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Southern News Group

Harris County leads nation in prostitution sting before Super Bowl



Inside C5

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Stock market shrugs off CPI rise but inflation obsession may linger

NEW YORK (Reuters) - So, were the stock market's fears about inflation ... inflated? Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange shortly after the opening bell in New York, U.S., February 13, 2018. REU-TERS/Lucas Jackson

U.S. stocks gained on Wednesday, shrugging off an initial sharp dip in premarket trading immediately after the release of U.S. government data that showed consumer prices rose more than expected in January.

The Labor Department said its Consumer Price Index increased 0.5 percent last month. That was higher than estimates for a 0.3 percent increase and the 0.2 percent in December. The year-on-year increase in the CPI was unchanged at 2.1 percent.

At first blush, the move higher in stocks seemed counterintuitive. Investors had braced for Wednesday's Consumer Price Index data since concerns about firming inflation were blamed in part for the 10-percent pullback in the stock market from its Jan. 26 record high. But investors pointed to several reasons why stocks were higher, with the S&P 500 up 0.8 percent in early afternoon trading.

For one, despite the higher-than-expected reading, annual inflation did not cause particular alarm. The "core" CPI, excluding the volatile food and energy components, rose 0.3 percent, the largest increase since January 2017. Still, the year-on-year rise in the core CPI was unchanged at 1.8 percent in January. In addition, while bond yields rose after the inflation data, the rates did not spike to levels that would be more worrisome for equities.

"Of itself, inflation, particularly driven by higher demand, is not necessarily negative for equities," said Rick Meckler, president of LibertyView Capital Management in Jersey City, New Jersey.

Rather, Meckler said, the concern is if bond rates adjust substantially higher in response to inflation data. Such increases in bond rates would provide more investment competition to stocks, after years of low yields made equities comparatively more desirable.

On Wednesday, while yields climbed, the benchmark 10-year Treasury note had not yet risen significantly above 2.90 in yield, a level that was closely watched.

"Maybe if we saw the yield continue to rise, if it went up past 2.90, it might hit stocks," said Michael Antonelli, managing director for institutional sales trading at Robert W. Baird in Milwaukee. "That it's stabilized has helped." The Federal Reserve, whose mandate includes price stability, has a 2-percent inflation target. But the U.S. Central Bank tracks the different personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price indexes, which has consistently undershot the Fed's target.

"Inflation has to be put into context," said Joseph LaVorgna, chief economist for the



Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange shortly after the opening bell in

Americas at Natixis in New York. "The year-over-year rate on the core is still below 2 percent. The core PCE, which the Fed thinks is better, is even lower, well below 2 percent." Even as the stock market shrugged off Wednesday's data, the focus on inflation may linger. Equity investors will look to the monthly CPI much in the

same way they have done for the U.S. employment report, said Walter Todd, chief investment officer at Greenwood Capital in Greenwood, South Carolina. "I fully anticipate that when this time rolls around next month, (investors) will obsess about it at that time," Todd said.

Mardi Gras marred as 3 killed, 5 wounded in New Orleans

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A festive close to Mardi Gras was marred by shootings across New Orleans that left three people dead and five others wound-

The first two shootings happened in the afternoon, when fights broke out near the traditional parade route.

Police clarified Wednesday that two teenage boys were wounded in one of the parade route shootings. Gunfire struck one boy in the "head area" and the other had a leg wound, police said in a news release.

Eddie Dingle is seen in an undated photo provided by the New Orleans Police Department. A festive close to Mardi Gras was marred by shootings across New Orleans Tuesday, Feb. 13, 2018, that left three people dead and five others wounded. Police named Dingle as a suspect after a man appeared to have been shot twice during a fight, and died after being rushed to the hospital. Police Chief Michael Harrison said investigators obtained a warrant for his arrest on a second-degree murder charge. (The New Orleans

Mardi Gras dancers take over SF's Mission; Colorful Carnaval celebration counteracts 'hate' A man appeared to have been shot twice during a separate fight, and died after being rushed to the hospital, Police Chief Michael Harrison said. Police named Eddie Dingle, 21, as a suspect and said investigators obtained a warrant for his arrest on a second-degree murder charge.

