

Supply chain crisis: Empty shelves at grocery stores across the US

- **Grocery stores are operating with less than their normal workforces, according to the National Grocers Association, and many of its members have less than 50 percent of their normal staff**

Shoppers across the U.S. are confronting alarming shortages of basic foodstuffs, as a variety of factors exacerbate [supply chain](#) issues from coast to coast.

Severe winter storms have disrupted shipping in parts of the country over the past week, and surging cases of [Omicron](#) are driving millions of absences from work, disrupting basic functions such as shipping, unloading and stocking.

On Monday, the U.S. confirmed a world record 1.46 million new cases of COVID-19, and one economic expert has predicted that five million people, or 3 percent of the national workforce, will have to call in sick this week as the virus spreads.

The United States reached a new record for number of Americans hospitalized with COVID, with more than 146,000 people currently admitted with the virus - a number higher than the 132,051 record set in January last year.

But despite rising hospitalizations, not as many Americans are dying from the virus as they were in previous surges, and not all of these hospitalizations are directly caused by the virus.

Yet the knock-on effect has been intense across industries.

From Washington, [D.C.](#), to Anchorage, [Alaska](#), shoppers are finding uncomfortable shortages as a result and demanding to know when the supply chain issues will ease.

The misery has been compounded by inflation.

Consumer prices rose by 6.8 percent in November from the year before, the fastest pace in 39 years. The December inflation report, due out on Wednesday, is expected to show price gains accelerated further last month.



Some shelves are seen nearly empty at a grocery store in Washington, D.C. on Monday





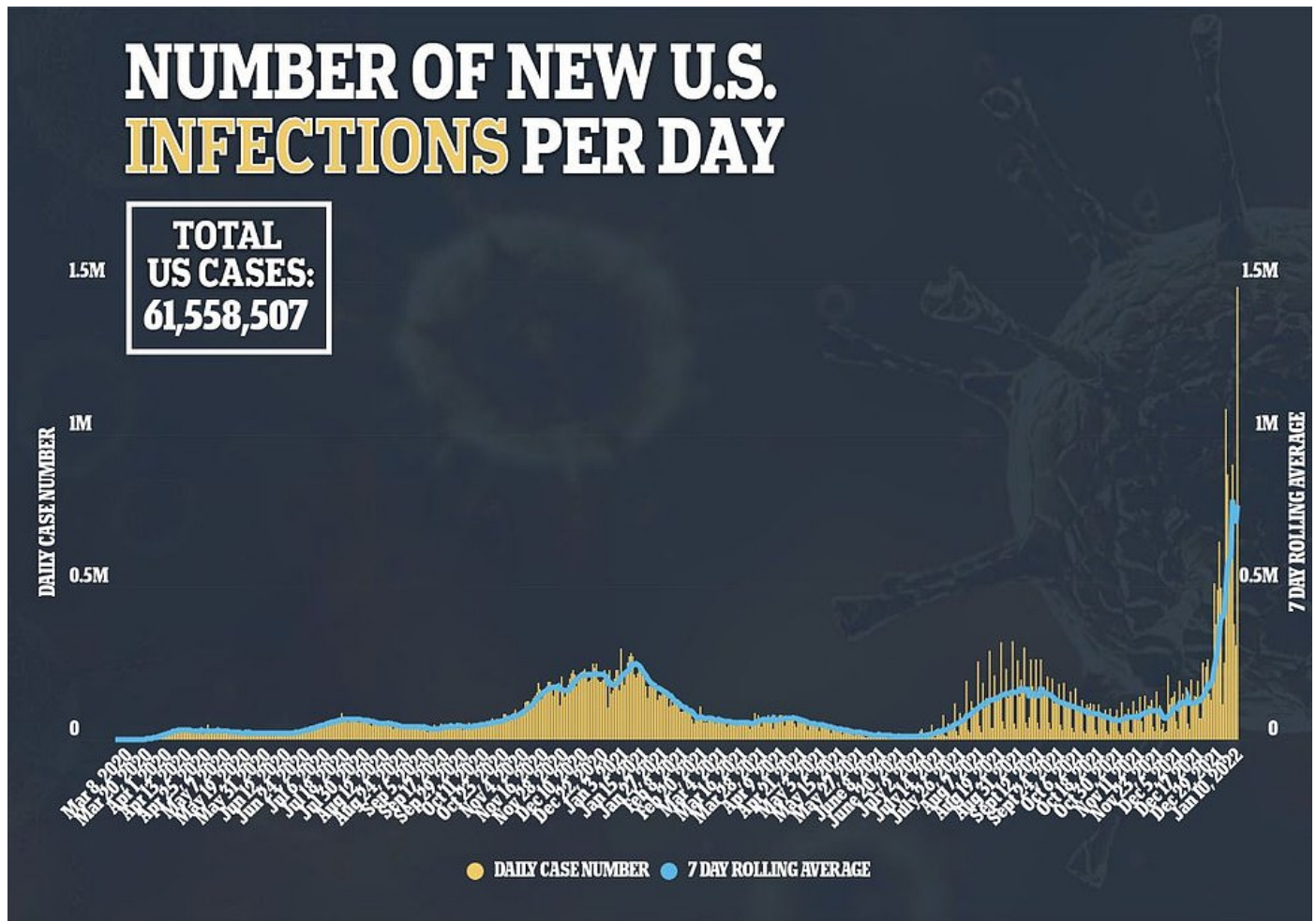
Empty shelves are seen inside a Trader Joes on Court Street in Brooklyn on Tuesday



