PRARANEWS

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The **National Guard's birthday** is **December 13, 1636**, a date that marks the organization of the first militia regiments in North America by the Massachusetts General Court. These regiments were established to defend the colony and are considered the oldest units in the U.S. military.

- **The founding:** The Massachusetts Bay Colony's General Court ordered the organization of the militia into three permanent regiments to better defend the colony.
- Legacy: The National Guard traces its lineage back to these original regiments, making it the oldest component of the United States armed forces.
- **Significance:** This date is recognized as the birth of the organized militia and is celebrated annually as the birthday of the National Guard.

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PRESIDENT'S PAGE

BY: KEVIN FORSYTHE

2025 Fuel Market Recap: A Wild Ride and a Turning Point

Oversupply Takes Center Stage

One of the biggest narratives of 2025 has been a rapidly growing supply of crude oil, even as demand struggles to keep pace. The International Energy Agency (IEA) projects that global supply will rise sharply — by **3.0 million barrels per day (b/d)** in 2025 — largely driven by OPEC+ nations unwinding prior production cuts, plus strong output from non-OPEC producers like the U.S., Brazil, Canada, and Guyana. Reuters+2World Bank Blogs+2. Meanwhile, global demand growth is much more modest, according to IEA forecasts. Reuters This mismatch has fueled concerns about a supply glut, with inventories building substantially. U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Falling Prices & Downward Pressure

The weight of rising supply has helped push oil prices lower. The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) expects Brent crude to average around \$66 per barrel in 2025, dropping further into 2026. U.S. Energy Information Administration. In its August 2025 outlook, the EIA projects even steeper declines: by 4Q25, Brent could fall to \$58/b, and potentially to \$49/b by early 2026. U.S. Energy Information Administration.

These forecasts reflect steadily building inventories. U.S. Energy Information Administration

Demand Is Growing — But Slowly & Unevenly

On the demand side, OPEC's own reporting projects global oil demand to grow by about 1.29 million b/d in 2025 vs. 2024. OPEC Digital Publications+2OPEC Digital Publications+2. They expect transportation fuels to be a major component: gasoline demand is forecast to increase, with jet/kerosene also growing strongly. OPEC+1. Still, this growth isn't enough to absorb all the new supply.

Geopolitical Jitters — But Limited Impact (So Far)

Tensions in the Middle East continue to loom. Iran, in particular, issued a threat in June 2025 to block the Strait of Hormuz — a move that could drastically disrupt oil flows. Wikipedia Nevertheless, despite the geopolitical risk, market fundamentals appear to be more strongly influenced by oversupply than by potential disruptions so far. There's also been unrest elsewhere: for example, in Angola, protests erupted midyear after the government cut fuel subsidies, triggering a 33% increase in diesel prices. Wikipedia For a country that is itself an oil producer, this kind of social unrest over fuel reflects how sensitive economies remain to energy costs — and how policy shifts can ripple quickly.

National Trends: U.S. and Beyond

In the U.S., production continued to climb, and the EIA forecasted output of 13.4 million b/d in 2025 (up from 13.2 in 2024). U.S. Energy Information Administration. At the same time, gasoline retail prices are expected to soften: the EIA projects the average U.S. gasoline price to be \$3.10 per gallon in 2025. U.S. Energy Information Administration. On natural gas, the outlook is very different — rather than falling, prices are expected to rise sharply, per the EIA, driven by tighter market conditions, U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Structural Shifts & Longer-Term Themes

Beyond the short-term volatility, 2025 seems to be underlining a more structural shift in the fuel market:

- 1. **Energy Transition Pressure**: Slower demand growth especially in developed markets is increasingly tied to electric vehicle (EV) adoption and cleaner energy trends. World Bank Blogs
- 2. **Strategic Stockpiling**: China, according to the EIA, may be accumulating crude strategically, which could be masking some of the build in global inventories. U.S. Energy Information Administration
- 3. **Refining Dynamics**: Despite the oversupply, refinery runs have stayed relatively high, suggesting that refiners are responding to demand for refined products even if crude itself is plentiful. Reddit
- 4. **Policy Risk**: Fuel subsidy reforms in places like Angola show that domestic political risk remains very real, especially for emerging-market producers. Wikipedia

