

**By Russ Pankonin**

**The Imperial Republican**

Chase County's median household income (MHI) from 2008-2012 didn't keep up with the inflation-adjusted buying power in 2000, according to newly released census data.

The MHI in 2000, adjusted for inflation to 2012, totalled \$44,580.

In 2012, the county's MHI fell to \$43,125, or 3.3 percent below the 2000 inflation-adjusted figure.

When looking at family income, the census data focused on the 2010 calendar year. This represented a year when corn prices hadn't reached the record prices of 2011.

That could account for why Chase County didn't show a gain while the surrounding counties of Perkins, Dundy, and Hayes all showed MHI increases.

These particular counties typically grow more acres of wheat than Chase County. And by the end of December 2010, wheat prices stood at \$7 per bushel while corn was at \$5.63 per bushel.

As a state, Nebraska lagged behind the income growth of nearby states during that same time frame.

Nebraska's MHI fell five percent, while the U.S. saw a drop of 8.3 percent in purchasing power.

Wyoming and North Dakota, which experienced energy booms, each saw their MHI increase 8.3 percent, while South Dakota increased one percent.

In Nebraska, the state's three largest counties, Douglas, Lancaster and Sarpy, experienced declines in MHI of 10.5, 10.2 and 6.6 percent, respectively.

### **Bad for nation's economy**

Recently, the Associated Press surveyed more than three dozen economists. The majority said this decline in household income isn't just bad for individuals, it spells trouble for the nation's economy.

Their concerns tap into a debate that's intensified as middle-class pay has stagnated while wealthier households have thrived.

A key source of the economists' concern: Higher pay and significant stock market gains are flowing mainly to affluent Americans. Yet these households spend less of their money than do low- and mid-dle-income consumers who make up most of the population but whose pay is barely rising.

Those trends have fueled an escalating political debate. In a speech this month, President Barack Obama called income inequality "the defining challenge of our time."

Obama also called for an increase in the federal minimum wage, now \$7.25. Republican leaders in the House oppose an increase, arguing that it would slow hiring.

Other views shared by economists address Obama's Affordable Care Act (ACA). They say the law will make little or no difference to the job market. About two-fifths said the law would cost jobs. None said it would increase hiring.

The law has drawn fierce opposition from many small business owners, requiring companies with 50 or more employees to provide coverage starting in 2015.

The sign-up process for individuals got off to a rough start as well.

### **Eleven percent uninsured in Nebraska**

With much attention being paid to the ACA and people's access to health insurance, the census

data showed 11.4 percent of all Nebraskans are uninsured. That equates to more than 204,000 people in the state.

In Chase County, the newly released census data shows that 14.6 percent of the county's residents are uninsured.

The largest number reside in Imperial with 291 of 2,056 residents uninsured, representing 14.2 percent of Imperial's population.

In Wauneta, 103 of 773 were reported as uninsured, representing 13.3 of their population.

Enders had the largest percentage of uninsured residents with 56 of 91, or 61.5 percent without health insurance.

In Champion, 32 of 85 residents are uninsured, representing 37.6 percent.

Another 52 residents without insurance are scattered throughout the county.

Of the neighboring counties, Perkins County had the smallest percentage of its population without insurance at 12.7 percent, or 369 people.

In Dundy County, the percentage was 15.5 or 303 people. In Hayes County, 19.9 percent or 203 people are uninsured.