Shelves sit empty at a Walmart in Anchorage, Alaska, on Saturday. Shortages at U.S. grocery stores have grown in recent weeks as new problems like the fast-spreading Omicron variant and severe weather have piled on to the supply chain



Empty medicine shelves are seen in a Long Island, New York store on Sunday, shared by a Twitter user who blamed '#BareShelvesBiden'



Grocer Albertsons, which owns Safeway, Vons and Jewel-Osco, said on Tuesday the Omicron variant had put a dent on the recovery of its supply chain, and expects the issues to linger for a longer duration.

'There are more supply challenges, and we would expect more supply challenges over the next four to six weeks,' said Vivek Sankaran, Chief Executive Officer, on an earnings call.

Sankaran also said Albertsons had to deal with several product categories being out of stock for a few months.

'I think as a business, we've all learned to manage it. We've all learned to make sure that the stores are still very presentable, give the consumers as much choice as we can get,' Sankaran said during the call.

Even so, he added, Omicron has put 'a bit of a dent' on efforts to improve supply chain gaps. 'We would expect more supply challenges over the next four to six weeks,' Sankaran said.



Analysts and corporate America had previously estimated supply-chain snafus to ease halfway through the year, but a full recovery could now be delayed because of Omicron-related issues, including labor shortages.

'For 2022, we expect supply pressures to likely linger for longer, perhaps until the second half of next year before gradually unwinding,' Deutsche Bank analysts wrote in a note on Tuesday.

Grocery stores are operating with less than their normal workforces, according to the National Grocers Association, and many of its members have less than 50 percent of their normal workforce.

'While there is plenty of food in the supply chain, we anticipate consumers will continue to experience sporadic disruptions in certain product categories as we have seen over the past year and half due to the continued supply and labor challenges,' said Greg Ferrara, the group's president and CEO.

'It's like a Soviet store during 1981. It's horrible,' one man at a Washington DC grocery store told [Fox News](#).

Memes began circulating of Joe Biden, as the hashtag #BareShelvesBiden began trending.

Yet Pete Buttigieg, the Transport Secretary, said the Biden administration was working to minimize further supply chain disruptions.

'As long as the pandemic persists, as long as we are making up for decades of past disinvestment, we are going to see impacts on shipping times and shipping cost,' Buttigieg said, during a press conference at the Port of Long Beach in California - the second busiest container port in the U.S. and the scene of a significant backlog of goods and vessels earlier this year.

'When there is an issue effecting ports here, you will feel it as far away as my Indiana hometown,' said Buttigieg, the former mayor of South Bend, Indiana.

In October, Biden announced the Port of L.A. would begin operating 24/7 - a move that had already been made at the Port of Long Beach. At the time, there were about 70 ships waiting to get into one of the ports.