Key Take-Aways for 2025

- Glut risk: Supply is outpacing demand growth, raising the specter of a sustained surplus.
- **Downward price pressure**: With inventories building, crude prices are under significant downward pressure, according to major agencies.
- **Mixed demand story**: While demand is growing, it's being propped up in part by transportation fuels but long-term risk from energy transition looms.
- Geopolitics still matter: But for now, geopolitical risks have not derailed the broader supply-side narrative.
- **Policy shifts are real**: From subsidy cuts to trade tensions, national policy is adding layers of complexity to the fuel market.

The Bureau of Workers' Compensation Health & Safety Division will be offering the following safety webinars in December 2025:

	Tuesday, December 2		Wednesday, December 17
9:30am	OSHA Injury & Illness	9:30am	Dealing with Angry People
	Recordkeeping	10:00am	Active Shooter Training
1:30pm	Right to Know - Chemical	1:30pm	Stress & Worker Safety
	Wednesday, December 3		Thursday, December 18
9:30am	Drug & Alcohol Awareness	9:30am	Cold Weather Injuries
	Supervisor	1:30pm	Certified Workplace Safety
1:30pm	Certified Workplace Safety		Committee - Member Training
	Committee - Member Training		
	Thursday, December 4		January 2026
9:30am	Dealing with Difficult Co-Workers		Tuesday, January 6, 2026
1:30pm	Suicide Prevention	9:30am	Business Case for Safety
	Tuesday, December 9	1:30pm	Back Safety & Safe Lifting
9:30am	Hotel - Motel Safety		Wednesday, January 7
1:30pm	Scabies, Bed Bugs, MRSA	9:30am	Ergonomics Webinar
	Wednesday, December 10	1:30pm	Governor's Award for
9:30am	Slips, Trips & Falls		Safety Excellence - GASE
1:30pm	Carbon Monoxide Poisoning		Thursday, January 8
	Friday, December 12	9:30am	Cold Weather Injuries
11:00am	Aggressive Driving & Road Rage	1:30pm	Certified Workplace Safety
	Tuesday, December 16		Committee - Member Training
9:30am	Electrical Safety		
1:30pm	Ladders		
To register for any of these events just copy and paste the link into your browser and follow the links: https://www.dli.pa.gov/Businesses/Compensation/WC/safety/paths/calendar/Pages/default.aspx		Remember, re is scheduled t	egistration closes the day before the presentation to begin.

Industry Associations Voice Concern Over Visa and Mastercard's Proposed Swipe Fee Settlement

It was reported that a new proposed swipe fee settlement was reached between Visa and Mastercard. The settlement, filed on November 10 in federal court in Brooklyn, New York, comes nearly 20 years after the original antitrust lawsuit was launched and follows the rejection of a prior \$30 billion agreement in 2024.

While it includes a modest 0.1% (10 basis point) reduction in interchange fees for five years and new flexibility for retailers to decline high-fee rewards cards, EMA warns the deal falls far short of delivering meaningful, long-term relief." Swipe fees have exploded in recent years-reaching \$111 billion in 2024 alone-while this settlement offers only temporary, minimal relief," said Rob Underwood, President of Energy Marketers of America. "The devil is in the details, and the proposed settlement raises more questions than answers. Energy marketers cannot afford another hollow compromise."

"No one should be fooled by the credit card industry's smoke and mirrors," said NACS Senior Vice President of Government Relations Lyle Beckwith. "This proposed settlement endorses business as usual, including by letting Visa and Mastercard increase their own fees without any restraints. That could erase the benefits that this settlement pretends to provide. Approving this settlement would contradict the ruling that Judge Brodie made just last year and would declare open season for the credit card companies to hit merchants and their customers with more price increases."

