

Chicago Tribune



QUESTIONS? CALL 1-800-TRIBUNE

MONDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2024

BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM



Shirley Meng, a professor of molecular engineering in the University of Chicago Pritzker School of Molecular Engineering, watches doctoral candidate Thomas Marchese work in an argon glove box at Fulton Labs in Chicago on Nov. 18. **ARMANDO L. SANCHEZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

There's a missing piece in move to clean energy

Engineers, lawmakers working to add battery storage for renewables to power grid

By Karina Atkins
Chicago Tribune

Dr. Shirley Meng and her team of material engineers are racing to create affordable and efficient batteries that can store solar and wind energy. The cells they're building are so sensitive they must work in oxygen-void, humidity-controlled glove boxes through thick rubber sleeves. It requires the fine motor skills one expects of a surgeon.

They're betting on sodium-ion batteries.

Renewable energy can only be generated when the sun is shining or the wind is blowing, and it operates in a use-it-or-lose-it fashion that can't satisfy society's constant demand for electricity.

Fossil fuels — and nuclear energy — have to kick in to compensate, unless there's a way to stockpile renewable energy for later use.

The answer to this dilemma could lie in Meng's West Loop lab, where a breakthrough this summer significantly increased the energy capacity and decreased

the production cost of sodium-ion batteries.

"The world is depending on battery scientists to give us a less expensive renewable-based grid," said University of Chicago climate economist Michael Greenstone. "The world is counting on Shirley."

From a young age, Meng found magic in the way waves, sunshine and breezes can power cities as she listened to her father, a civil engineer, talk about building hydroelectric dams in 1980s China. She moved to the U.S. from

Singapore in 2001 on a mission to better harness renewable energy. Chicago became home a decade later when she was tapped to be chief scientist at Argonne National Laboratory and a professor at the University of Chicago's Pritzker School of Molecular Engineering.

Batteries have recently caught the attention of lawmakers in Springfield, too.

Sen. Bill Cunningham plans to push forward a bill to significantly increase the battery

Turn to Batteries, Page 3

Biden signs pardon for son

Action keeps Hunter Biden out of prison; president previously had said he would not

By Zeke Miller
and Alanna Durkin Richer
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden pardoned his son Hunter on Sunday night, sparing the younger Biden a possible prison sentence for federal felony gun and tax convictions and reversing his past promises not to use the extraordinary powers of the presidency for the benefit of his family members.

The Democratic president had previously said he would not pardon his son or commute his sentence after his convictions in the two cases in Delaware and California. The move comes weeks before Hunter Biden was set to receive his punishment after his trial conviction in the gun case and guilty plea on tax charges, and less than two months before President-elect Donald Trump returns to the White House.

It caps a long-running legal saga for the president's son, who publicly disclosed he was under federal investigation in December 2020 — a month after Joe Biden's 2020 victory.

In June, Biden categorically ruled out a pardon or commutation for his son, telling reporters as his son faced trial in the Delaware gun case, "I abide by the jury decision. I will do that and I will not pardon him."

As recently as Nov. 8, days after Trump's victory, the White House ruled out a pardon or clemency.

In a statement Sunday evening, Biden said, "Today, I

Turn to Biden, Page 9

Feelings mixed about development in North Lawndale

Residents and builders share excitement, concerns over neighborhood investment

By Lizzie Kane
Chicago Tribune

Ali Ahamad has several ideas for how to turn North Lawndale's vacant lots from eyesores into neighborhood attractions. He hopes to construct the neighborhood's first dog park, a playground and a garden next to his property and new homes for community members.

He has seen a flurry of development in the neighborhood over the last few years and is waiting to see what the city's new for-sale housing development program starting early next year brings.

The homeowner and landlord, who grew up in North Lawndale and now raises his two kids there, said he wants to participate in the program but will have

to remain on the sidelines given the requirements for, and lack of notice about, the initiative, and because his desired city-owned lots are not being offered.

"The development should come," Ahamad said, who lives on a block with at least five vacant lots, only one of which is available for purchase as a part of the new program. "But at least give the people that (are) stakeholders and people that have been here ... the opportunity."

The West Side's North Lawndale community is on the verge of receiving city investment. The program — called the Missing Middle Infill Housing Initiative — will begin as a pilot in North Lawndale and is part of the Chicago Department of

Turn to Housing, Page 2



Stateville Correctional Center in Crest Hill on Sept. 25. **E. JASON WAMBSGANS/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

For ex-Stateville inmates, transfers mean disruption, family separation

By Olivia Olander
Chicago Tribune

For years, Lillian Bell says she hardly ever missed a Sunday visiting her son Michael in prison at Stateville Correctional Center.

The 70-year-old mother of three was grateful when Michael was transferred from a downstate prison to Stateville, near Joliet, when she had a heart attack. The family has remained close despite Michael's decades in prison, and the hourlong drive to Stateville from her South Side home made

it much easier for them to see each other in recent years, she said.

But as the state prepares to demolish and rebuild Stateville, inmates were moved to other prisons around the state. Michael Bell was transferred downstate to Lawrence Correctional Center in Summer. It's more than a four-hour drive from Chicago, and Lillian, who said she's in remission for breast cancer, said she can't make it on her own.

She hasn't been to see him since he was moved to Lawrence. Michael Bell said he feels uncon-

fortable even asking his family to travel to see him at Lawrence, because he fears the long drive would be a waste of time if the prison was on lockdown or other circumstances prevented a visit.

"It's really, it's just so heartbreaking that I won't be able to get to see him as much unless one of my boys take me," Lillian Bell said.

Michael was even less optimistic: "I'll probably never (see) my mom as long as I'm down here," he wrote though a prison messaging

Turn to Prison, Page 5

Trump's pick Kash Patel looks to shake up FBI

The president-elect's drive to upend the agency was welcomed by some Republican senators. **Nation & World**

Syria launches airstrikes after rebels take Aleppo

The surge in fighting has raised the prospect of another destabilizing front in the Middle East. **Nation & World**