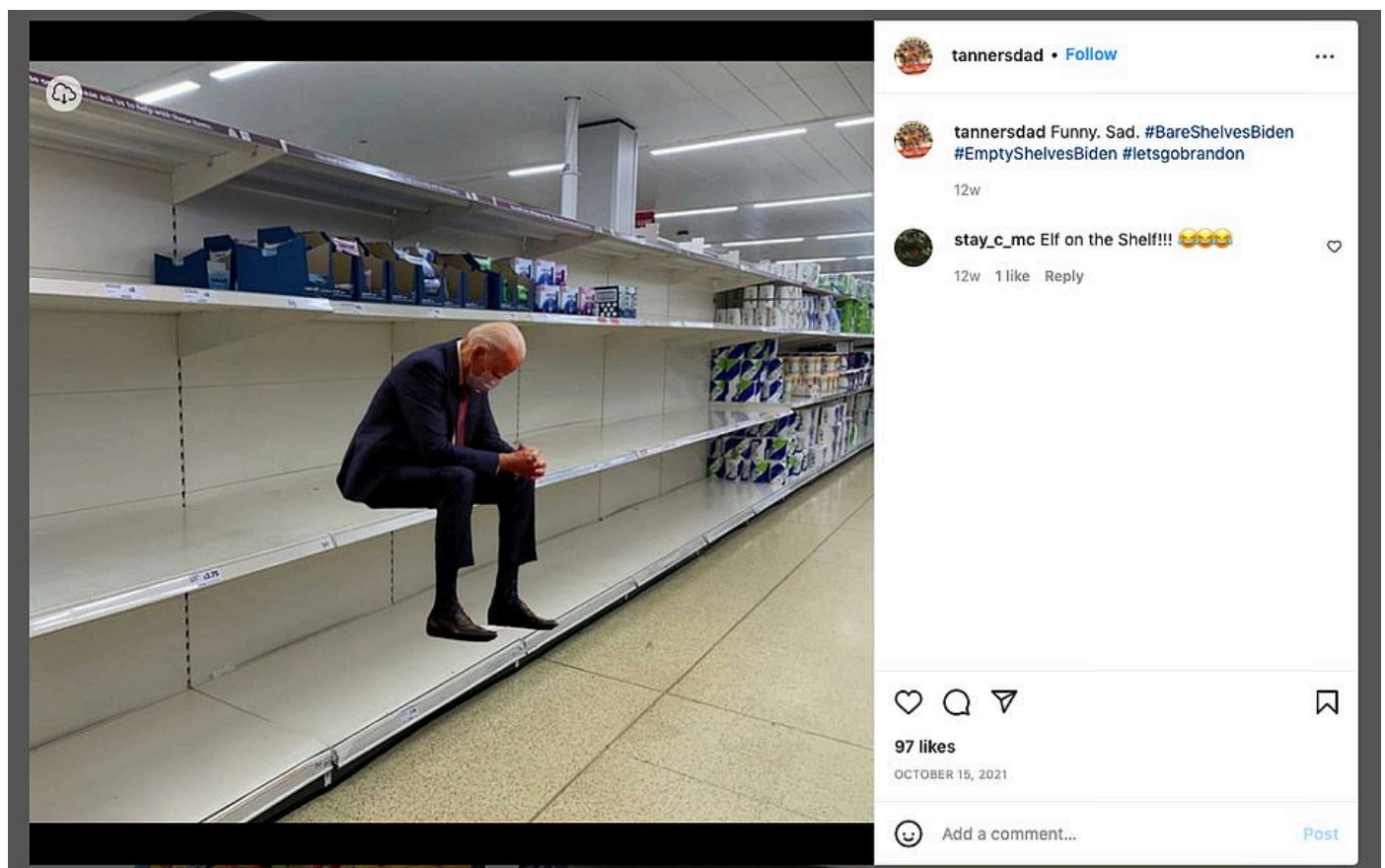
While Buttigieg praised the operations at ports over the holiday season, he

noted that goods have to keep flowing to address the ongoing pandemic.

