

Hello again, and welcome. I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. Today's **As It Is** program is different. Usually we take you around the world to hear about interesting people, places, and things. But today we are staying closer to home. You could call it an "all American" show. First we will talk about money, jobs, and the economy. It seems that one western state has been doing a bit better than others. We will hear why California is the place to be.

Then, we will make stop in Houston, Texas, to hear about some young people who have been chosen to help the city grow and prosper. And near the end of the program, some silliness, and just a touch of classic rock and roll music. **As It Is** ...helping you to learn English by way of your radio and computer.

The American economy is slowly improving from the recession of 2008 and 2009. Industries like construction and building repair are doing well. Unemployment, however, remains high throughout the United States. From state to state, the economic recovery appears uneven. But California is growing at a rate above the national average.

Rosalie Andersen is a real estate agent. Her job is to help people buy and sell homes. Today, she is attempting to sell a white house made of stucco in a quiet Los Angeles neighborhood. She hopes this house will sell for more than a million dollars. She says the housing market is getting better.

“It’s kind of puzzling. We talk in the office, and we’re just wondering: Where are these people getting all this cash from? But I think what a lot of people are doing is that they’re finally realizing that your best investment for money is a home.”

Last year, the California economy grew at rate of three-point-five percent. That is a full percentage point above the national average. But the growth rate differs from place to place.

Robert Kleinhenz is an economist with the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation. He says California’s ports are busier than other ports.

“We’re still well below the pre-recession peak levels of port activity that we had seen in 2007. We’ve seen some slight gains with each passing year. But there still is a ways to go.”

In downtown Los Angeles, the Chinese immigrant owner of a small business says he is doing well. His store sells t-shirts and slippers -- footwear normally worn around the house. Nearby, Henry Wong sells low-cost decorations and cloth imported from China. Mr. Wong says the cost to operate his business is low. When the economy is not good, he says, he and his employees work harder. Currently, Mr. Wong is doing well. He has six workers in his store, and more working in a building where the goods are stored.

High-technology companies are helping the American economy. But even in Silicon Valley, California’s high-technology center, the situation is mixed. Cisco Systems has reported good sales, but is cutting 4,000 jobs. The company says it is reacting to a changing market. Banking and professional services are doing well. The recreation and hospitality industry is expanding, adding jobs to hotels and visitor services.

California's \$44 billion farming industry helps feed the nation and is growing. The state's unemployment rate is 8.7 percent, down from over 12 percent three years ago. The national unemployment rate is 7.4 and improving. But Mr. Kleinhenz says the numbers are not what they should be.

"The unemployment rate has been coming down. GDP (Gross Domestic Product) has been growing. The problem is, they continue to tell us that the economy is growing at a slower pace than we would really like to see."

## **Houston Looks for Young Leaders**

The Greater Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Foundation recently held a graduation ceremony for 34 young adults who completed its Emerging Leaders Institute. The program's purpose is to increase their skills -- and their confidence that they can help the future of this busy city in the state of Texas. Christopher Cruise tells us more.

Participants in the program are students, or those who recently completed their studies at a university in the Houston area.

Most graduates of the Houston Emerging Leaders Institute are Hispanic, but others also take part. Huyen Do is a good example. She says she is ready to be a leader.

The program includes business leaders and civil engineers, biologists, bankers and politicians. Laura Murillo leads the Greater Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Foundation. She says the program is aimed at helping make progress in a city that is changing both ethnically and economically.

"Houston is diverse, in terms of the people who are here, and it is diverse in terms of the careers that are available. So we want to get and identify all those great people out there, put them in this program and prepare them to lead Houston."

Program members like Mercedes Sanchez said they learned from working with others in the class of 2013.

"I think that one of the many benefits of having such a diverse group is that you really get to learn from each other, and it enriches the experience that you have."

Participant Jo Anna Castilleja works for Shell Oil. She said she needed guidance about the business world because she was the first in her family to complete college.

"My parents came from elementary and secondary education, and I needed to ask for help from someone who had that kind of (college) experience."

Sonia Gonzalez was one of Miz Castilleja's guides, or mentors. Miz Gonzalez said the training has produced better workers and citizens. She noted that the program combined Miz Castilleja's work experience with a wider understanding of what is happening in the city. And, she said that made her a more valuable employee.

Although the students have graduated from the program, they may return one day as a mentor to a new young participant. I'm Christopher Cruise.

And I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. Thank you for spending some time with us on this Thursday, October 9th. Today is International Top Spinning Day, a day to spin your small wooden toy, and then email the Spinning Top and Yo Yo Museum in Burlington, Wisconsin, to tell them you participated!

Today is also the National Bring Your Teddy Bear to Work Day. After all, the poor little fellow rarely gets out of the house anymore.

And American singer and songwriter Jackson Browne is celebrating his 63rd birthday today.

There are more Learning English programs coming your way, and world news at the beginning of every hour on VOA.

