynesville Shale moved ahead Feb. 12, even after Barnett rebounded from winter well freeze-offs. While few argue that Haynesville is on a faster production track, confirmation of the timing of its Barnett takeover won’t come until lagged well production numbers are released. Both fields are in the Federal Reserve Eleventh District.

Advances in horizontal drilling technology and lessons learned from Barnett helped boost Haynesville production.

The first Haynesville well was completed in 2008, with production exceeding 5 billion cubic feet (Bcf) per day in less than three years. It took Barnett almost 10 years to achieve that level, government data show. Haynesville production stood at 5.3 Bcf on Feb. 12, compared with Barnett’s 5.2 Bcf, according to estimates based on flows. The figures rose to 5.5 Bcf at Haynesville and 5.3 Bcf at Barnett by month’s end.

Haynesville offers economic benefits to northwestern Louisiana. Since January 2007, energy employment in the Shreveport–Bossier City area has increased 78 percent, compared with 4 percent in Louisiana and 12.1 percent in Texas. Haynesville has also lifted Louisiana state and local tax revenues and boosted household earnings.

—Adam Swadley

ELECTRIC POWER: February’s Rolling Blackouts Chill Much of Texas

The North American Electric Reliability Corp. (NERC), which oversees bulk power system reliability throughout the U.S. and much of Canada, had anticipated a warmer-than-average Texas winter.

Instead, a record cold snap hit Texas in early February, and rolling blackouts affected most of the state Feb. 2 when weather-related mechanical issues knocked out 102 power-generation units that provide about 7,000 megawatts (MW) of capacity. The Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT), an independent operator in the NERC system that manages service to more than 22 million customers, coordinated the rolling blackouts. Such planned outages are designed to conserve power and prevent total blackouts.

The rolling blackouts largely took place over an eight-

hour period as demand reached 56,334 MW, taxing the impaired system. Texas electricity use peaks in the air conditioning-cooled summer; the ERCOT record of 65,776 MW occurred last Aug. 23. Heading into winter, NERC predicted peak demand of 48,066 MW in ERCOT’s service area. Such forecasts help utilities meet demand for electricity, a product that’s difficult to store.

The arctic front swept as far south as the Rio Grande Valley, producing the longest and coldest winter streak in Texas in over 20 years. The Valley’s citrus crops survived, but Dallas pre-Super Bowl events and work schedules were disrupted as wind chills fell below zero. El Paso, outside of ERCOT’s area, also endured rolling blackouts during the cold snap.

—Michael Weiss