'Not only is this about the presents under the tree, this is about essential goods like medical goods that are needed in this moment of continued public health challenge,' he said.

The port is considering implementing fines for containers which are left sitting on the docks, in a bid to speed up the transport of goods.

The fines, if implemented, will begin at \$100 per container, increasing by \$100 per container each day. Containers set to be transported by truck will incur fines if they remain at the port for nine days or more. For rail containers, fines will be assessed if they are at the port for three days or more.





Pete Buttigieg, the transport secretary, is seen on Tuesday during a tour of the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, where he admitted that there were issues with the supply chain but said they were working to overcome them



Buttigieg said the Biden administration was 'making up for decades of past disinvestment' and was determined to keep supply chains moving

Empty shelves shown inside of Trader Joes in Brooklyn



Some shelves are seen nearly empty at a grocery store in Washington, D.C. on Monday



The fruit section looks bare in a Washington D.C. grocery on Monday

John Catsimatidis, CEO of the New York City supermarket chain Gristedes, told Fox News that the supply chain problems were severe.

'Omicron is taking its toll at different levels of the supply chain,' he said.

'Whether it's the warehouses, whether it's the selectors, the drivers, the loaders — and as they call in sick, there are interruptions.'

Catsimatidis said that though Gristedes has multiple suppliers, everyone is feeling the impact of the rise in sickouts, and retailers are driving up the prices of beef, eggs and chicken in order to keep product on the shelves for more consumers.

'If they normally sell 10 million pounds of chicken, they figure if they raise the

price 10, 20 cents, some people will buy less chicken and the people that really want to buy the chicken, the chicken will be there for them to buy,' he explained.

Though, he warned that as supply continues to be squeezed, some products may take longer to get to supermarket shelves.

Catsimatidis also said the rising cost of oil is also having a dramatic impact on the price of food and called on the Biden administration to seek out ways to cut the price of gas.



Bare shelves greeted shoppers at this Washington D.C. supermarket on Monday



The nation's capital was feeling the shortages, as seen in a supermarket on Monday



Bread aisle shelves at a Target are seen nearly empty as the U.S. continues to experience supply chain disruptions in Washington D.C. on Sunday



Loaves of bread were scarce for shoppers at this Target in Washington D.C. on Sunday



A beef display case is seen nearly empty at a Giant Food grocery store in Washington D.C. on Sunday



Only a few bottles of water remain at this supermarket in Washington D.C. on Monday