The third shooting began as people celebrated Tuesday night at a house party in the Lower 9th Ward, about 2 miles (3 kilometers) from the parade route. Witnesses described a fusillade of bullets. Police spokeswoman Ambria Washington said multiple suspects opened fire on a car with five people inside. The gunfire shattered its windows, flattened its front tires and left more than a dozen bullet holes in the driver's door.

The driver managed to drive to a nearby gas station before two people died from their wounds. Arriving officers strung up police tape to keep crowds away. At that scene and outside the family home of some of the victims a few blocks away, mourners were still wearing festive Mardi Gras shirts and hats.

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FILE PHOTO: Revellers throw beads from a French Quarter balcony on Mardi Gras Day in New Orleans



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BUSINESS

The Blue Apron company may be losing money, but that hasn't deterred Donald Trump from proposing the high-end mealkit company be a loose model for the federal food stamps program.

The White House's 2019 budget request —a wish list for Congress to take under consideration—includes a plan to revamp the government program that ensures lower-income people have access to food. Trump official Mick Mulvaney sold the idea as one that would modernize the Supplemental Nutrition Assistant Program (SNAP) by casting it as a "Blue Apron-type program." One catch among many: It wouldn't include fresh fruits or vegetables.

Blue Apron may be losing money, but that hasn't deterred Donald Trump from proposing the high-end meal-kit company be a loose model for the federal food stamps

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The Blue Apron Program

Blue Apron Inc. is an American ingredient-and-recipe meal kit service. It exclusively operates in the United States.[1] The weekly boxes contain ingredients and also include suggested recipes that must be cooked by hand by the customer using the pre-ordered ingredients.

As of September 2016, the company had shipped 8 million meal servings. In June 2017, the company went public with an initial public offering.



boxes containing the ingredients to cook recipes in August 2012, packing and shipping the first 30 orders themselves from a commercial kitchen in Long Island City. In May 2014, the company announced that it would be launching a fulfillment center in Richmond, California. In November 2014, Blue Apron launched Blue Apron Market, a store featuring kitchen tools and cookware curated by Blue Apron. In December 2014, the company opened another fulfillment center in Jersey City, New Jersey.

After the opening of its third fulfillment center in Arlington, Texas in June 2015, the

Trump Wants Food Stamps To Work Like Blue Apron—But With No Fresh Foods

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



cart at a Washington, DC area grocery store.

company began shipping to the contiguous United States.

In September 2015, Blue Apron launched Blue Apron Wine, a direct-to-consumer wine delivery service that sends customers six 500ml bottles per month. The wines, made specifically for Blue Apron, are purchased directly from vineyards and sent directly to customers.



A Blue Apron food

In October 2016, Buzzfeed reported a history of safety and health violations at the company's Richmond, California

ed the problems to operational issues while scaling up during its early days. The company announced in February 2017

distribution center. The company attribut-

that it would be opening a fulfillment center in Linden, New Jersey.

On June 29, 2017, Blue Apron had its initial public offering of 30 million shares of class A common stock (ticker APRN) priced at \$10 per share; it is the first U.S. meal-kit company to go public.

Since going public, Wall Street has cut Blue Apron's stock price in half, and by October 2017, prior to its next earnings report, the company announced a company-wide realignment, 6% of employees laid off at both the corporate offices and fulfillment centers, estimated to be a couple of hundred

On November 30, 2017, Blue Apron announced that Brad Dickerson would be replacing Salzberg as CEO; Salzberg will remain chairman. (Courtesy Wikipedia) One catch among many: It wouldn't include

fresh fruits or vegetables. (Courtesy https://

qz.com) **Related**

The Trump administration has proposed

a radical overhaul to the food stamp program that would replace some people's benefits with a "Harvest box" of products like shelf-stable milk, pasta, peanut butter, meat, and canned fruits and vegetables.

The changes are part of a dramatic proposed cut to funding for food stamps, or SNAP, adding up to more than \$200 billion dollars over 10 years. Switching to "Harvest boxes," according to the budget, would contribute \$130 million of that savings.

SNAP serves about 42 million Americans, which includes low-income working families, and seniors and disabled people on fixed incomes. Currently, people who receive SNAP have their monthly benefit deposited to an EBT card — basically a special debit card — that lets them purchase unprepared food at authorized grocery stores or local businesses.

