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Make Today Different

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Publisher: Wea H. Lee
President: Catherine Lee
Editor: John Robbins, Jun Gai
Address: 11122 Bellaire Blvd., Houston, TX 77072
E-mail: News@scdaily.com

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U.S. to lift restrictions Nov 8 for vaccinated foreign travelers



Travelers queue in a security line limited to every other lane for social distancing at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport in SeaTac, Washington, U.S. April 12, 2021. REUTERS/Lindsey Wasson

WASHINGTON, Oct 15 (Reuters) - The White House on Friday will lift COVID-19 travel restrictions for fully vaccinated international visitors starting Nov. 8, ending historic restrictions that had barred much of the world from entering the United States for as long as 21 months.

The unprecedented travel restrictions kept millions of visitors out of the United States from China, Canada, Mexico, India, Brazil, much of Europe and elsewhere; shrunk U.S. tourism; and hurt border community economies. They prevented many loved ones and foreign workers from reuniting with families.

"Oh how I've missed Christmas in NY," Alexandros Koronakis, an executive with AT&T Inc in Brussels, wrote on Twitter.

U.S. allies had heavily lobbied the Biden administration to lift the rules. Many praised Friday's announcement, including Sweden's ambassador to the United States Karin Olofsdotter, who called it "very welcoming news."

White House spokesman Kevin Munoz confirmed the Nov. 8 date on Twitter, adding the policy "is guided by public health, stringent, and consistent."

Restrictions on non-U.S. citizens were first imposed on air travelers from China in January 2020 by then-President Donald Trump and then extended to dozens of other countries, without any clear metrics for how and when to lift them.

Curbs on non-essential travelers at land borders with Mexico and Canada have been in place since March 2020 to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reuters first reported Friday's announcement of the Nov. 8 starting date earlier in the day.

U.S. airline, hotel and cruise industry stocks rose on the news, including American Airlines (AAL.O), up 2.8%; Marriott International Inc (MAR.O), up 3.7%; and Carnival Corp (CCL.N), up 0.9%.

U.S. international air passenger traffic was down 43% in August and overall passenger air traffic was down 21% over pre-pandemic levels, the U.S. Transportation Department said Friday.

Airlines have seen an increase in international ticket sales in recent weeks after the White House announced plans to lift the restrictions, Nick Calio, chief executive of the Airlines for America industry trade group, said in a statement.

Calio said the "full reopening of international travel is also critical to reviving economies around the globe, reinvigorating communities and supporting millions of jobs in the U.S. and abroad."

The United States had lagged many other countries in lifting such restrictions.

In January, Trump issued an order to lift travel restrictions on people in Europe and Brazil. But the order was reversed by President Joe Biden before it took effect.

The Biden administration, which repeatedly has said it does endorse so-called "vaccine passports," grappled for months over whether to mandate vaccinations as a condition of lifting country-specific restrictions, officials told Reuters.

Travelers queue in a security line limited to every other lane for social distancing at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport in SeaTac, Washington, U.S. April 12, 2021. REUTERS/Lindsey Wasson

Travelers queue in a security line limited to every other lane for social distancing at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport in SeaTac, Washington, U.S. April 12, 2021. REUTERS/Lindsey Wasson

On Tuesday, the White House announced it would lift restrictions at its land borders and ferry crossings with Canada and Mexico for fully vaccinated foreign nationals in early November. They are similar but not identical to requirements announced last month for international air travelers.

Unvaccinated visitors will still be barred from entering the United States from Canada or Mexico at land borders.

Canada on Aug. 9 began allowing fully vaccinated U.S. visitors for non-essential travel.



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11122 BELLAIRE BLVD., HOUSTON, TX 77072

WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

CORONAVIRUS DIARY 10/16/2021

The World Economy Is Still Struggling



Wea H. Lee
Wealee@scdaily.com

Chairman of International District Houston Texas
Publisher Southern Daily Wea H. Lee

Southern News Group Chairman / CEO
Chairman of International Trade & Culture Center
Republic of Guiana Honorary consul at Houston Texas



The resurgence of the coronavirus coupled with the backup of the supply chain will threaten to hold up the global economic recovery.

The International Monetary Fund issued the latest World Economic Outlook Report that indicated the overall growth rate will remain at 6 percent this year. This is an historically high level after a recession, but the expansion reflects a vast divergence in the fortunes of rich and poor countries.

