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What's News

Business & Finance

◆ **Prices edged up** in December, a reminder of the pressures still facing consumers after a year when inflation fell by nearly half and paychecks grew robustly, delivering real wage gains in 2023 for the first time in three years. **A1**

◆ **Hertz is selling about** a third of its global electric-vehicle fleet, a major reversal for the rental-car company that had plans to vastly grow its fleet of plug-in models. **A1**

◆ **Vanguard said it won't** offer the new spot bitcoin exchange-traded funds on its brokerage platform. **A1**

◆ **Chesapeake and** Southwestern agreed to merge in an all stock-transaction valued at \$7.4 billion that would create the largest natural-gas producer in the U.S. **B1**

◆ **Airbus broke its** record for the highest number of orders in a single year as airlines' demand for new planes soared. **B1**

◆ **U.S. stocks were mixed**, with the S&P 500 falling about 0.1%, the Dow gaining less than 0.1% and the Nasdaq finishing essentially flat. **B11**

◆ **EBay agreed to pay** a \$3 million criminal penalty after employees engaged in a harassment campaign against two bloggers for their coverage of the company. **B6**

◆ **Novartis backed away** from its pursuit of Cytokinetics, putting a damper on the prospects of a deal for the promising heart-drug developer. **B2**

◆ **Blackstone promoted** two senior executives to the newly created roles of co-chief investment officers as the firm adjusts to life as a trillion-dollar asset manager. **B1**

World-Wide

◆ **A U.S.-led coalition** launched more than a dozen strikes on Houthi rebel targets in Yemen, officials said, two days after the Yemeni rebel force defied an ultimatum to halt its attacks on ships transiting the Red Sea with a barrage of missiles and drones. **A1**

◆ **South Africa accused** Israel of genocide before the International Court of Justice, contending that the Jewish state's military response to Hamas attacks launched from Gaza violates the international treaty drafted in the aftermath of Nazi Germany's systematic extermination of six million Jews. **A7**

◆ **Lawyers for Trump** and the state of New York made closing arguments in the civil trial that could determine the future of the former president's businesses. **A3**

◆ **The EPA sent letters** asking telecom companies to meet with the agency about their lead-sheathed phone cables, in a new phase of an investigation in the EPA's efforts to protect the public from potential lead hazards. **A6**

◆ **The Iranian Navy said** it seized an oil tanker off the coast of Oman that has been at the center of a dispute between Iran and the U.S. **A7**

◆ **The CDC issued new** vaccine recommendations and said it was concerned about low inoculation rates this season for Covid, influenza and respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV. **A3**

◆ **There is no evidence** popular weight-loss drugs cause suicidal thoughts, a preliminary analysis by the Food and Drug Administration found. **A3**

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Inflation Ticks Up After Cooling

Gain in CPI of 3.4% shows battle not won yet, but Fed rate cuts still on table this year

By GWYNN GUILFORD AND NICK TIMIRAO

Prices edged up in December, a reminder of the pressures still facing consumers after a year when inflation fell by nearly half and paychecks grew robustly, delivering real wage gains in 2023 for the first time in three years.

Inflation's cool-down from historic highs keeps the Fed-

eral Reserve on track to hold rates steady later this month and contemplate cutting them later this year. But U.S. consumers aren't in the clear yet. The consumer-price index increased 3.4% from a year earlier in December, the Labor Department said Thursday. The acceleration from November's 3.1% advance shows inflation isn't fully beaten.

The December reading is well down from a 6.5% rise at the end of 2022, and inflation-adjusted wages rose 0.8% last year, a reversal after two full-year declines and a better gain than the year before the pandemic began.

"The progress on inflation since June 2022 has been remarkable," said David Kelly, chief global strategist at J.P. Morgan Asset Management. "The bottom line is that the most likely path for inflation from here is not upwards or sideways but rather down."

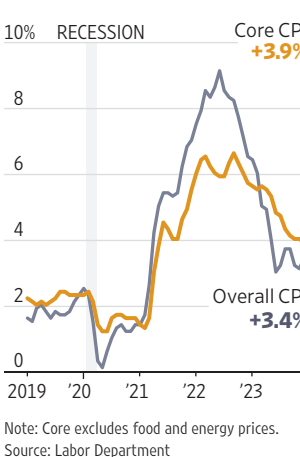
The rapid cooling of price increases has raised hopes of a soft landing, where inflation can be tamed without a surge in unemployment or a recession.

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◆ **Stocks finish flat after CPI data release.....** B11

◆ **Heard on the Street: Cooler inflation expectations....** B12

Consumer-price index, change from a year earlier



Note: Core excludes food and energy prices. Source: Labor Department



Gastric cancer patient Meilin Keen, 27, applying makeup before an evening out with friends in December.

Cancer Is Hitting More Young People

Baffled doctors are trying to determine what is behind the rise in early-onset cases

By BRIANNA ABBOTT

Meilin Keen was studying for the bar exam and preparing to move to New York City last June when she started throwing up blood.

Keen, 27 years old, learned days later that she has gastric cancer. She postponed the bar exam. Brain fog from chemotherapy made it hard to do her legal work.

Surgeons removed her stomach in December. Keen is coming to terms with all that means for her diet, her health, even her dating life. "That's a

fun icebreaker: I don't have a stomach anymore," she said.