Under Trump's proposal, rather than getting all of their benefits to spend on groceries, SNAP recipients who receive more than \$90 a month in benefits would also get a package of food that includes "shelf-stable" milk, juice, cereals, pasta, peanut butter, canned meat, and canned fruits and vegetables, all "100 percent American-grown and produced." They'd pay for those boxes with their benefits and get the remaining value on the EBT card, the way the program works now.



The change would affect about 16.4 million households

— about 81 percent — of those receiving SNAP benefits, according to the USDA. The Harvest box proposal is scant on implementation details: How boxes would be distributed, for example, is left up to the states. One expert described the idea as "puzzling,"solving no actual problems with the program but creating plenty of new ones.



The only thing the Trump proposal has in common with meal kit delivery services is the box. Its real effect would be giving people in need less choice about what they feed themselves and their families.

What is SNAP?

About 42 million Americans — including

about 20 million children — receive benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, formerly known as food stamps. Eligibility is de-

termined based on income, generally at or below 130 percent of poverty line. A typical family of four can't make more than \$2,665 per month before taxes, a little less than \$32,000 per year, to be eligible. (Full disclosure: I previously worked as a SNAP case manager in New York City.)



Right now, SNAP recipients gives

es about the food they buy, as long as it's unprepared. They can buy healthy food or junk food, but they can't buy prepared roast chickens or deli sandwiches. (They can buy seeds for planting, if available.) People buy food with EBT cards, which function as debit cards for eligible purchases. Items such as alcohol or cigarettes aren't allowed, nor are any household items like paper towels or shampoo. People also can't get SNAP benefits paid out in cash.

The average benefit is about \$126 per person per month, or about \$254 per household per month, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. That comes out to about \$1.40 per meal — whether you live in New York or North Dakota.

The SNAP program helps lift millions of households out of poverty each year. It usually responds nimbly during times of economic hardship, such as during the Great Recession, or even natural disasters. and functions as economic stimulus. Ellen Vollinger, the SNAP director at the Food Research and Action Center, called SNAP an "economic multiplier." For every \$1 spent in SNAP benefits, it generates approximately \$1.79 for the economy.

But as the Trump administration sees it, the program would improve the food stamps program by delivering recipients healthier foods, saving taxpayers money, and cutting down on EBT fraud.



SNAP has tried to promote better nutrition among its recipients — something policy makers have been grappling

with, from debates over soda bans to expanding SNAP use at farmer's markets. But food stamps are already a pretty efficient use of taxpayer money, and EBT fraud is relatively low.

"Harvest boxes" are supposed to be healthier. But they also reduce choice. Previous research on SNAP has shown

that people who do use the program have a slightly more unhealthy diet than those households who are eligible but don't rely on the program. But the federal government has largely avoided banning certain foods or setting guidelines — and it's not clear the Harvest box will adequately address these shortfalls.

USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue promised in a fact sheet that the program would provide "nutritious food to people who need assistance feeding themselves and their families," and "all of it ... home grown by American farmers and producers.'

This makes it seem as if the Harvest box is some farm-to-table treat, but it will mostly include items like "shelf-stable milk," cereals, juices, and proteins.

The closest analogy that the federal government runs now is a program that distributes food boxes instead of SNAP benefits on American Indian reservations. Available foods include canned beans, corn, and spinach; dried eggs; dried and canned fruit; peanut butter; and canned and frozen meat. It's a far cry from a meal kit box with fresh grass-fed beef, kale, and a tiny container of Sriracha. (And also serves far fewer people — about 90,000.)



Government "Harvest Boxes" would come preassembled.

Whether these Harvest boxes are healthy depends on what type of juice and grains make it inside, said Sara Abiola, an assistant professor of health policy and management at Columbia University. It matters, for example, whether the fruit is canned in water or syrup.

People who struggle to buy food might also live in substandard housing, or share living spaces with multiple people. "What happens if your kitchen is not functional?" Abiola said. It's "idealistic to think that folks are going to be able to cook a 'healthy' meal," she said, of the food boxes.

