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WEEKEND

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## Prison plan not mentioned in Sanders' State of the State



A display across from the proposed Franklin County prison site reflects local opposition to the project. Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders did not mention the prison in her April 9 State of the State address. GEORGE "CLAY" MITCHELL

### Governor supports facility that many oppose

**George "Clay" Mitchell**  
Fort Smith Southwest Times Record  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders still considers the proposed 3,000-bed prison in Franklin County the state's best option for expanding correctional capacity, even as the project went unmentioned in her recent State of the State address and in a letter to the co-chairs of the Joint Budget Committee outlining her recommendations for the upcoming fiscal session.

In a statement following the speech, a spokesperson for the governor said the administration continues to support the Franklin County facility while also pursuing additional strategies to address capacity needs.

"Governor Sanders still believes that the Franklin County prison project is the best opportunity for the state to grow its prison bed capacity, but will also con-

tinue to pursue other ways to build a safer, stronger Arkansas, including prison bed expansion at existing facilities and the Recidivism Reduction Pilot Program," spokesperson Sam Dubke said.

The governor's remarks to lawmakers last week focused heavily on education funding and tax cuts, while highlighting the addition of 1,500 prison beds at existing facilities as part of her public safety agenda. The larger Franklin County proposal, which has drawn both support and opposition, was not referenced.

The proposal also was not included in the governor's written budget recommendations to legislative leaders. In that letter, Sanders referenced continued funding for the construction of a new state crime lab, describing it as a key investment to support law enforcement, but did not address prison expansion.

#### Local, legislative reactions

Adam Watson, an advocate, founder of Gravel and Grit and former District 26

candidate who opposes the project, said the governor's remarks did not appear to reference the Franklin County proposal.

"The way I read that, it didn't sound to me like she was referencing Franklin County," Watson said. "Ultimately, I think our tax dollars are better spent finding solutions to reduce crime and recidivism without building additional beds. However, if no one has the appetite to do that hard work, then any new beds need to be built in a fiscally responsible manner, and that will simply never be the case at the Mill Creek Mountain site."

Sen. Bryan King, R-Green Forest, whose district includes part of Franklin County, said it remains unclear how the project will move forward, pointing to shifting funding discussions at the Capitol.

"I don't know," King said. "They are drafting something that transfers the \$75 million that was supposed to go to the Calico Rock expansion that Asa

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## Grocery prices rise, but staples getting cheaper

**Betty Lin-Fisher**  
USA TODAY

Grocery prices are on the rise, but not all foods are seeing increases, according to a new price analysis of some common food staples.

CouponFollow analyzed the monthly Consumer Price Index average food price data by the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics for the last two years to take a look at what's happening to your food market basket.

Overall, while 11 of the 25 common grocery staples fell in price in the last two years, the food items that are climbing have offset those savings, the analysis showed.

Proteins and beverages saw the biggest increases, according to the analysis.

Here are the top five products that saw the largest increase from February 2024 to February 2026:

• **Coffee:** The price per pound for ground roast coffee has increased 55.2% as it rose from \$6.09 in to \$9.46.

• **Lettuce:** The price per pound for romaine lettuce went up 38.6% from \$2.57 to \$3.56.

• **Ground beef:** 100% ground beef per pound rose 31.3% from \$5.13 to \$6.74.

• **Steak:** U.S. Department of Agriculture choice boneless sirloin per pound rose 21.1% from \$11.72 to \$14.19.

• **Orange juice:** a 16-ounce can of frozen concentrate rose 15.4% from \$4.21 to \$4.86.

There has been a high degree of variation in price fluctuation across categories, said David Ortega, a food economist and professor at Michigan State University.

Coffee and beef prices are likely to stay elevated, Ortega said. Average coffee prices are up 55% in two years, driven by consecutive poor harvests in Brazil and Vietnam plus U.S. tariffs on major producing countries, he said.

While Brazil's 2026 harvest is expected to be stronger, it takes months for lower commodity prices to reach store shelves, Ortega said.

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## American Girl revives dolls for 40th anniversary

### Designed to be 'as close as possible' to originals

**Melina Khan**  
USA TODAY

Mattel has relaunched eight of the original American Girl dolls in honor of the brand's 40th anniversary this year.

Each of the dolls in the American Girl Historical Characters collection were designed to be "as close as possible" to the originals, including their signature outfits, accessories and packaging.

"More than a product launch, it's a nostalgic reunion, inviting longtime fans to reconnect with the stories and dolls that shaped their childhood," the company

said in a release announcing the dolls were available to buy starting April 7.

In 1986, American Girl's founder, Pleasant Rowland, created a line of 18-inch dolls, each inspired by various eras of American history.

The brand, which Mattel acquired in 1998, has been treasured by girls for generations.

Each doll in the 40th anniversary Historical Characters collection comes bundled with her signature meet outfit, accessories and a book, plus packaging inspired by the original 1986 design, American Girl said.

• **Addy Walker:** First launched in 1993, the new Addy doll is almost exactly like

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Each doll in American Girl's 40th anniversary Historical Characters collection comes bundled with her signature outfit, accessories and a book, plus packaging inspired by the original 1986 design, the company said.

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