Military faces limitations in how it can respond to coronavirus

By Robert Burns
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon is already helping combat the coronavirus outbreak in the United States and is considering ways to do more. But the military faces limits. Its health care system is geared more toward handling combat casualties than infectious diseases. And there are logistical and legal concerns about expanding the military’s role in civilian affairs, such as tasking it with enforcing quarantines. Defense officials also want to be careful not to do anything to weaken its ability to defend the nation.

At the request of the Department of Health and Human Services, the Pentagon has made housing available at four military bases for some passengers taken from the Grand Princess cruise ship, which was hit with a cluster of coronavirus cases. It also has made available housing at other bases for people entering the U.S. at certain civilian airports and needing monitoring.

At those bases, the people being given housing are cared for by civilian agencies, not the military.

Also, Army scientists are researching and testing vaccines for the coronavirus, in coordination with civilian agencies.

The most extensive role for the military thus far is by the National Guard, which is called into combat
Amazon seeks to hire 100K for surge in orders

By Joseph Pisani
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Amazon said Monday that it needs to hire 100,000 people across the U.S. to keep up with a crush of orders as the coronavirus spreads and keeps more people at home, shopping online.

The online retailer said that it will also temporarily raise pay by $2 an hour through the end of April for hourly employees. That includes workers at its warehouses, delivery centers and Whole Foods grocery stores, all of whom make at least $15 an hour. Employees in the United Kingdom and other European countries will get a similar raise.

“We are seeing a significant increase in demand, which means our labor needs are unprecedented for this time of year,” said Dave Clark, who oversees Amazon’s warehouse and delivery network.

Amazon said this weekend that it needs to hire 100,000 for its surge in orders,

The Seattle-based company said that the new job openings are for a mix of full-time and part-time positions and include delivery drivers and warehouse workers, who pack and ship orders to shoppers.

Amazon said that a surge of orders is putting its operations under pressure. It warned shoppers that it could take longer than the usual two days to get packages. It also said that it was sold out of many household cleaning supplies and is working to get more in stock.

The Seattle-based company said that the new job openings are for a mix of full-time and part-time positions and include delivery drivers and warehouse workers, who pack and ship orders to shoppers.

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Afghan officials’ standoff threatens peace deal

BY PAMELA CONSTABLE
The Washington Post

KABUL, Afghanistan — The most dangerous place in the Afghan capital today isn’t under threat from Taliban or Islamic State insurgents. A single building near the presidential palace, bristling with guns, has become ground zero in a surreal war of nerves between two civilian politicians both claiming to be the country’s legitimate leader.

Just a short walk from the compound of President Ashraf Ghani, the incumbent whose re-election was announced last month, gunmen in armored vehicles guard the smaller palace of his archrival Abdullah Abdullah, who insists he was cheated out of victory and is forming a parallel government. Across the street, gunmen guard the offices of Abdurrashid Dostom, a former army general now allied with Abdullah, who has reoccupied the compound he once used as a vice president under Ghani.

No shots have been fired, giving the confrontation an eerie, stage-managed quality. But as the standoff drags into its second week, many Afghans fear the slightest incident could ignite a violent conflagration between rival camps, plunging the country into chaos and dooming planned negotiations between the government and the Taliban to end Afghanistan’s 18-year war. The insurgents have vowed to continue attacks if no settlement is reached.

“All the cards are in the Taliban’s hands now,” said Zalmai Rassoul, a former Afghan national security adviser. “If there is no breakthrough within the next week or two, the entire situation starts happening that makes things spin out of control.”

Violence erupted between armed Ghani and Abdullah supporters, he predicted, “within days the Taliban will take several provinces, and this time the United States won’t stop them. At the moment, I am very pessimistic.”

Aides to Ghani said there are still hopes for rapprochement between the warring factions, but so far Abdullah and Dostom, his most powerful backer, have refused offers to switch sides. Dostom, a former warlord who commands a large armed following among ethnic minority Uzbeks, was offered the country’s highest military rank but has refused to budge.

