

Health insurance costs rise to highest level since 2010

What's driving the increase for employees and those who buy their own coverage. **In Money**

A look at low-key players beyond the MLB favorites

With playoff races going down to the wire, let's recognize quiet heroes on each team. **In Sports**

EMMY AWARDS

Behind the scenes from TV's big night

Catch up on everything you missed, including best fashion from the red carpet and all the winners (and losers), at usatoday.com/entertainment.

USA TODAY

THE NATION'S NEWS | \$3 | MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2025



ADAM SCOTT BY KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES; KATHY BATES BY ROBYN BECK/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Dry and dangerous fall in the forecast

Wildfire worries rise as drought in West grows

Doyle Rice
USA TODAY

Drought continues to worsen in several parts of the country, meteorologists warned in early September as dry conditions are forecast for many areas later in the month, sparking additional fears about wildfires in the fire-prone West.

“The top story is the drought in the Western U.S. has gotten considerably worse from late June to early September,” James Aman, senior meteorologist at environmental firm AEM, told USA TODAY via email.

How much worse? In June, 51% of the West was in a drought. Now it’s ballooned to 64%, according to the latest U.S. Drought Monitor summary. Additionally, 100% of the giant Colorado River Basin is now in a drought.

Specifically, the U.S. Drought Monitor now shows much deeper levels of drought in Washington state, northern Oregon, Idaho and western Montana.



Water levels at Lake Powell could fall low enough to stop hydropower generation there by the end of 2026, NOAA says. REBECCA NOBLE/GETTY IMAGES

In Washington, the state has been forced to issue a drought declaration for an unprecedented third year in a row due to the ongoing dryness, according to a report from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The report said water storage in Washington’s five reservoirs in the Yakima River Basin has dropped sharply, bringing levels at times to some of the lowest measured since record-keeping started in 1971.

Elsewhere in the Northwest, northern Idaho and western Montana have been dealing with drought conditions for nearly three years.

“Drought is also much worse in the central Rockies (west and southwest Wyoming, the west half of Colorado and all of Utah),” Aman said via email.

The entire Colorado River Basin is now in a drought, according to the Drought Monitor. The Colorado River Basin includes all of Arizona and parts of Colorado, California, Wyoming, Utah, New Mexico and Nevada.

Large areas of “extreme” or “exceptional” drought are in the Upper Basin, where most of the water supply comes from.

Downstream, ongoing worries about the giant reservoirs of the West, such as Lakes Mead and Powell, continue. In fact, water levels at Lake Powell, one of the main water storage reservoirs for the Colorado River

See DROUGHT, Page 6A

How search for gunman unfolded



Mourners visit a memorial for political activist Charlie Kirk on the grounds of Utah Valley University in Orem, Utah, on Sept. 13. The CEO of Turning Point USA was fatally shot Sept. 10 while speaking on campus. CHET STRANGE/GETTY IMAGES

Fatal shooting of Kirk led to chaos, 33-hour manhunt

Rick Jervis and Chris Kenning USA TODAY

Seth Teasdale arrived at his alma mater, Utah Valley University, just before noon, rippling with excitement to see one of his online heroes, Charlie Kirk.

It was a sun-drenched 80-degree day on Sept. 10, with clear, azure skies. The amphitheater in front of the Sorensen Student Center buzzed with anticipation: College students mingled with high schoolers and families, some wearing red “Make America Great Again” caps. More than 3,000 in all. In one corner, protesters held up signs denouncing Kirk’s controversial views and chanted insults.

Teasdale texted his brother, who was meeting him there, and squeezed through the crowd toward the canopy where Kirk would be speaking.

Just after noon, Kirk arrived in a gaggle of SUVs. Former Utah state Rep. Phil Lyman was there to greet him. Kirk had helped Lyman a few years earlier as he planned a run for governor of

See SEARCH, Page 2A

More coverage

Widespread fame and influence: For many young people, Charlie Kirk was a symbol. **3A**

Online: Find the latest developments at usatoday.com.

“At first I didn’t believe it was a gunshot, but that became evidently clear after a short time.”

Riley Beesley
Junior at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City and vice chair of the Utah Federation of College Republicans

Assassination puts focus on balance between safety and free speech

BrieAnna J. Frank
USA TODAY

The assassination of conservative activist Charlie Kirk at a Utah university on Sept. 10 brings to the forefront the challenge colleges and universities face in balancing a mission of critical inquiry with maintaining safety in an era of political violence.

It’s a “major dilemma” for schools around the country, said Ken Paulson, director of Middle Tennessee State University’s Free Speech Center.

“We don’t want campuses to be able to turn away speakers that don’t have the resources for security,” he said. “You also don’t want a situation where only the most tame and tepid speakers can come because they don’t provoke angry responses.”

See BALANCE, Page 3A

Yoke finally broken: Egg prices down 70%



As long as there are no other bird flu outbreaks, shoppers can expect cooler egg prices heading into the holiday season. BLOOMBERG VIA GETTY IMAGES

Michelle Del Rey
USA TODAY

Egg prices are down 70% since March, when they reached their highest levels this year, prompting supermarkets to implement rationing policies as suppliers struggled to meet demand.

As of Aug. 29, the wholesale price for Midwest large shell eggs, the industry standard averaged across all label types of eggs, was \$2.50 per dozen, according to Department of Agriculture data.

That’s a 70% decrease from March highs, which saw egg prices rise to \$6.85 a dozen, according to the USDA data. It’s also a 33% decrease from the Easter season, when there is typically a peak demand for eggs.

Here’s a look at what caused egg prices to soar this spring – and what to expect through the rest of the year.

See EGG PRICES, Page 6A