Harvest boxes would need a whole new in-

Harvest boxes would also seem to make the existing food stamp infrastructure a lot more complicated, undoing decades of changes that have streamlined the program. (Courtesy VOX)

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Dr. Hwang is certified by the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology. He earned his undergraduate and medical degree from the National Taiwan University College of Medicine in Taipei. He completed residency programs at National Taiwan University Hospital and St. Luke's Hospital, Bethlehem, Penn. In addition, he earned a postgraduate degree of Master of Public Health in maternal and child health from the prestigious Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health in Baltimore, Md. He is a member of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Texas Medical Association and Harris County Medical Society.

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A Snapshot Of The World



Police and rescue workers attend the scene near Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School following a shooting incident in Parkland



Joe lodato proposes to Emily Gambarella on Valentine's Day in Times Square in New York



Snowboarding - Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympics - Men's Halfpipe Finals - Phoenix Snow Park - Pyeongchang, South Korea - February 14, 2018 - Shaun White of the U.S., draped in the U.S. flag, celebrates. REUTERS



A bride and groom stand next to a horse-drawn carriage outside the Palace of Westminster in central London



Ice Hockey – Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympics – Women Preliminary Round Match - Korea v Japan - Kwandong Hockey Centre, Gangneung, South Korea – February 14, 2018 - North Korean cheerleaders. REUTERS/Lucy Nicholson



Curling - Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympics - Women's Round Robin - Olympic Athletes from Russia v Britain - Gangneung Curling Center - Gangneung, South Korea - February 14, 2018 - Anna Sloan and Vicki Adams of Britain sweep



Candles are seen on the sign marking the entrance to the New York City Department of Corrections Rikers Island facility in Queens, in New York



A couple kisses as fireworks explode above the Marseille harbour during the cultural event "MP2018 Quel Amour! The Big Kiss" for Valentine's Day celebrations in Marseille



Kelly Zapata and Anthony Espejo kiss after exchanging wedding vows at their Valentine's Day wedding ceremony in Times Square in New York



COMMUNITY

Eight months before construction crews are expected to begin renovations work on the now-shuttered Astrodome, some groups already are hatching plans to make use of the famed stadium's nine acres.

Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo officials see space for hundreds of commercial exhibitors who were wait-listed even as the annual event shattered attendance records.

Ken Lovell, president of the Houston International Boat, Sport and Travel Show, envisions a display of watercraft in the aging stadium harkening back to a 1960s event held there.

The non-profit Astrodome Conservancy is crowd-funding and seeking donors to host music, art and dance events, Chairman Phoebe Tudor said.



April 9, 1965: Opening Day, with President Johnson and Texas Gov. John Connally on hand for an Astros-Yankees exhibition game. Mickey Mantle launches the first Astrodome home run, but the Astros win, 2-1.

The emerging enthusiasm comes as Harris County Commissioners Court voted unanimously Tuesday, February 13th, to move forward with the final design and construction of a \$105 million project to transform the cherished piece of Houston's sporting history into what officials hope will be coveted event space.

"It gives us a huge national story line," said Holly Clapham, chief marketing officer for Houston First Corp., the city's main marketing arm. "This, obviously, is a very significant building and we can tell the story of its new life, and serving a new constituency that didn't know it as the 'Eighth Wonder of the World.'"

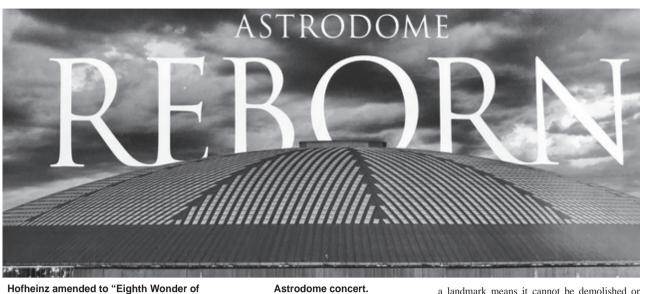
Construction on the project is expected to begin in October and end in February 2020.



Nov. 19, 1965: Billy Graham, who described the Astrodome as "one of the wonders of the world" (which Judge Roy

Harris County OKs \$105 Million Renovation Of Astrodome

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



Hofheinz amended to "Eighth Wonder of the World"), begins a crusade that draws 376,419 to the Dome.

