

Chicago Tribune



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BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

Judge: Felons can own firearms

District court ruling calls federal statute unconstitutional

By Jason Meisner
Chicago Tribune

As a five-time convicted felon, Glen Prince was facing a mandatory minimum 15 years behind bars when he was charged in federal court with being a felon in possession of a handgun stemming from an armed robbery on CTA train in 2021.

Instead, Prince's case was tossed out earlier this month by a federal judge who ruled the statute barring felons from possessing handguns is unconstitutional in light of a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision.

The ruling by U.S. District Judge Robert Gettleman is the first of its kind to come down in Chicago's federal court and joins a host of other similar cases that have thrown the decades-old law into a sort of legal limbo as the issue works its way back to the high court.

The implications are particularly large in Chicago, where there are hundreds of pending felon-with-firearm cases stemming largely from the U.S. attorney's office efforts to throw federal law enforcement resources into the fight against the city's relentless gun violence.

Gettleman's Nov. 2 ruling in Prince's case was immediately appealed by the U.S. attorney's office. The 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals has set a Dec. 19 deadline for prosecutors to file a brief, court records show.

It contradicts a handful of recent rulings by other district judges here upholding the felon-with-firearm law, saying that Second Amendment protections on gun possession have traditionally applied only to "law-abiding citizens."

On the national level, the U.S. Justice Department last month urged the Supreme Court to overturn a lower-court ruling in Philadelphia that the law violated the constitutional rights of a man who possessed a weapon after pleading guilty years earlier to food-stamp fraud.

Turn to Firearms, Page 8

Council OKs \$16.77B budget

Mayor's spending plan holds line on property taxes, slightly increases funding for city police

By Alice Yin
and A.D. Quig
Chicago Tribune

In a broad show of support for Mayor Brandon Johnson's budding progressive agenda, the City Council on Wednesday overwhelmingly approved his \$16.77 billion 2024 budget.

Aldermen voted 41-8 in favor of Johnson's 2024 spending plan, which he framed as a gradual introduction to the bold, leftist promises from his mayoral campaign while holding the line on property taxes and slightly increasing police spending.

During a wide-ranging debate

on the trajectory of the city ahead of the vote, supporters heralded the package as the beginning of a new Chicago that will take care of its forgotten constituents and implement alternative approaches to fighting crime and poverty.

Dissenters, however, dinged his one-time strategies for plugging in a \$538 million deficit as unsustainable and questioned the utility of his new investments, underscoring the widening divide between Johnson's progressive bloc of aldermen and their moderate and conservative colleagues.

Turn to Budget, Page 4



Mayor Brandon Johnson listens as aldermen speak about the budget before voting during the City Council meeting Wednesday at City Hall. Johnson wants state and federal funding to supplement \$150 million in budgeted aid for migrants. BRIAN CASSELLA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE



STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

A HERO'S TRIBUTE

The casket of firefighter Andrew Price is unloaded at a funeral home Wednesday in Chicago. A procession of fire and police vehicles, as well as Price's family, accompanied the late firefighter. Price died Monday after falling through a floor while fighting a fire in the Lincoln Park neighborhood of Chicago. The 39-year-old, who joined the department in 2009, is the fourth city firefighter to die in the line of duty this year.

It's end of the road for Victory Auto Wreckers

Salvage yard's TV ad, so bad it's good, was a relic of bygone era

By Robert Channick
Chicago Tribune

When Victory Auto Wreckers tows and crushes its last clunker this month after nearly 80 years in business, it will mark the end — thankfully, for some — of perhaps the longest-running commercial in the history of Chicago television.

For nearly 40 years, the low-budget Victory spot has aired more than a half-million times, searing its grainy images and simple "that old car is worth money" tagline into the collective unconscious of a city. After Saturday, however, the family-owned



Bob Zajdel, the star of the infamous 1980s Victory Auto Wreckers commercial, stands Tuesday near a 1976 International Scout in the junkyard. STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

auto salvage yard in Bensenville near O'Hare will no longer pay "cash on the spot" for your beater.

Facing a challenging salvage market, rising interest rates and a dearth of do-it-yourselfers ready to scour a 9-acre junkyard for parts, Kyle Weisner, 54, the third-generation owner of Victory Auto Wreckers, will be the last in his family's towing line as he heads for semi-retirement in Arizona.

"The plan is to close up the yard completely by the end of the year," Weisner said. "Hopefully, we're able to make a deal with somebody to buy the property."

The imminent Victory closing means the end of the road for a Chicago TV spot that now takes its place in the pantheon of bygone commercials so bad they were good, right next to Bert

Turn to Victory, Page 7

Biden and China's Xi seek to ease tensions

By Aamer Madhani,
Colleen Long
and Didi Tang
Associated Press

WOODSIDE, Calif. — U.S. President Joe Biden and China's Xi Jinping emerged Wednesday from their first face-to-face meeting in a year vowing to stabilize their fraught relationship and showcasing modest agreements to combat illegal fentanyl and re-establish military communications. But there were still deep differences on economic competition and global security threats.

The two leaders spent four hours together — in meetings, a working lunch and a garden stroll — intent on showing the world that while they are global economic competitors they're not locked in a winner-take-all faceoff.

"Planet Earth is big enough for

the two countries to succeed," Xi told Biden.

The U.S. president told Xi: "I think it's paramount that you and I understand each other clearly, leader to leader, with no misconceptions or miscommunications. We have to ensure competition does not veer into conflict."

Their meeting, on the sidelines of the annual Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation conference, has far-reaching implications for a world grappling with economic cross currents, conflicts in the Middle East and Europe, tensions in Taiwan and more.

They reached expected agreements to curb illicit fentanyl production and to reopen military ties, a senior U.S. official said after the meeting ended. Many of the chemicals used to make synthetic fentanyl come from

Turn to China, Page 14

Starbucks baristas on strike

Baristas at a pair of city Starbucks went on strike Wednesday, a day ahead of a nationwide walkout coinciding with the annual Red Cup Day. **Business**

LaVine doesn't deny rumors



Bulls star admits he's frustrated with lack of winning following reports he's on the trading block. **Chicago Sports**

TODAY'S WEATHER



High 66 Low 47

Complete Chicagoland forecast on Page 16

\$4.00 city and suburbs and elsewhere
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