

The gas pump is where a war abroad becomes a crisis at home

By **ANTHONY ANGELILLO**
Copy Editor

Just a month ago, I filled up my car with about a half-tank of gas. It was at BJ's gas station near Quinnipiac and paid about \$30 without giving it much thought. Last week, the same amount of gas cost me over \$50. My driving habits stayed the same, but the price at the pump didn't.

By late March, the national average for a gallon of gas hit \$3.98, a dollar more than it was just a month before. In Connecticut, drivers are now paying \$3.93 per gallon on average, up \$1.02 in a month. Gas prices have gone up for 10 weeks in a row, the longest stretch since early 2022.

It all started on Feb. 28, when the U. S. and Israel carried out airstrikes on several sites in Iran. Things escalated quickly after that. Iran responded by closing the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway between Iran and Oman that handles about 20% of the world's seaborne crude oil and 27% of global maritime petroleum trade.

On March 1, crude oil was about \$71 per barrel. Just eight days later, it shot up to over \$118. The U.S. Energy Information Administration said this closure was the largest supply disruption since the 1970s energy crisis. That's exactly what we're seeing at the gas pump.

I drive a 2010 Honda Accord, known for being good on gas. Its four-cylinder

engine gets about 21 miles per gallon in the city and 31 on the highway, and the 18.5-gallon tank used to make my weekly commute from Plantsville to Quinnipiac feel affordable.

When gas was under \$3 a gallon, filling up was routine and didn't mess with my budget. Now that it's close to \$4, the same tank takes money I'd rather use for food or other things college students really need.

Mohammad Elahee, a professor of international business at Quinnipiac told WFSB in early March that the concern centered on potential disruptions to oil shipments through the Persian Gulf.

In just one month, gas prices in Long Island and lower Connecticut jumped from an average of \$2.90 to \$3.90. Diesel prices went up even more,

rising by \$1.80 in both areas. Spring break travel and higher seasonal demand have only made things worse, as more people need gas while supplies remain limited.

On March 10, Governor Ned Lamont suggested a temporary gas tax holiday that would have paused the state's 25-cent-per-gallon fuel tax. The plan stalled in the legislature, as lawmakers from both parties had concerns about the timing and its overall effect.

Connecticut's fuel tax brings in about \$500 million each year for the Special Transportation Fund, which made the proposal a hard sell regardless of where anyone stood politically.

The federal

government hasn't done much either. The Department of Energy released 172 million barrels of oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve after crude oil prices rose above \$115, temporarily bringing down prices. Now, crude oil is about \$90 per barrel, which is lower than the peak but still 39% higher than February's average.

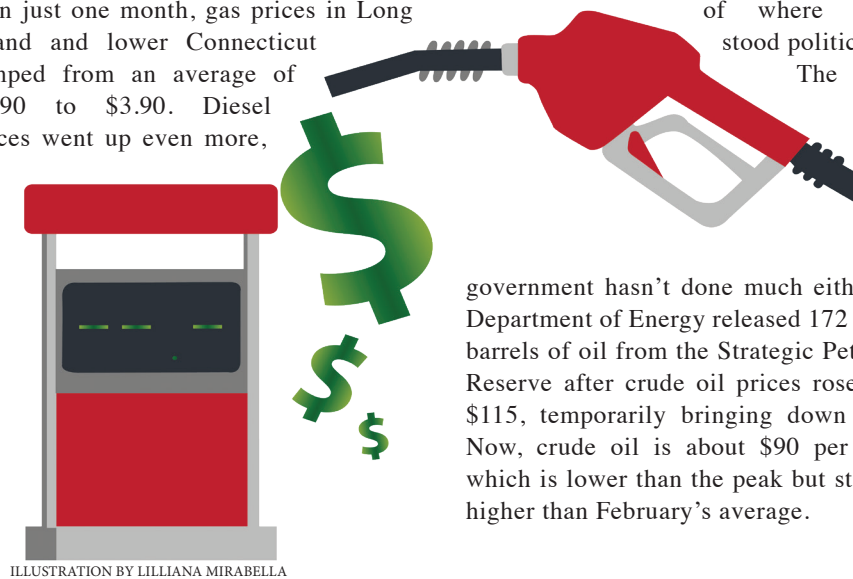


ILLUSTRATION BY LILLIANA MIRABELLA

You need a hobby

By **SOPHIE MURRAY**
Associate Arts & Life Editor

Let's be honest: if your daily routine consists of endless doomscrolling, binge-watching or sleeping, then you're wasting your time.

Don't get me wrong, I need my rot time. Sometimes you need to lie in bed, scroll for hours and shut your brain off. That's balance. But if it's all your free time turns into, it stops feeling like a reset and starts feeling like the norm. The worst thing you can do is look up from your phone, realize it's 11 p.m. and you have no idea what you did all day.

Scrolling is not a hobby. It feels like one because it fills time, but it doesn't give anything back. A real hobby is different. It's something that lets you express yourself, relax and actually engage your brain at the same time. It's not just a pastime, it's a time filler.

And in a time where everyone just doomscrolls all day, doing something that's actually yours sets you apart beyond what's on everyone's screen.

So, why do hobbies even matter? Because life gets boring without them.

Hobbies break the cycle of endless refreshing and scrolling that leaves you feeling drained rather than refreshed. They give your brain something to do instead of just something to consume. And that matters more than people think. When you're actively engaged in something, learning a dance, baking something new, drawing or even organizing a space, you're using different parts of your brain by creating instead of absorbing.

Hobbies also have real mental, emotional and even physical benefits. They reduce stress, improve focus and give you a sense of accomplishment.