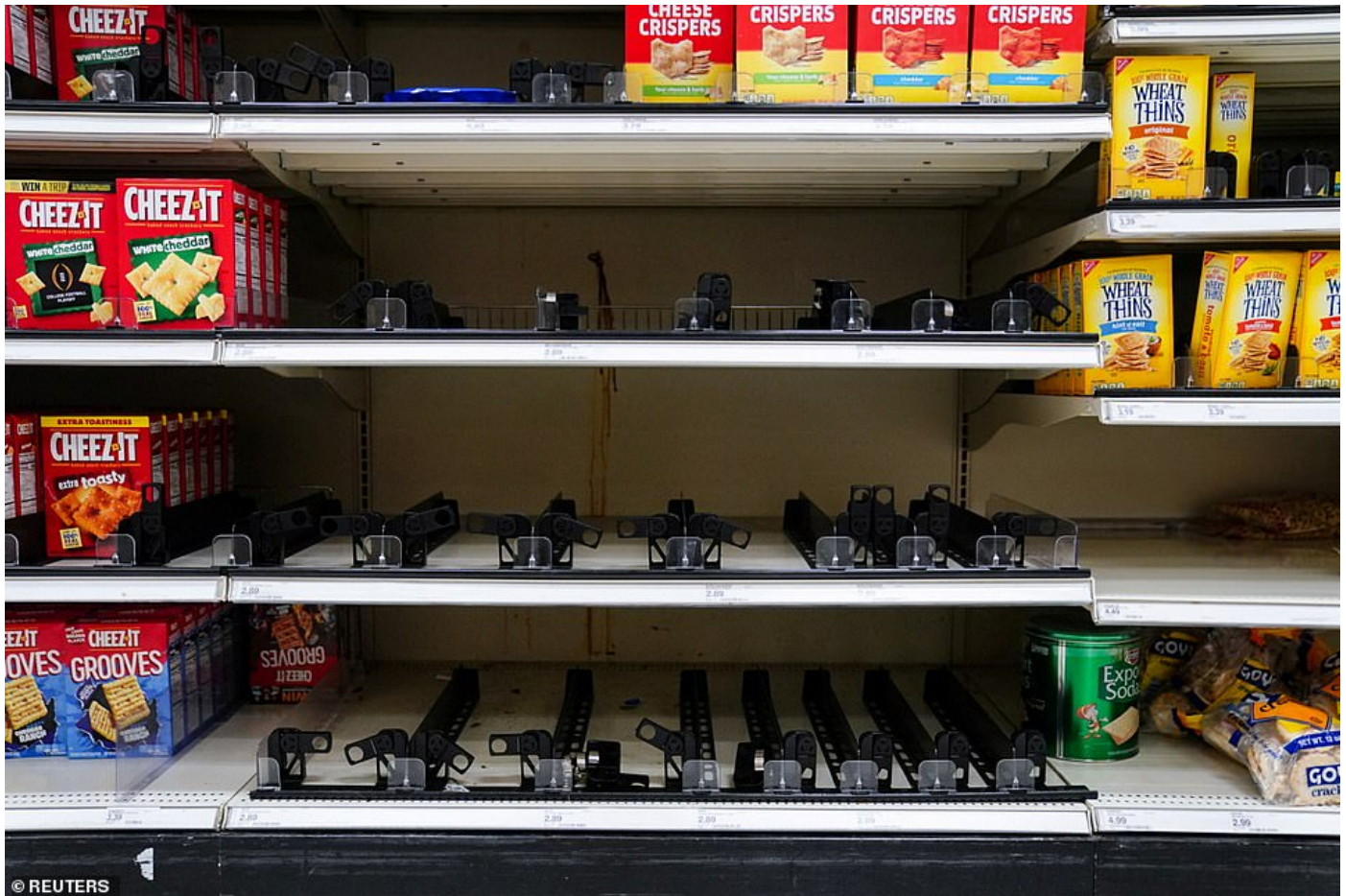
Empty chiller shelves at a Giant supermarket in Alexandria, Virginia on Sunday



Flashback to March 2020: Toilet paper is once again sold out at stores across the US, including this Target store in Washington D.C. seen on Saturday



Pharmacy racks are seen empty in a CVS as the U.S. continues to experience supply chain disruptions in Washington on Sunday



A portion of shelves in the cracker section are seen nearly empty at a Target in Washington D.C. on Sunday

Larry, another D.C. shopper, told Fox: 'Whatever it is, I know they need to hurry up and get this straightened out because people will be starving. It's going to get rough if it keeps on continuing like that.'

Zenatta, another shopper, said that she had been to several stores in the DC area, and shelves were bare everywhere.

'A lot of the stores have been down like this,' she said.

'I think that we're about to have a food shortage, everything's pretty empty.'

Another woman, Megan, told the site that her friend warned her not to shop at a local Trader Joe's.

'I also had a friend who came before me and said, don't even bother coming in. They don't have any trucks. Nobody's been able to get what they need,' Megan said.

Phil Lempert, an industry analyst and editor of SuperMarketGuru.com, told [CNN](#) that it was a perfect storm of factors.

'From farms to food makers to grocery stores, it's across the board,' said Lempert.

'During the pandemic, these operations have had to implement social distancing protocols and they're not really built for that and it has impacted production.'

He said that a shortage of truck drivers was compounding the problem.

'The trucking industry has an aging workforce on top of a shortage.'

'It's really been a problem for the last several years.'

Severe weather in recent weeks has contributed to the issue, Lempert said - but some of the climatic issues were not short term.