Key concerns include:

- Minimal Fee Reduction: A 0.1% cut for just five years does not offset the 70% surge in swipe fees since the pandemic, leaving fuel retailers-who operate on razor-thin margins-without sustainable relief.
- Rewards Card Loophole Risk: While retailers may decline entire categories of cards, it remains unclear whether accepting one rewards card would require accepting all-potentially allowing Visa and Mastercard to reclassify non-rewards cards with token rewards to preserve high fees.
- Consumer and Sales Impact: With 70% of transactions involving rewards cards, refusing them could drive customers to competitors, forcing retailers into an untenable choice between profitability and customer loyalty.





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Federal Legislation to Fix the Penny Shortage

The penny is officially on its way out and small retailers are running out of time to adapt. In May 2025, at President Trump's direction, the U.S. Treasury ended production of the penny with the last penny shipments to Federal Reserve coin distribution centers occurring in August 2025. With no fresh supply, the existing pool of pennies will dwindle, leaving cash-reliant businesses unable to make exact change. Retailers are increasingly concerned that this unavoidable shortfall could put them at odds with state consumer-protection laws and are urgently seeking clear federal guidance.

Without a federal fix to the penny shortage, states and localities with "exact change" laws could ban rounding entirely, forcing retailers into legal gray zones or costly compliance headaches. In an era of inflation and supply-chain volatility, small businesses cannot absorb another avoidable regulatory burden.

Bipartisan federal legislation now pending in Congress can address this problem, but only if it includes explicit federal preemption allowing retailers to round cash transactions to the nearest nickel. The Common Cents Act of 2025 (H.R. 3074 / S. 1525) – sponsored by Reps. McClain (R-MI) and Garcia (D-AZ) and Sens. Lummis (R-WY) and Gillibrand (D-NY) – aims to solve the penny shortage, yet the current draft does not include language protecting small businesses that simply cannot provide exact change.

EMA urges lawmakers to support small business retailers by making changes to the Common Cents Act to add clear federal preemption and rounding authority to the nearest nickel for cash transactions, effective immediately or within 30-90 days of enactment, rather than one year. This straightforward update will ensure businesses can comply with the law, serve customers efficiently, and navigate an increasingly uncertain currency landscape.

Energy Marketers of America Applauds Trump Administration's Crackdown on Unlawful Smoke Shops Selling Illegal Vapes

The Energy Marketers of America (EMA), representing thousands of fuel wholesalers, fueling stations and convenience stores, praised President Trump's decisive crackdown on rogue smoke shops selling illegal, unregulated products—restoring fairness to retail and shielding families and kids from harm.

Legitimate retailers watch these unlawful smoke shops set up shop next door, dodging ID checks, taxes, and safety rules while pushing untested junk to minors. For too long, they operated unchecked. Now, Trump's all-of-government blitz—spearheaded by FDA, CBP, and DOJ—is turning the tide, boosting market integrity and public health.

Key wins: HHS and CBP's record seizure of 4.7 million illegal e-cigs worth \$86.5 million—mostly from China. FDA-CBP's \$34 million Chicago vape haul earlier this year. New York's Operation Vapers' Dozen nailed dozens of illicit vape distributors.

State takedowns crush networks: Louisiana's Operation Vape Out—10 arrests, \$1M+ seized. Florida's Operation Smoke Signals—27 busted across 20 stores for sales to kids. North Carolina's Operation Smoke and Mirrors—13 shops shuttered, linked to drugs and trafficking. Orange County, CA cops seized hundreds of pounds of contraband from phony retailers.

Illicit vape imports have become a lucrative enterprise for foreign manufacturers, primarily in China, with products featuring candy flavors and bright packaging aimed at children. In contrast, responsible convenience stores train employees to verify ages, pay all required taxes, and sell only compliant products under state and federal law.

The Administration's coordinated enforcement has renewed confidence among legitimate operators. By seizing millions of illicit vapes and closing unlawful smoke shops, it sends a powerful message: the days of selling illicit vapes are over.

