

Employers reluctant to expand in increasingly erratic economy

U.S. hiring stalls as unemployment rate ticks up to 4.3% last month. It is the highest number since 2021.

BY PAUL WISEMAN, ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AND CORA LEWIS
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The American job market, a pillar of U.S. economic strength since the pandemic, is crumbling under the weight of President Donald Trump's erratic economic policies. Uncertain about where things

are headed, companies have grown increasingly reluctant to hire, leaving agonized jobseekers unable to find work and weighing on consumers who account for 70% of all U.S. economic activity. Their spending has been the engine behind the world's biggest economy since the COVID-19 disruptions of 2020.

The Labor Department reported Friday that U.S. employers — companies, government agencies and nonprofits — added just 22,000 jobs last month, down from 79,000 in July and well below the 80,000 that economists had expected. The unemployment rate ticked up to 4.3% last month, also worse

than expected and the highest since 2021. “U.S. labor market deterioration intensified in August,” Scott Anderson, chief U.S. economist at BMO Capital Market, wrote in a commentary, noting that hiring was “slumping dangerously close to stall speed. This raises the risk of a harder landing for consumer spending and the economy in the months ahead.” Alexa Mamoulides, 27, was laid off in the spring from a job at a research publishing company and

has been hunting for work ever since. She uses a spreadsheet to track her progress and said she's applied for 111 positions and had 14 interviews — but hasn't landed a job yet. “There have been a lot of ups and downs,” Mamoulides said. “At the beginning I wasn't too stressed, but now that September is here, I've been wondering how much longer it will take. It's validating that the numbers bear out my experience, but also discouraging.” **See JOBS, 2A**

475 people detained in migrant raid in Georgia

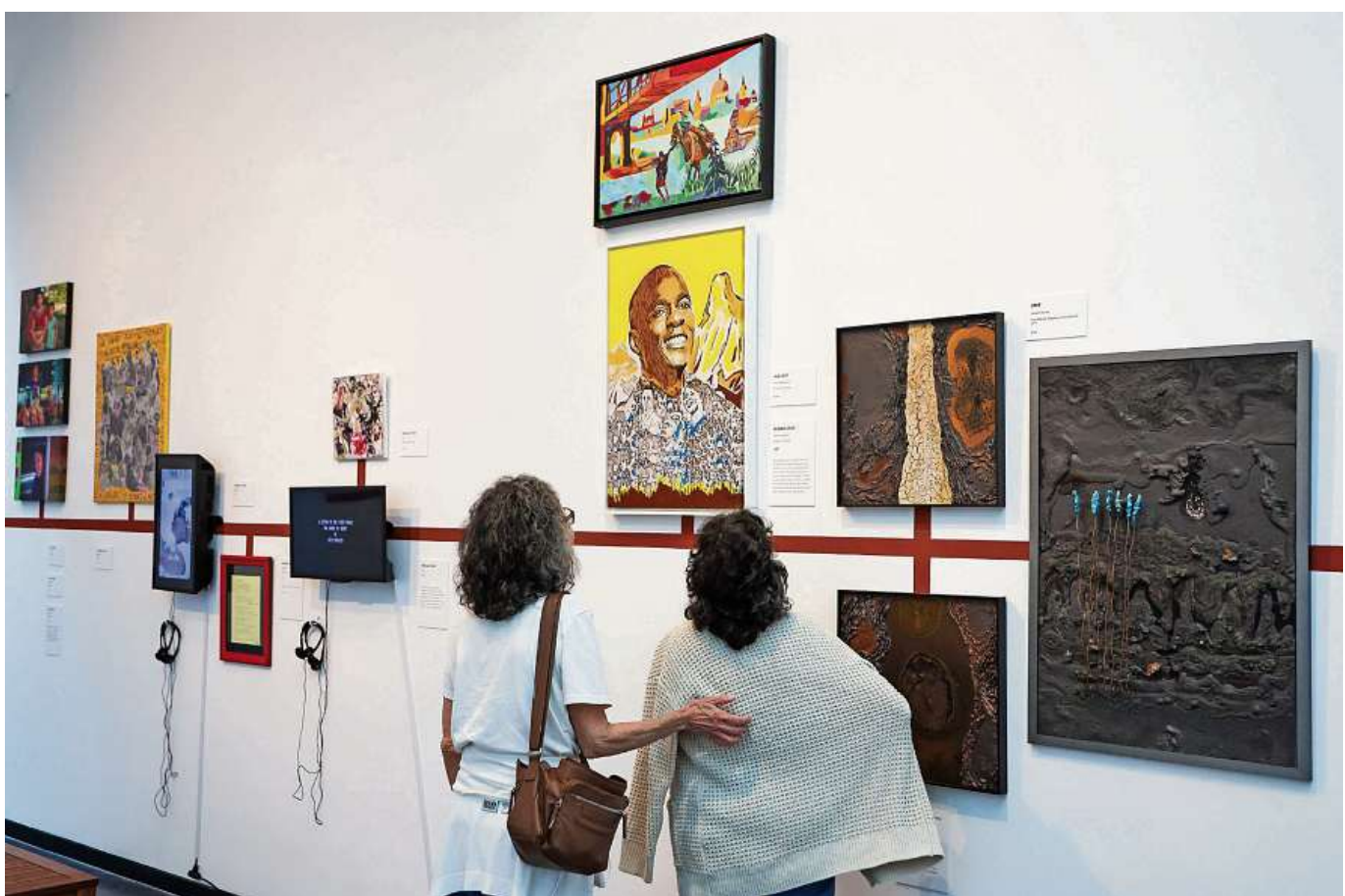
Most of the people nabbed at Hyundai manufacturing plant are South Korean nationals, agents say.