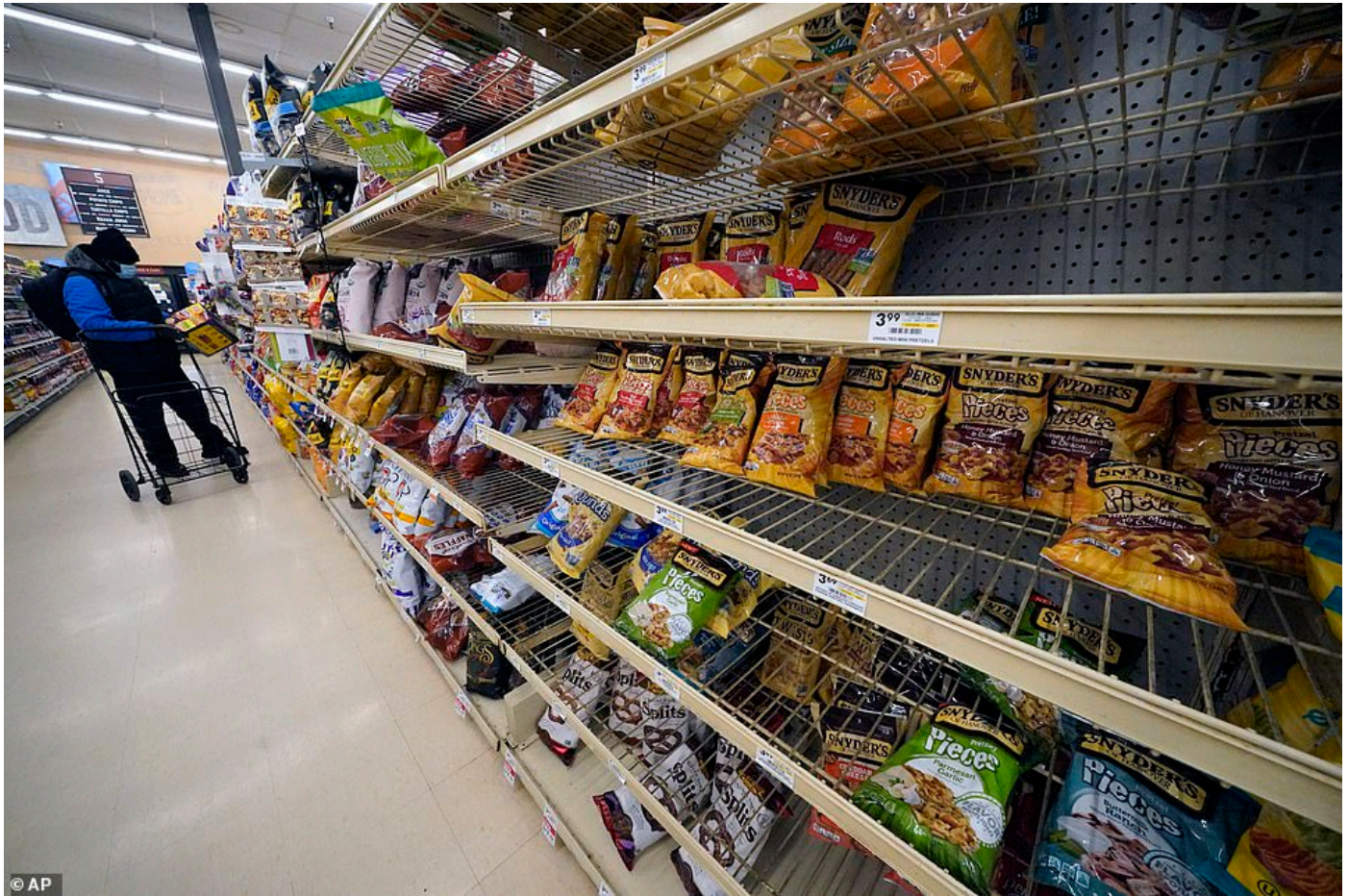
'Fires and droughts are damaging crops such as wheat, corn and soybean in the US and coffee crops in Brazil,' he said. 'We can't ignore it.'

And he added that the pandemic had made people more used to cooking at home.

'We don't want to keep eating the same thing and are trying to vary home cooking. As we do that, we're buying even more food products,' he said.



Shelves that held Chef Boyardee products are partially empty at a grocery in Pittsburgh on Tuesday



A shopper looks at snack food on partially stocked shelves at a grocery in Pittsburgh on Tuesday