The vaccine is at the heart of economic disparities, while the bolstering shots are coming to the rich countries while 96% of the poor countries are still not

vaccinated. The economists say that it is very clear that we are all in this together and the pandemic is not over anywhere until it is over everywhere.

According to a U.S. Department of Labor report in August 2021, a record 4.3 million workers have quit their jobs to take or seek new jobs, or to leave the workforce entirely.

Because of rising inflation, prices are climbing for food, healthcare, automobiles and trucks. Inflation will be the biggest challenge the economy will face.

Today the world has become a global supply chain. We are all interdependent on each other in many ways. When a shoe manufacturer shuts down in Vietnam, we are not going to have shoes to sell in America.

The pandemic has underscored how economic success or failure in some countries can ripple throughout the globe.

We urge all the countries to take action to help each other and to work together because this is a global issue.



Southern DAILY Make Today Different

Editor's Choice



A woman wearing a burqa sits in the trunk of a taxi in Chawok market in Kabul, Afghanistan. The sticker reads "for God sake stop fighting". REUTERS/Zohra Bensemra



Fishermen bring in their catch from a lake in front of a power plant of the State Development and Investment Corporation (SDIC) outside Tianjin, China. REUTERS/Thomas Peter



A satellite image in infrared color shows smoke rising as lava flows while the Cumbre Vieja volcano continues to erupt on the Canary Island of La Palma, Spain. Maxar Technologies/via REUTERS



Robert Durst is seen being sentenced to life without possibility of parole for the killing of Susan Berman, at Airport Courthouse, in Los Angeles, California. Myung J. Chun/Pool



Migrants wait to disembark from a boat towed by a Spanish coast guard vessel, in the port of Arguineguin, on the island of Gran Canaria, Spain. REUTERS/Borja Suarez



The sky goes orange behind the Washington Monument and the Smithsonian Castle as a couple pose for a sunset selfie in Washington. REUTERS/ Kevin Lamarque

'A Huge Feather In The Cap' For The Region

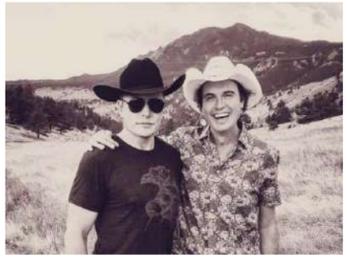
Tesla Moving HQ From California To Austin



Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor And Sports News Service Media

One of the biggest economic development announcements in Austin history came with little fanfare and almost no warning. Speaking to shareholders Thursday, Tesla CEO Elon Musk mentioned almost casually that the electric automaker — one of the world's best-known and most valuable companies — has decided to move its corporate headquarters from California to Austin. The stunning move — which came as a surprise to many local and state officials — continues Austin's ascent as a technology hub and adds to Tesla's swiftly growing presence in the region, as the company is building a \$1.1 billion manufacturing facility in southeastern Travis County.

"I'm excited to announce we're moving our headquarters to Austin, Texas," Musk said. "We're going to create an ecological paradise here around the Colorado River."



Elon Musk and his brother Kimbal

strike a "Texas pose." Musk had previously threatened to move the company's headquarters from Palo Alto, Calif., to Texas or Nevada in 2020, after disagreements with California lawmakers. Musk did not mention that dispute during Thursday's meeting.

Dan Ives, an analyst with Wedbush Securities, said Tesla's decision is a major win for Austin and makes sense for the company.

"This is a major strategic move for Tesla that makes a ton of sense," Ives said. "The tea leaves were there for Tesla to make this move, and it's a huge feather in the cap for Austin."



Elon Musk

Musk and Tesla still left a number of questions unanswered. The announcement didn't indicate a timetable for the move, how many employees might be coming to Central Texas or how many jobs might be created. The compa-

ny also didn't say where the corporate headquarters would be located, although Musk seemed to hint that it could be on the 2,100-acre property at Texas 130 and Harold Green Road in Travis County where the company is continuing construction of its newest manufacturing facility. Travis County Commissioner Jeff Travillion, whose district encompasses Tesla's factory, said Tesla has not told county officials how many corporate jobs are likely to accompany the decision, or whether the headquarters will be at the site of the new factory or somewhere else in the city.