EMA urges continued momentum, including sustained coordination and resources for state and local law enforcement on the front lines. Allocating a portion of federal enforcement funds directly to local agencies will enhance investigations, seizures, and prosecutions.

"Honest retailers—family-run, community-based small businesses—seek only a level playing field. Each shutdown of a rouge smoke shop selling illegal vaping products restores fairness to those who play by the rules. Strict enforcement ultimately protects consumers, shields children, and enables law-abiding businesses to thrive," said EMA President Rob Underwood.

SSDA-AT Legislative Updates

IRS Provides Penalty Relief on Tips and Overtime for Tax Year 2025

The Department of the Treasury and the Internal Revenue Service issued guidance providing penalty relief to employers and other payors for tax year 2025 regarding new information reporting requirements for cash tips and qualified overtime compensation under the One, Big, Beautiful Bill.

Transition penalty relief for tax year 2025

<u>Notice 2025-62</u> PDF provides penalty relief from the new information reporting requirements for cash tips and qualified overtime compensation under the OBBB to employers and other payors for not filing correct information returns and not providing correct payee statements to employees and other payees.

Specifically, employers and other payors will not face penalties for failing to provide a separate accounting of any amounts reasonably designated as cash tips or the occupation of the person receiving such tips. In addition, employers and other payors will also not face penalties for failing to separately provide the total amount of qualified overtime compensation. The relief is limited to returns and statements filed and provided for tax year 2025 and applies only to the extent that the person required to make the return or statement otherwise files and provides a complete and correct return or statement.

Treasury and IRS are aware that employers and other payors may not currently have the information required to be reported under the OBBB, or the systems or procedures in place to be able to correctly file the additional information with the IRS, or SSA in the case of a Form W-2, and provide it to employees and other payees. Moreover, the IRS has announced that Forms W-2 and 1099 for tax year 2025 will not be updated to account for the OBBB-related changes. Therefore, tax year 2025 will be treated as a transition period for IRS enforcement and administration of the new information reporting requirements for cash tips and qualified overtime compensation under the OBBB.

While not a requirement to receive the penalty relief provided in Notice 2025-62, employers and other payors are encouraged to provide employees and payees, particularly those in a tipped occupation, with the occupation codes and separate accountings of cash tips, so the employee or payee can claim the deduction for qualified tips for tax year 2025. Likewise, employers and payors are encouraged to provide employees and payees with separate accountings of overtime compensation, so the employee or payee has readily available the information necessary to claim the deduction for qualified overtime compensation for tax year 2025. Employers and payors can make the information available to their employees and payees through an online portal, additional written statements provided to the employees or payees, other secure methods, or in the case of qualified overtime compensation in Box 14 of the employee's Form W-2.

New reporting requirements under the OBBB

No tax on tips: Certain employees and self-employed individuals who receive qualified tips may deduct qualified tips that are reported on a Form W-2, Form 1099, or reported directly by the individual on Form 4137. Employers and other payors must file information returns with the IRS, or SSA in the case of Form W-2, and provide statements to taxpayers showing certain cash tips received during the year and the occupation of the tip recipient.

No tax on overtime: Certain individuals who receive qualified overtime compensation may deduct the qualified overtime compensation that is reported on a Form W-2 or Form 1099. Employers and other payors are required to file information returns with the IRS, or SSA in the case of Form W-2, and provide statements to taxpayers showing the total amount of qualified overtime compensation paid during the year.

Additional guidance for individual taxpayers that addresses how they can claim the deductions for qualified tips and qualified overtime compensation when they file their tax year 2025 returns is forthcoming. For more information, please see the <u>One, Big, Beautiful Bill provisions</u> page on IRS.gov.



SSDA-AT Legislative Updates

401(k) Limit Increases to \$24,500 for 2026, IRA Limit Increases to \$7,500

The Internal Revenue Service announced that the amount individuals can contribute to their 401(k) plans in 2026 has increased to \$24,500, up from \$23,500 for 2025.

The IRS today also issued technical guidance regarding all cost-of-living adjustments affecting dollar limitations for pension plans and other retirement-related items for tax year 2026 in Notice 2025-67 PDF, posted today on IRS.gov.