BY RUSS BYNUM AND KIM TONG-HYUNG
Associated Press

SAVANNAH, Ga. — Immigration authorities said Friday they detained 475 people, most of them South Korean nationals, when hundreds of federal agents raided the sprawling manufacturing site in Georgia where Korean automaker Hyundai makes electric vehicles. Steven Schrank, the lead Georgia agent of Homeland Security Investigations, said during a news conference Friday that the raid resulted from a monthslong investigation into allegations of illegal hiring at the site and was the “largest single site enforcement operation” in the agency's two-decade history. The Thursday raid targeted one of Georgia's largest and most high-profile manufacturing sites, where Hyundai Motor Group a year ago began manufacturing electric vehicles at a \$7.6 billion plant west of Savannah that employs about 1,200 people. Gov. Brian Kemp and other officials have touted it as the state's largest-ever largest economic development project. Agents focused their operation on an adjacent plant that's still under construction at which Hyundai has partnered with LG Energy Solution to produce batteries that power EVs.

South Korean government expresses ‘concern’

The South Korean government expressed “concern and regret” over the operation targeting its citizens. “The business activities of our investors and the rights of our nationals must not be unjustly infringed in the process of U.S. law enforcement,” South Korean Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lee Jaewoong said in a televised statement from Seoul. Lee said the ministry is dispatching diplomats from its embassy in Washington and consulate in Atlanta to the site, and planning to form an on-site response team. Schrank told reporters in Savannah that while some of the detained workers illegally **See RAID, 3A**



Guests visit The Gallery at Creative Pinellas on Friday, a day after Pinellas County commissioners in a preliminary vote defunded the arts agency. Commissioners ultimately voted to eliminate \$156,000 in funding. (DIRK SHADD | Times)

Creative Pinellas set to lose arts funding following vote

The 5-2 decision comes as the county faces scrutiny from Gov. Ron DeSantis' effort to ferret out wasteful spending.

BY COLBI EDMONDS
Times Staff Writer

Pinellas County commissioners took a preliminary vote Thursday to slash spending on a program that provides grants and exhibit space for artists, and signaled they may move to cut more. They did so despite protests from a packed house of residents who argued that public support for the arts is a major part of what gives the county its identity. The 5-2 vote to lop funding for Creative Pinellas comes as the county faces scrutiny from Gov. Ron DeSantis' administration, which launched a statewide effort to ferret out wasteful

spending by local governments. More than 100 people filled the meeting chambers Thursday to tell commissioners that providing financial assistance for artists and their work is not wasteful. “We're embedded in the community in ways no other arts organization is,” said Creative Pinellas CEO Margaret Murray in a phone interview before the meeting. “We are a solid return on the county's investment, and I don't see any other agency that can do the work that we're doing.” Creative Pinellas requested \$1.05 million from the county as part of a budget request for 2026, most of it from tourist

taxes assessed to short-term lodging. This year, the agency received \$300,000 in noncounty grants and contracted services, in the effort of diversifying its revenue stream, Murray said. It is also looking to begin fundraising. Commission chairperson Brian Scott initially suggested eliminating Creative Pinellas' budget at an August work session and directing \$500,000 it gets from tourist tax money toward a new arts grant program. That proposal may come back at a later date. On Thursday, county commissioners ultimately voted to eliminate \$156,000 Creative Pinellas receives from the county's general operating fund. “I have struggled since I've become a commissioner to understand what they're **See FUNDING, 7A**

For some, getting a COVID-19 vaccine proves troublesome

Limits on who can get the shots and prescription requirements are confusing drugstore customers.

BY TOM MURPHY
Associated Press

Michelle Newmark has tried — and failed — a couple times to get an updated COVID-19 vaccine. First, she was told she needed a prescription. Then she learned that her local CVS drugstore won't have shots for a couple more weeks. The Reston, Virginia, resident was considering a drive to Maryland to get vaccinated before a friend told her of a closer CVS that was booking appointments.

What was once a simple process has become “a whole different beast this year,” Newmark said. “It's very frustrating that I can't get a vaccine that I feel should be widely available like it always has been in the past,” she said. The debut of updated COVID-19 vaccines has gotten off to a clunky start in many states. Limits on who can get the shots and prescription requirements are confusing customers and leaving some **See VACCINE, 5A**



Co-owner Marc Ost at Eric's Rx Shoppe holds a box of COVID-19 vaccines as he unpacks a shipment on Tuesday in Horsham, Pa. (MATT ROURKE | Associated Press)