Musk had announced in July 2020 that Austin was the choice for the factory, where the company plans to produce its Cybertruck, Semi, Model 3 company sedan, Model Y and batteries. Musk said Thursday that the Austin facility might also produce Tesla ATVs. Musk said Thursday that Tesla is making great progress on the Austin-area factory, which the company has dubbed Giga Texas. The first vehicles are expected to roll out as early as this year, and the facility could bring more than 10,000 new jobs to Central Texas through 2022.

Local government entities last year approved millions in tax breaks to help lure the Tesla factory to Central Texas. The Del Valle school board approved a tax break that could be worth about \$46.4 million over 10 years, and Travis County commissioners approved an incentive package worth at least \$14 million over 10 years.



Tesla's announcement comes less than a year after software giant Oracle announced in December that it was moving its corporate headquarters from California to Austin. A number of other technology giants — including Apple, Facebook, Google and Amazon — have recently expanded their operations in Central Texas, adding to the tech sector that has long been anchored by Round Rock-based Dell Technologies. Samsung has also said it is considering two Central Texas sites — one near its current Austin operations and one in Williamson County, near Taylor — for a \$17 billion chip manufacturing facility. Amber Gunst, CEO of the Austin Technology Council, said that while the timing of the announcement was a surprise, she was not shocked that Austin had been chosen as Tesla's new headquarters.



"Austin has just proven time and time again that we have a stable economy, that we've got a state and local government that is willing to work with companies to provide opportunities and jobs to the area," Gunst said. "It sends a message not just to Silicon Valley and to California, but to the entire country, that ... there's a lot to offer here. And that if cities and states are not making it transparent and aware to companies that they're valued and that they're wanted there, then companies will find another place to go."

Matt Patton, an economist with Austin-based Angelou Economics, said Musk's announcement didn't come out of the blue, given his favorable comments about Texas relative to California over the past year and the other moves he has made to establish numerous operations here.

"But whether or not it's a surprise, it's still a big deal," Patton said. "Certainly there are going to be a lot of eyes on Austin" as Tesla's official new base of operations.



Musk previously said the Austin-area facility had become one of his biggest focuses. In December, when Musk confirmed he had moved to Texas, he said the move was to be closer to the Giga Texas factory and to SpaceX's starship development in South Texas. Musk said on social media in June that he has a home near SpaceX's South Texas facility. He has not publicly said he has a residence in Austin, but he said Thursday that he was in the city during the February freeze, staying in a house with no power, heat or internet access.

Other Musk-led companies have been expanding into Austin over the course of the pandemic. They include Musk's tunneling firm the Boring Co., which has had a presence since last year and purchased land in Bastrop County; Neuralink, Musk's neurotechnology company, which had job postings for Austin in recent months; and Musk's private foundation, the Musk Foundation, which moved to Austin in the summer of 2020.



Elon Musk

SpaceX, which has a South Texas presence with operations near Boca Chica, could also be expanding into Austin, as it has posted listings for jobs in the area, although it is unclear what the company's plans might be.

Musk also said Thursday that the company planned to start selling Tesla Insurance in Texas next week. (Courtesy statesman.com)

Why Are China's Bitcoin Miners Moving To Texas?



Quick Look

China's ban on cryptocurrency mining has forced bitcoin entrepreneurs to flee overseas. Many are heading to Texas, which is quickly becoming the next global cryptocurrency capital.

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

When China announced a crackdown on bitcoin mining and trading in May, Kevin Pan, CEO of Chinese cryptocurrency mining company Poolin, got on a flight the next day to leave the country.

"We decided to move out, once [and] for all. [We'll] never come back again," Mr Pan told the BBC.

Headquartered in Hong Kong, Poolin is the second largest bitcoin mining network in the world, with most of its operations in mainland China. The country was home to around 70% of global bitcoin mining power, until the clampdown sent the price of bitcoin into a tailspin and caught miners off guard.

Now China's "bitcoin refugees" are urgently scrambling to find a new home, whether in neighbouring Kazakhstan, Russia or North America, because for bitcoin miners, time is literally money.



"We had to find a new location for the [bitcoin mining] machines," Poolin's vice-president Alejandro De La Torre

said. "Because every minute that the machine is not on, it's not making money."