Highlights of changes for 2026

The annual contribution limit for employees who participate in 401(k), 403(b), governmental 457 plans, and the federal government's Thrift Savings Plan is increased to \$24,500, up from \$23,500 for 2025.

The limit on annual contributions to an IRA is increased to \$7,500 from \$7,000. The IRA catch-up contribution limit for individuals aged 50 and over was amended under the SECURE 2.0 Act of 2022 (SECURE 2.0) to include an annual cost-of-living adjustment is increased to \$1,100, up from \$1,000 for 2025.

The catch-up contribution limit that generally applies for employees aged 50 and over who participate in most 401(k), 403(b), governmental 457 plans, and the federal government's Thrift Savings Plan is increased to \$8,000, up from \$7,500 for 2025. Therefore, participants in most 401(k), 403(b), governmental 457 plans and the federal government's Thrift Savings Plan who are 50 and older generally can contribute up to \$32,500 each year, starting in 2026. Under a change made in SECURE 2.0, a higher catch-up contribution limit applies for employees aged 60, 61, 62 and 63 who participate in these plans. For 2026, this higher catch-up contribution limit remains \$11,250 instead of the \$8,000 noted above.

The income ranges for determining eligibility to make deductible contributions to traditional Individual Retirement Arrangements (IRAs), to contribute to Roth IRAs and to claim the Saver's Credit all increased for 2026.

Taxpayers can deduct contributions to a traditional IRA if they meet certain conditions. If during the year either the taxpayer or the taxpayer's spouse was covered by a retirement plan at work, the deduction may be reduced, or phased out, until it is eliminated, depending on filing status and income. (If neither the taxpayer nor the spouse is covered by a retirement plan at work, the phase-outs of the deduction do not apply.)

Here are the phase-out ranges for 2026:

- For single taxpayers covered by a workplace retirement plan, the phase-out range is increased to between \$81,000 and \$91,000, up from between \$79,000 and \$89,000 for 2025.
- For married couples filing jointly, if the spouse making the IRA contribution is covered by a workplace retirement plan, the phase-out range is increased to between \$129,000 and \$149,000, up from between \$126,000 and \$146,000 for 2025.
- For an IRA contributor who is not covered by a workplace retirement plan and is married to someone who is covered, the phase-out range is increased to between \$242,000 and \$252,000, up from between \$236,000 and \$246,000 for 2025.
- For a married individual filing a separate return who is covered by a workplace retirement plan, the phase-out range is not subject to an annual cost-of-living adjustment and remains between \$0 and \$10,000.

Other phase-out ranges and limitations

The notice also provides limitations for 2026 for Roth IRAs, the Saver's Credit and SIMPLE retirement accounts.

- The income phase-out range for taxpayers making contributions to a Roth IRA is increased to between \$153,000 and \$168,000 for singles and heads of household, up from between \$150,000 and \$165,000 for 2025. For married couples filing jointly, the income phase-out range is increased to between \$242,000 and \$252,000, up from between \$236,000 and \$246,000 for 2025. The phase-out range for a married individual filing a separate return who makes contributions to a Roth IRA is not subject to an annual cost-of-living adjustment and remains between \$0 and \$10,000.
- The income limit for the Saver's Credit (also known as the Retirement Savings Contributions Credit) for low- and moderate-income workers is \$80,500 for married couples filing jointly, up from \$79,000 for 2025; \$60,375 for heads of household, up from \$59,250 for 2025; and \$40,250 for singles and married individuals filing separately, up from \$39,500 for 2025.
- The amount individuals can generally contribute to their SIMPLE retirement accounts is increased to \$17,000, up from \$16,500 for 2025. Pursuant to a change made in SECURE 2.0, individuals can contribute a higher amount to certain applicable SIMPLE retirement accounts. For 2026, this higher amount is increased to \$18,100, up from \$17,600 for 2025.
- The catch-up contribution limit that generally applies for employees aged 50 and over who participate in most SIMPLE plans is increased to \$4,000, up from \$3,500 for 2025. Under a change made in SECURE 2.0, a different catch-up limit applies for employees aged 50 and over who participate in certain applicable SIMPLE plans, which remains \$3,850. Under a change made in SECURE 2.0, a higher catch-up contribution limit applies for employees aged 60, 61, 62 and 63 who participate in SIMPLE plans, which remains \$5,250.