"The first thing we have to do is get it back to where it's structurally sound," Harris County Judge Ed Emmett said after Tuesday's court meeting. "Nine acres of open space, under cover, in Houston, Texas, is a big deal. We've already been contacted by all sorts of groups that want to come use it, so it's exciting.

The court's approval came more than four years after Harris County voters rejected a \$217 million bond proposal that would have paid for massive renovations to the 53-year structure.

Many interpreted the vote as a public mandate to demolish the stadium that once was home to the Houston Oilers and Astros, hosted countless major sporting events.

The Dome has not housed a professional sports team since the Astros moved to Minute Maid Park in 2000. NRG Stadium opened in the Dome complex two years later to serve as the home of the NFL's Houston Texans



Dec. 17, 1965: Judy Garland, with the Supremes as opening act, presents the first

Astrodome concert.

The Houston fire marshal's office declared the massive building unfit for occupancy in 2009.

Attempts to develop a plan to re-purpose the Dome produced numerous ideas, from an indoor amusement park to movie studio space, but failed to generate actual financing to pull any of those off. One idea would have seen the stadium stripped to its steel skeleton and ground beneath turned into green space.

Since then, the county has sold off thousands of dome seats and pieces of Astroturf to longtime fans and collectors

Tuesday's vote was not unexpected. Commissioners Court signaled its intention to renovate the dome rather than raze it in September 2016 with a vote to begin the "design phase" of the project.

Four months later, the Texas Historical Commission designated the Astrodome a state antiquities landmark, giving the stadium special protections against demolition



June 18, 1967: Rookie Don Wilson no-hits the Braves, striking out 15 in a 2-0 victory. The historical commission must sign off on the renovation plan, and the Dome's designation as

altered without a permit from the commission. A historical commission spokesman said Tuesday that the county had not yet submitted an application for the permit.

Critics of the plan to re-purpose the stadium have latched on to the cost, as well as the timing of Tuesday's vote less than six months after Hurricane Harvey devastated the Houston metropolitan area. Money being spent on the Dome renovation could be better spent beefing up the region's flood protections, critics said.

In the wake of Harvey, Harris County leaders have proposed a bond issue of more than \$1 billion be put before voters to boost flood control According to Emmett, about of third of the \$105

million cost to refurbish the Dome into convention and meeting space would come from the county's property tax-supported general fund. The reminder would be funding by hotel occupancy taxes and parking revenues



Dec. 22, 1973: The first high school championship game at the Astrodome featured a future Houston favorite - Earl Campbell, who ran for 164 vards and two TDs in

Tyler John Tyler's 21-14 win over Austin Reagan. (Above: Earl Campbell runs for the Houston Oilers.)

State Senator Paul Bettencourt, R-Houston, who co-sponsored legislation last year that would have required a public referendum on the Astrodome project, called Tuesday's vote by Commissioners Court "tone deaf"

"We just need to recognize the obvious," Bettencourt said in a statement. "If the county has money to ignore a public vote and refurbish the Astrodome, then they have the capability to offer flooded-out homeowners disaster reappraisal and to cut their property tax rate."

Bettencourt and Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick have called on local taxing jurisdictions to allow residents whose homes were damaged by Harvey to have their properties reappraised to reflect their lower values.

Through a spokesman, Emmett called Bettencourt's remarks "ill-informed" and said the project would allow the county to generate revenue for upgrades to the NRG Complex that otherwise would fall on taxpayers.



Feb. 27-March 1, 1970: Elvis Presley performed six shows at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo for a combined 207.494 fans. He returned for two shows on March 3, 1974, before 88,149.

The county spends about \$170,000 a year to maintain the Dome in NRG Park, located on South Loop 610, largely for electric bills and flood insurance.

