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Colonial Pipeline CEO Tells Why He Paid Hackers a \$4.4 Million Ransom

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May 19, 2021



A cyberattack on the U.S.'s largest fuel pipeline on May 7 forced a shutdown that triggered a spike in gas prices and shortages in parts of the Southeast. WSJ explains just how vulnerable the nation's critical energy infrastructure is to attack. Photo illustration: Liz Ornitz/WSJ

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The operator of the Colonial Pipeline learned it was in trouble at daybreak on May 7, when an employee found a ransom note from hackers on a control-room computer. By that night, the company's chief executive officer came to a difficult conclusion: He had to pay.

Joseph Blount, CEO of Colonial Pipeline Co., told The Wall Street Journal that he authorized the ransom payment of \$4.4 million because executives were unsure how badly the cyberattack had breached its systems, and consequently, how long it would take to bring the pipeline back.

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