Details on these and other retirement-related cost-of-living adjustments for 2026 are in Notice 2025-67, available on IRS.gov.









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PA Supreme Court Hears Arguments on Skill Games

Last week, Pennsylvania's Supreme Court heard arguments on the appeal of the attorney general's office of a lower-court decision that ruled skill games are based on a player's ability — and not solely on chance, like slot machines and other traditional gambling games.

The Supreme Court justices focus on two questions: whether adding a small, hard-to-see skill component makes a game legal, and whether existing slot-machine laws should also apply to these devices. Lower courts previously ruled that the games are not traditional slot machines, allowing them to remain in operation.

Lawmakers have struggled to find consensus on how to regulate and tax the estimated 80,000 skill games already in use across the state. Governor Josh Shapiro previously proposed a 52% tax, which he said

could generate \$370 million annually, but no measure passed. Competing bills have offered different approaches, including Senate Bill 1079, which would charge a \$500 monthly fee per machine, projected to raise \$300 million a year. Other proposals suggested tax rates of 16% (Senate Bill 626) or 35% (Senate Bill 756), but none gained enough support.

The Lottery's profits fell by \$130 million last year, though it still made over \$1 billion. Draw game sales also dropped by nearly \$300 million, partly due to fewer large jackpots. Supporters of skill games argue casinos remain profitable — especially through rapidly expanding online gambling — and say legalizing and taxing skill games would bring new revenue to the state. Skill game regulations with a structure that would ensure convenience stores have equal access to operator permits, along with a taxation structure that incentivizes retailers to offer the games.

For now, the machines continue to operate with a favorable ruling from the lower court. The Supreme Court's ruling could ultimately determine the fate of skill games in Pennsylvania aside from legislative action.

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USED TIRE PICKUP

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EMA Regulatory Reminder: Energy Marketers Sound Alarm: EPA's Proposed RFS Reallocation Could Slam Businesses with Higher Costs

Recently, the Energy Marketers of America (EMA) – representing the nation's fuel distributors and retailers -- urged the EPA to not reallocate small refinery exemptions (SREs). Shifting exempted renewable fuel volumes from small refiners back onto larger ones could likely spike RIN prices, rack fuel costs, and squeeze branded marketers caught in long-term contracts – all while lacking clear legal backing.

The Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) mandates blending biofuels into gasoline and diesel, enforced via Renewable Identification Numbers (RINs). Small refineries can petition for SREs if compliance causes "disproportionate economic hardship." In August 2025, EPA granted a slew of SREs, exempting 11.4 billion gallons of 2023-2024 fuel – translating to billions in waived Renewable Volume Obligations (RVOs). EPA's Supplemental Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (SNPRM) for 2026-2027 RFS volumes – out September 18 – floats two co-proposals: 100% or 50% reallocation of those volumes to non-exempt refiners.

Biofuel advocates demand 100% reallocation to shield farmers from lost demand – projecting \$7.5 billion hit to soy growers without it. Refiners and downstream players warn of \$70 billion plus annual consumer costs from RFS overall, with reallocation piling on billions more.

EMA speaks for 48 state associations, and 80% of U.S. motor/heating fuels via 60,000 retail stations and supplying 40,000 more. Most are small to medium sized businesses, below-the-rack, non-blenders who are hyper-sensitive to upstream shocks.

Calendar of Events

National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day December 2

National Guard Birthday December 13

First Day of Winter December 21

Christmas Day December 25

New Year 's Eve December 31

A&B Operator Training ClassJanuary 21, 2026

Business Hours:

Monday Closed
Tuesday 8:30-3:30
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