



# ANALYSIS: Trading rocky since SpaceX’s June debut

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U.S. retail sales increased marginally in June though there were decreases in receipts at clothing, and food and beverage retailers. MARIO TAMA/GETTY IMAGES FILE

# Retail sales edge higher last month

### Low unemployment claims signal stability

Lucia Mutikani  
REUTERS

WASHINGTON – U.S. retail sales increased marginally in June as lower gasoline prices depressed receipts at service stations, but households boosted purchases of motor vehicles and spent more at online outlets, reinforcing economists’ views that consumer spending accelerated in the second quarter.

The economy’s resilience was highlighted by other data on July 16 showing labor market stability, with first-time applications for unemployment benefits dropping to a two-month low last week. The data did not impact views on near-term monetary policy, with economists expecting the Federal Reserve to keep interest rates unchanged later this month.

“Despite challenges, consumers are still spending and the labor market shows no signs of cracking,” said Ellen Zentner, chief economic strategist at

The modest relief at the pump, which reflected a retreat in oil prices as a shaky ceasefire between the United States and Iran took hold, freed money for spending elsewhere. But the truce collapsed last week and the renewed hostilities in the Middle East have sent oil and gasoline prices rising again.

Morgan Stanley Wealth Management. “This type of data won’t move the Fed’s needle either way, but it underscores the ongoing resilience of the U.S. economy.”

Retail sales rose 0.2% in June, the smallest gain in five months, after an upwardly revised 1.0% jump in May, the Commerce Department’s Census Bureau said. The increase in retail sales, which are mostly goods and are not adjusted for inflation, was in line with economists’ expectations and followed a previously reported 0.9% advance in May.

Sales rose 6.7% year-on-year in June, despite household budgets being strained by higher prices from import

tariffs and more recently the Middle East conflict. Spending continues to be driven by higher-income households, which have seen their wealth boosted by a stock market rally.

Generous tax refunds this year have provided a cushion and consumers have also been tapping into savings and seeking bargains.

The Federal Reserve’s Beige Book report on July 15 described consumer spending as having edged up in early July, adding that “several districts noted declines in spending on discretionary items or trading down to more affordable varieties.”

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# Developer proposes concrete plant, waste station

Joe Hotchkiss  
Augusta Chronicle  
USA TODAY NETWORK

A Columbia County company specializing in commercial-grade disposal and recycling wants to build a concrete plant and waste transfer station east of Harlem.

Developer Sewell Brother Ventures LLC has filed paperwork with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs offering information about the proposed development on almost 31 acres of land with less than 200 feet of frontage on the 3900 block of Gordon Highway.

The widest part of the parcel, shaped like a pie piece, hugs the curve of a CSX rail line beside Old Augusta Highway. The land is owned by Cedar View Farms LLC.

The land would have to be rezoned to accommodate the project, whose estimated value at buildout is \$2 million, according to the state filing. The development would create 14 full-time jobs.

The land would have to be rezoned to accommodate the project, whose estimated value at buildout is \$2 million, according to a state filing with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs and an explanatory letter accompanying a filing with Columbia

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# Richmond County School System lands on federal agency’s radar

Augusta Chronicle  
USA TODAY NETWORK

A federal agency is investigating the Richmond County School System for practices it said potentially endangered students.

The U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights recently launched a nationwide K-12 initiative, including in Augusta, aimed at combating sexual abuse and harassment by school employees, according to the DOE’s website. The effort comes amid concerns that some districts have failed to adequately investigate misconduct allegations or have transferred accused employees to other schools or positions, a practice known as “passing the trash.”

Richmond County schools Superintendent Dr. Malinda Cobb acknowledged the investigation in a news release issued Wednesday evening, noting officials had received a letter from the DOE

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## HEALTH SCORES

# Flies, gnats an issue at this Augusta Applebee’s

Jennifer Miller  
Augusta Chronicle  
USA TODAY NETWORK

The following is a list of restaurants in Richmond and Columbia counties that were inspected July 3-10, accompanied by their scores and, in some cases, the health infractions that lowered those scores. Scores below 70 are considered failing.

Disclaimer: On any given day, an establishment may have fewer or more violations than noted in its most recent

inspection. An inspection conducted on any given day may not be representative of the overall, long-term conditions at the establishment. A few more recent follow-up inspections may not be included here.

**Perfect scores**

Here are the restaurants in Richmond and Columbia counties that passed with perfect scores in recent food service inspections.

**Starbucks Coffee Shop**, 421 S. Belair

Road, Martinez

**Starbucks @ Kroger**, 4355 Washington Road, Evans

**Cold Stone Creamery**, 3683 Windsor Spring Road, Hephzibah

**New Moon Café**, 936 Broad St., Augusta

**Getting warmer**

Here are the restaurants in Richmond and Columbia counties that

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