A study published by Nature Medicine looked at more than 93,000 people across 16 countries, including the U.S., Japan,

China and multiple European nations. Participants, mostly aged 65 and older, many with existing health conditions, were followed for four to eight years and regularly reported on their health and well-being. The results were consistent across every country: people who had hobbies reported better health, more happiness, fewer symptoms of depression and a higher life satisfaction than those who didn't.

"But the researchers say hobbies - such as arts and crafts, games, gardening, volunteering or participating in clubs - involve creativity, sensory engagement, self-expression, relaxation and cognitive stimulation, which are linked to good mental health and well-being," the study stated.

Hobbies are also like social currency. They give you something to talk about and something to connect over. The person who casually mentions they're learning how to cook instantly sounds more interesting than someone recounting TikTok trends for an hour.

Now the tricky part is actually getting started. You don't need to reinvent your personality overnight. A hobby can be simple and fit into your life exactly as it is.

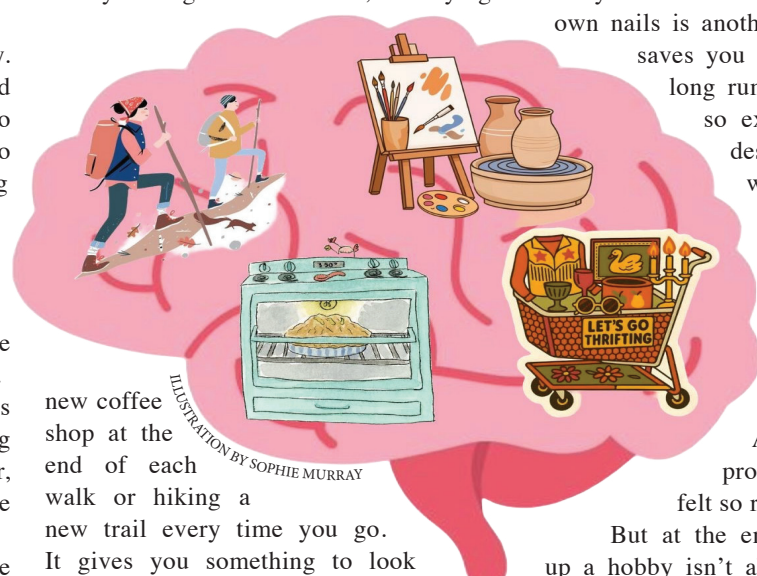
My favorite hobby, and one that I always try to connect with people over, is cooking or baking. If you're an avid TikTok scroller, I know you've seen at least one viral recipe that you can easily try out.

The next thing I am going to try that I've seen online is making sourdough bread. It's definitely tough to master, but that's kind of the appeal. It's such a great way to connect with people, you can bring what you make to gatherings, do taste tests with your friends and family, and once you get better, start experimenting with different flavors and toppings. It turns something simple into something social and it's an accomplishment.

Another hobby I loved over winter break

was diamond painting. I got a kit for cheap at Hobby Lobby, and once I started, I couldn't stop. There's something so satisfying about matching each gem to its number and watching the image come together. I would throw on one of my favorite playlists while doing it and I felt both relaxed and productive. Anything that has a final product at the end feels so rewarding.

If you're someone who likes to get outside and move your body, turn walking or hiking into an actual hobby. And it can't be a walk where you look at your phone simultaneously. Discover a new podcast to listen to or curate a new playlist. You can even make it more fun by adding little traditions, like trying a



new coffee shop at the end of each walk or hiking a new trail every time you go. It gives you something to look forward to and makes it feel less like exercising and more like a routine you actually enjoy.

If you're into fashion, shopping or even just the idea of making some extra money, thrifting and reselling is such a good option. Go through your closet, pull pieces you never wear and list them on an app like Depop. It's an easy way to clean out your space and make some money at the same time.

If you don't have anything you want

Iran's grip on the strait has not loosened. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has attacked more than 21 merchant ships, and a senior official said no oil will leave the region through that waterway.

President Donald Trump gave Iran more time to reopen the Strait after his first ultimatums were ignored. The U.S. also offered a 15-point ceasefire plan, but there's been no real response, and the strait has stayed closed for almost four weeks.

The EIA predicts that gas could average \$3.34 per gallon for all of 2026. Even if shipping through the strait resumes in April, prices probably won't drop below \$3 until at least the end of 2027.

As a college student who commutes every day, these predictions really matter to me. I'm now thinking more than ever about gas prices, including when and where I fill up, depending on how many trips I have each week.

Most people know that gas prices go up and down, but a war in the Middle East closed one of the world's key shipping lanes, and now everyone in the country is paying the price at the pump.

It doesn't matter what kind of car you have or how carefully you drive. When oil prices almost double in a week, no amount of fuel efficiency can protect you from rising gas prices.

to sell from your closet, go thrifting and sell what you find online. If you're not interested in selling, thrifting itself is such a great activity, especially with friends. You find pieces you would never normally pick out, and there's something about digging through the racks that makes it feel more rewarding than regular shopping.

I know I said scrolling isn't a hobby, but if you are interested in the creative side of it, take up content creation. Start filming little parts of your day, learn basic editing and make videos just for fun. It doesn't have to be serious or for views but it's a low-pressure and creative outlet.

If you're into beauty, learning to do your own nails is another hobby to try out. It saves you so much money in the long run, since nail salons are so expensive, and you can design them however you want. I got into doing Gel X nails and I loved being able to control how they turned out. The supplies are affordable on Amazon and it was always so relaxing. Again, having a finished product at the end always felt so rewarding.

But at the end of the day, picking up a hobby isn't about becoming a more interesting person in the room; it's about actually enjoying your life a little more. Something to break up the endless cycle of scrolling, making your day feel a little less repetitive. Keep the rot time and the comfort shows, I couldn't live without it. At the end of the day, choose to spend your time doing something that makes you feel good and accomplished rather than letting a day disappear from you.