In what some call the "Great Mining Migration," the Poolin executives are among the many bitcoin miners who have recently landed in a place reputed as part of America's wild west: Austin, Texas

Bitcoins are a digital currency with no physical form - they exist and are exchanged only online.

They are created when a computer 'mines' the money by solving a complex set of maths problems and that is how bitcoin 'miners' who run the computers earn the currency.

This takes a lot of energy. As a new form of money that transcends national boundaries, there is also much confusion and potential to run afoul of government rules - so two things bitcoin entrepreneurs value are cheap electricity and a relaxed regulatory environment.

The Lone Star State fits the bill to a tee.



New frontier for bitcoin mining

For Mr Pan, Texas felt like home almost instantly. Days after his arrival, he was gifted an AR-15 rifle, which he says he may use to "hunt hogs from a helicopter" one day.

While the shooting ranges and Texas barbecue provide for welcome entertainment, legal protection for business is the major attraction for the bitcoin miners. "What happened to us in China won't happen in the US," Mr De La Torre says.



Kevin Pan (left) and Alejandro De La Torre.

Governor of Texas Greg Abbott has been a vocal supporter for cryptocurrency. "It's happening! Texas will be the crypto leader," he tweeted in June. In the same month, the Lone Star State became the second US state after Wyoming to recognise blockchain and cryptocurrency in its commercial law, paving the way for crypto businesses to operate in the state.

Many Chinese bitcoin companies have looked to Texas for stability and opportunity. Shenzhen-based firm BIT Mining has planned to invest \$26 million to build a data centre in the state, while Beijing-based Bitmain is expanding its facility in Rockdale, Texas. This small town with around 5,600 residents once housed one of the world's largest aluminium plants, and now it's emerging as the next global hub for bitcoin mining.

There might be another underlying connection between the industry and the state, as De La Torre says that bitcoiners and Texans share the same values. "Texans take their freedom and rights very seriously, and so do we bitcoiners." Experts believe China's bitcoin crackdown was motivated by having greater

control over the financial markets, and it may become a boon for America. "The migration benefits the US in terms of talent acquisition and furthering the innovation ecosystem," says Kevin Desouza, a business professor at the Queensland University of Technology who has done research on China's digital currency policy. In return, the bitcoin miners get access to a thriving and innovative community, as well as more diverse sources of capital, according to Prof Desouza.



China was once the world's centre of bitcoin mining.

Energy and political risks Other than a stable regulatory environment, the energy-hungry industry is hunting for cheap electricity in Texas. Texas has some of the cheapest energy prices in the world, due to its deregulated power grid. Consumers enjoy more choices of electricity providers, which encourage providers to lower prices to stay competitive. During peaks of electricity demand, bitcoin farms can even sell unused power back to the grid.

Although El Salvador is set to become the first country to adopt bitcoin as a national currency, bitcoin miners prefer the US because of its well-developed electrical infrastructure, says Mr

De La Torre.

But some analysts warn that the "Great Mining Migration" may lead to serious repercussions, as cities and towns struggle to meet the huge energy appetite.

In February, blackouts following a deadly snowstorm left millions of homes and businesses in Texas without power for days. More than 200 people died. During the power outage, bitcoin farms were compensated to stay offline.



The increased scrutiny of Chinese companies in America may also lead to more attention on these mining newcomers. Texas recently passed a law that prevents "hostile foreign actors" from accessing critical infrastructure, including its power grid. The new law was reportedly prompted by a Chinese billionaire's plan to build a wind farm in southwest Texas. Critics allege that the project could be used to hack into the Texas energy grid and to gather intelligence from a nearby US military base.

Prof Desouza says that while access to electricity grids is unlikely to be an issue for bitcoin miners in the short term, political risk will continue to evolve.

The bitcoin miners do miss something in China - cheap labour cost and speedy construction.

According to Mr Pan, while a new bitcoin farm takes up to five months to build in China, it could take as long as 18 months in Texas. Global shipping prices have also skyrocketed during the pandemic, making it significantly more expensive to ship mining machines from China to the US.

Despite the costly and time-consuming efforts, Mr Pan says his company is committed to settle in Texas. "It's a free land, and a lot of bitcoiners are here," he says, "so we feel: 'whoa, family reunion.'" (https://www.bbc.com/)