News

Backpacks for Life to hold donation drive Saturday



Ava Abruzzese at the Catholic Center at Storrs hosting the Backpacks for Life Donation Drive event on April 5, 2025. The yearly event provides homeless veterans with daily necessities.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JAMIE DEPAOLA/FACEBOOK

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Backpacks for Life will be holding a donation drive on Saturday from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. at the University of Connecticut Catholic Center.

Backpacks for Life is a national nonprofit organization based in New Jersey that helps homeless veterans by providing them with daily necessities such as toiletries, clothing and other travel-sized products in military grade backpacks.

The goal of the organization is to "enhance the general well-being of our homeless veterans while providing them with tools to succeed," according to their website.

Ava Abruzzese, an eighth-semester molecular and cell biology major at UConn, started volunteering her sophomore year and now helps organize the events.

Anyone can donate, including UConn students and residents in the area.

Along with physical donations, people can also donate money through cash, check or Venmo at @backpacksforlife. The organization's website also has a place for people to donate online.

As items get donated, they are sorted into three different categories — toiletries, clothes and miscellaneous items — and then packaged and put into the backpacks, according to Abruzzese.

> **"Being able to see the number of backpacks we are able to fill increase over the years is really amazing."**
> **AVA ABRUZZESE**

The event usually ends up filling 30 backpacks. The leftover items go to a warehouse to be distributed at a later time. Many of the backpacks get distributed to nearby areas such as Coventry and Willimantic.

Since Abruzzese joined in 2024, they've donated 80 backpacks and their goal is to exceed 125 backpacks for the past three years.

On the national level, the organization has donated over 13,000 backpacks across 33 states through its constituents, while also raising monetary donations.

The organization also has a coaching and mentorship program for veterans in or near the New Jersey area. The program aims to help veterans through hardships and obstacles, along with helping other needs they may have.

Abruzzese said her favorite part of the event is to see all the successful donation drives.

"Being able to see the number of backpacks we are able to fill increase over the years is really amazing," she said.

To sign up to volunteer, students can email ava.abruzzese@uconn.edu.

According to Abruzzese, the next drive will most likely be held around April next year.

Key inflation gauge remains elevated in February before Iran war



A customer walks by produce at a grocery store in Portland, Ore., Wednesday, April 8, 2026.

PHOTO BY AP PHOTO/JENNY KANE

WASHINGTON (AP) — A key measure of inflation stayed high in February, before the war in Iran spiked gas prices, a sign that everyday costs were elevated even before the conflict began.

An inflation gauge monitored by the Federal Reserve rose 0.4% in February from January, up slightly from the previous month. Compared with a year ago, prices rose 2.8%, the same as January. Thursday's data was delayed by a backlog of economic reports created by the six-week government shutdown last fall.

Excluding the volatile food and energy categories, core inflation also rose 0.4% in February from January, and it was 3% higher than a year earlier. The annual figure is slightly below January's reading of 3.1%.

Still, the monthly increases are at a pace that if continued for a whole year, would easily top the Fed's 2% inflation target.

"Consuer inflation was firming even prior to the outbreak of war in the Middle East, and it is primed to jump sharply higher in March," Kathy Bostjancic, chief economist at Nationwide, wrote in a client note. "Even if a long-lasting deal to end the war is reached and the Strait of Hormuz is fully reopened, it would take months for oil, gasoline, diesel and other commodity supplies to snap back to prewar levels and thus for prices to settle back to preconflict levels."

Thursday's report is largely a warm-up for the more important inflation data to be released Friday, when the government will publish the higher-profile consumer price index for March. The Friday report will be the first to reflect the impact of the gas price spike from the Iran war. Economists forecast it will show a big increase of 0.9% just in March from February, and a 3.4% gain from a year earlier. The annual figure would be a big increase from 2.4% in February.

The large jump in inflation in March will heighten concerns at the Fed that prices are moving further away from their inflation target and make it much less likely the central bank will cut rates anytime soon. At their most recent meeting last month, some Fed officials supported opening the door to the potential for rate hikes if inflation didn't show signs of improving.

Thursday's report from the Commerce Department also showed that Americans' incomes slipped 0.1% in February, the first decline since October, while spending after adjusting for inflation barely increased.

Higher inflation is sapping Americans' purchasing power. Spending rose a solid 0.5% in February from the previous month before adjusting for higher prices. Bostjancic expects consumer spending, adjusted for inflation, will rise a modest 1.2% at an annual rate in the first three months of this year, below the 1.9% reached in last year's fourth quarter.

The economy may still grow a decent 2% in the first quarter, Bostjancic said, driven by investments in artificial intelligence and a bounceback in government spending after last year's shutdown. The government said Thursday growth was just 0.5% at the end of last year.

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