Cancer is hitting more young people in the U.S. and around the globe, baffling doctors. Diagnosis rates in the U.S. rose in 2019 to 107.8 cases per 100,000 people under 50, up 12.8% from 95.6 in 2000, federal data show. A study in BMJ Oncology last year reported a sharp global rise in cancers in people under 50, with the highest rates in North America, Australia and Western Europe.

Doctors are racing to figure out what is making them sick, and how to

identify young people who are at high risk. They suspect that changes in the way we live—less physical activity, more ultra-processed foods, new toxins—have raised the risk for younger generations.

"The patients are getting younger," said Dr. Andrea Cercek, who co-directs a program for early-onset gastrointestinal cancer patients at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York, where Keen was treated. "It's likely some environmental change, whether it's something in our food, our medica-

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Bitcoin ETF Debut Is Big Hit, Vanguard Demurs

The new bitcoin ETFs had a roaring debut in their first day of trading, but Vanguard refused to join the party.

By Jack Pitcher, Vicky Ge Huang and Alexander Osipovich

The asset-management giant said Thursday it won't offer the new spot bitcoin exchange-traded funds on its brokerage platform, highlighting concerns about the digital currency's suitability for many individual investors.

"Our perspective is that these products do not align with our offer focused on asset classes such as equities, bonds, and cash, which Vanguard views as the building blocks of a well-balanced, long-term investment portfolio," the com-

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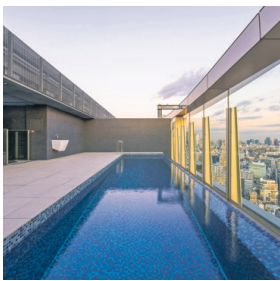
◆ **Heard on Street: Grayscale ETF is hard to sell.....** B12

INSIDE



JASON GAY

After 24 years and six Super Bowl titles, the end comes for a legend in New England. **A12**



MANSION

Glamorous top-floor apartments reach new heights of luxury in Tokyo. **M1**

Feds to Highway Signs: You Have Two Years to Stop Being Funny

Regulators want states to rein in the yuks; 'Slow down this ain't thunder road'

By ALLISON POHLE

U.S. road trippers now commonly cruise down the highway and find corny messages on big electronic-safety billboards that double as dad jokes.

Massachusetts has urged drivers to "Use Yah Blinkah," Utah has pointed out that "Driving Basted is for Turkey's"

and over the holidays Arizona went with "Use headlights like Rudolph uses his red nose."

But for America's funniest highway sign-writers, there's a slowdown ahead. Uncle Sam isn't exactly in on the joke.

In December, the Federal Highway Administration, an

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Hertz to Cut Fleet Of Electric Vehicles In Major Reversal

By MIKE COLIAS AND BEN GLICKMAN

Hertz is selling about a third of its global electric-vehicle fleet, a major reversal for the rental-car company after it positioned itself as a champion of the technology with plans to vastly grow its fleet of plug-in models.

Hertz said Thursday that it would sell about 20,000 EVs in the U.S. and use some of the proceeds to purchase internal-combustion-engine vehicles. The company in a regulatory filing cited weaker demand for electrics and their higher operating costs.

The move is the latest example of a swift retrenchment by the car business on EVs. After years spent outlining aggressive expansion plans, automakers in recent months have put some EV projects on ice and dialed back production forecasts, citing signs that U.S. consumers aren't ready to move to cars powered exclusively by batteries as quickly as once thought.

U.S.-Led Coalition Strikes Houthis In Yemen

Operation comes in response to attacks by Iran-backed rebels on Red Sea shipping

A U.S.-led coalition launched more than a dozen strikes on Houthi rebel targets in Yemen, officials said late Thursday, after the Yemeni rebel force defied an ultimatum to halt its attacks on ships transiting the Red Sea with a barrage of missiles and drones.

The strikes, conducted by U.S. and British forces and

By Nancy A. Youssef, Benoit Faucon, Costas Paris and Saleh al-Batati

supported by Australia, Bahrain, Canada and the Netherlands, were intended to reduce the Houthis' campaign, which the Iran-backed rebel group said it launched in response to Israel's war on the Hamas militant group in Gaza.

The coalition strikes early Friday morning local time "targeted radar systems, air defense systems, and storage and launch sites for one way attack unmanned aerial systems, cruise missiles, and ballistic missiles," said U.S. Central Command, which oversees U.S. military operations in the Middle East. U.S. submarine, destroyers and jet fighters and part of the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower aircraft carrier strike group took part, a U.S. official said.

Houthi officials reported explosions in the capital, San'a, and the provinces of Hodeida, Saada and Dhamar and elsewhere, which they blamed on "American-Zionist-British aggression against Yemen." San'a hosts the Houthis' missile inventories, while attacks on vessels were launched from the port of Hodeida, according to shipping executives.

"These targeted strikes are a clear message that the United States and our partners will not tolerate attacks on our personnel or allow hostile actors to imperil freedom of navigation in one of the world's most critical commercial

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◆ **Court hears case accusing Israel of genocide.....** A7

◆ **Iran seizes oil tanker tied to U.S. sanctions.....** A7