The renovation project has drawn the support of the Houston Texans and the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, the two major tenants of NRG Park. Tudor said Tuesday that the Astrodome Con-

servancy and the county are holding an event dubbed a "Domecoming" on April 9, well before the construction starts to give people a peek inside the stadium before it is locked down for construction. "We're just delighted and thrilled that such a

great structure with such a great history is going to be preserved and reused," she said. (Courtesy https://www.chron.com/news)

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主治:各種心臟、血管疾病及高膽固醇血症 門診時間:星期一至星期五 (9:00am至 5:00pm)

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休士頓德州醫學中心Hermann Hospital 主治醫師

■ 移民體檢指定醫師 9180 Bellaire Blvd. #E. Houston, TX 77036

(位於DIHO Square,對面惠康超市左邊轉角 ,Ranchester Dr.) 星期一、二、三 8:30am – 5:00pm 星期四、五 8:30am – 12:00pm 星期六 8:30am - 4:00pm

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美國内科特考文憑 Huaiguang Li, M.D.Ph.D Board Certified, ABIM





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LOCAL NEWS

Harris County leads nation in prostitution sting before Super

By Fernando Alfonso III and Samantha Ketterer

For the second year in a row, the Harris County Sheriff's Office made the most arrests among 30 American law enforcement agencies participating in a prostitution sting leading up to the Super Bowl. The sheriff's office edged out agencies like the New York Police Department and the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department with 103 men arrested on charges of trying to buy sex during the National Johns Suppression Initiative.

The Houston Police Department arrested 64 men. The sting ran from Jan. 7 through Feb. 4 and was coordinated by Illinois' Cook County Sheriff's Office.

The Harris County Sheriff's conducted their stings by having female officers pose as prostitutes, said Captain Jesse Inocencio, who coordinated this year's operation.

"It's a trend to shift a focus on the demand," Inocencio told Chron.com. "We understand with the trafficking problem, there's a victimization there. Sometimes it's a victim of circumstance. If we can reduce the demand side, we're helping the victims." The Harris County Sheriff's Office arrested 178 men in last year's prostitution sting.

At least 638 sex buyers were arrested during this year's initiative around the country, the Cook

County Sheriff's stated in a news release. Of those arrested, 18 also face human trafficking-related charges.

Judge orders Houston strip club shut down for alleged prostitution, employment of minors Cook County partnered with Seattle Against Slavery to roll out an artificial intelligence bot online to catch sex buyers as part of Project Intercept. This technology was also used in Boston, Seattle, Phoenix, and Los

Angeles. "Project Intercept posts ads online with phone numbers that connect to bots posing as trafficking victims," Cook County states in its news release. "The bots, which have banes such as Ariel, Brook, and Cari, fluidly interact via text message with individuals seeking to buy sex."

At some point after a price is agreed to, the bot would send a deterrence message telling the person that soliciting sex is a crime while directing them to a website with information on the harms of prostitu-

More than 9,000 possible sex buyers engaged with the bot, of which more than 60 percent reached its deterrence message.

The Harris County Sheriff's office also said that deputies have tripled the arrests of illegal sex buyers over a











For the second year in a row, the Harris County Sheriff's Office made the most arrests among 30 American law enforcement agencies participating in a prostitution sting leading up to the Super Bowl.

three-year period, going from 146 arrests in 2014 to 433 in 2017.

The sheriff's office provided the media with

the mugshots of all the men arrested in this year's sting. They are innocent until proven guilty.

Crude, fuel inventories continue to build

Crude oil and gasoline inventories continued to grow last week, although oil stockpiles increased less than was feared. The nation's commercial crude stocks rose by 1.8 million barrels this week, continuing the recent upward trajectory this month. Gasoline inventories jumped by a larger 3.6 million barrels, according to U.S. Energy Department data released Wednesday.

U.S. oil prices fell sharply in recent days dating back to

last week, but the bleeding stopped Wednesday and prices were hovering just above \$59 a barrel Wednesday morning.

Because of declines in distillates, residual fuel oils, propane, propylene and other oils, the nation's total petroleum stockpiles actually declined by 2.7 million barrels last week, despite the crude and fuel builds.



Rainwater from Hurricane Harvey surrounds oil refinery storage tanks in this aerial photograph taken above Texas City, Texas, U.S., on Wednesday, Aug. 30, 2017. Unprecedented flooding from the Category 4 storm that slammed into the state's coast last week, sending gasoline prices surging as oil refineries shut, may also set a record for rainfall in the contiguous U.S., the weather service said Tuesday. Photographer: Luke Sharrett/



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