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USA OUTLOOK

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Congress will draft legislation suspending trade relations with Russia and banning energy imports

A powerful, bipartisan group in Congress announced Monday that it would craft legislation suspending normal trade relations with Russia and Belarus and grant the White House the authority to increase tariffs on the two countries, in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In a significant statement, four top lawmakers -- the Democratic and Republican leaders of the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee -- said they would require the US trade representative to try to suspend Russia's participation in the World Trade Organization and would provide President Joe Biden the power to restore trade relations subject to certain conditions and congressional disapproval. They also said they had agreed to strike a deal banning the import of "energy products" from Russia. The letter was signed by Massachusetts Democratic Rep. Richard Neal, Texas GOP Rep. Kevin Brady, Oregon Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden and Republican Sen. Mike Crapo of Idaho.

U.S., allies agree to limit Russia's access to SWIFT banking system

Some U.S. allies in Europe had been reluctant to include SWIFT as part of the sanctions against Russia, since their economies are more closely tied.

The United States and its allies announced an agreement on Saturday to take aim at Russia through SWIFT, a service that facilitates global transactions among thousands of financial institutions.

"We commit to ensuring that selected Russian banks are removed from the SWIFT messaging system. This will ensure that these banks are disconnected from the international financial system and harm their ability to operate globally," the leaders of the European Commission, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States said in a joint statement.



Foto: NBC News



Foto: The Drive

US gas hits a record: \$4.17 a gallon

US drivers have never paid this much for gasoline. The price for a gallon of regular gas now stands at \$4.17, according to AAA. That breaks the previous record of \$4.11 a gallon that has stood since July 2008.

As Russia continues its military offensive in Ukraine, gas prices are rising faster than they have since Hurricane Katrina slammed into oil platforms and refineries along the US Gulf Coast in 2005. Gas prices rose 10 cents since early Monday, gaining three of those cents overnight, according to the Oil Price Information Service, the firm that collects and calculates prices for AAA.

The price data is calculated on a dynamic basis with pricing information from 130,000 US gas stations. OPIS confirmed Monday evening that a new record of \$4.14 a gallon had been reached. But enough stations raised their prices further later Monday and early Tuesday to lift the average to \$4.17.

US census produced huge undercount of Latino population in 2020

The 2020 US census undercounted America's Latino population at more than three times the rate of the 2010 census, according to a report released on Thursday by the US Census Bureau.

The census also undercounted the nation's Black and Native American residents, while overcounting non-Hispanic white people and Asian Americans. The census helps guide the annual federal distribution of \$1.5tn for public services including education, healthcare and transportation. Undercounting communities results in reduced political representation on local, state and federal level.

According to the report, Latinos had a net undercount of nearly 5%. The Black population had a net undercount of 3.3%, a slight increase from a 2.1% shortfall a decade ago. American Indian and Alaska Natives living on reservations had a net undercount of 5.6%, up from 4.9% in the last census. The non-Latino white population had a net overcount in the 2020 census of 1.6% while Asians had a net overcount of 2.6%.



Foto: The Guardian



Foto: CNBC

U.S. extends airplane mask mandate through April 18

The Transportation Security Administration is extending a federal requirement that travelers wear masks on airplanes, at airports, on trains and buses through April 18, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Thursday. The mandate was set to expire on March 19.

An extension of the mandate comes as the Biden administration, cities and states have rolled back mask mandates and other pandemic policies elsewhere as Covid cases drop. The shorter extension of the policy compared with previous

announcements suggests President Joe Biden and the CDC are weighing whether to lift the mandate entirely this spring, if Covid cases continue to fall.

The CDC plans to work with government agencies over the next month to "help inform a revised policy framework for when, and under what circumstances, masks should be required in the public transportation corridor," it said in a statement.