Ghani has said little about the standoff since March 9, when he and Abdullah held competing inauguration ceremonies at the same time a block apart. He has postponed naming a Cabinet and refrained from using force to clear the contested city block. Abdullah has pressed on, naming his own governors in several provinces, but Ghani’s team is continuing to meet privately with intermediaries in hope that he will eventually accept a compromise.

“This is a very unfortunate situation, given the peace process that is very fragile and could get derailed,” said an adviser to Ghani, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive topic. “The Taliban is next door, and the public is angry and fearful. But we think there is still room to bargain. Abdullah and his people know that if things get out of control, nobody can put them back. It will be a disaster for Afghanistan for many years to come.”

Others say Abdullah, diplomatic by nature, is now stuck out on a limb, having enlisted hard-line ethnic minority bosses to bolster him in his grudge match against Ghani, who defeated him in fraud-marred elections in 2014 and 2019. Last time, the two rivals were forced into a tense power-sharing arrangement under U.S. mediation; this time, despite the hasty patching-up efforts underway, the idea is anathema to both politicians.

For most Afghans, there are far worse concerns. This week’s standoff has become the latest jolt to a nation increasingly isolated as the coronavirus, which has been constantly in the news here as it ravages more developed countries, has now started striking in Afghanistan, a poor country with inadequate health facilities.

“Everyone is worried,” said Abid Shereza, 45, who runs a grocery while his wife teaches school. “We have corona, and the Taliban, and the same nephews and nieces taking sides who once fired rockets at our houses.

“We want peace and calm to bring progress. We want one president, not two,” he said. “We want good educated leaders, not a bad king on every corner. We want to move forward, not back. But with the Americans leaving, who will help us now?”

Most people interviewed said they preferred Ghani over Abdullah, but several said the difference hardly mattered now, compared to the far more important risk that the current power struggle between the two rivals will delay negotiations between Afghan and Taliban leaders. Those talks were scheduled to begin this week, but most say we are already sidetracked by a dispute over the proposed mass release of Taliban prisoners.

Iraq: Strikes on bases hosting coalition troops have become regular event

FROM FRONT PAGE

State officials are now in the crosshairs of Iraqi militia groups backing Tehran. Militia rocket strikes on bases hosting coalition troops have become a regular occurrence and already brought the U.S. and Iran to the brink of war.

Last week in Iraq, the U.S. launched its second wave of air strikes targeting the Iran-backed Kataib Hezbollah group in the space of three months, after two American and one British service members were killed in suspected militia rocket attacks on Camp Taji, an Iraqi military base north of Baghdad.

The U.S. Defense Department said that airstrike had targeted five weapons storage facilities linked to the Iran-backed Kataib Hezbollah group, to “degrade” its ability to launch future strikes. But a day later, Camp Taji was hit by another salvo of rockets, wounding two Iraqi and three U.S. servicemen.

A newly-announced group calling itself Usbat al-Thairen, or the League of Revolutionaries, on Sunday claimed responsibility for the strike. “We rejoice in the fear that we have struck in the chests of the occupying enemy as a result of our quality operations,” the group said in a video statement circulated on Telegram. “This operation is only the beginning and the end is soon to come.”

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo discussed the attacks with Iraq’s Prime Minister, Adel Abdul-Mahdi during a phone call Saturday, according to a statement.

“Secretary Pompeo underscored that the groups responsible for these attacks must be held accountable,” said a statement. “The U.S. would not tolerate attacks and threats to American lives.”

The U.S.-led coalition mission in Iraq said in January 2019 that Iran-backed paramilitary groups representing the same ethnic and regional tenors as the performance group had seized a third of the country and seized swaths of neighboring Syria as well. The groups that are now targeting American bases were once part of the same individuals, the same ethnic and regional tenors, and the same potential for the Taliban to fill the breach and seize power.

Two other factors are adding to the sense of anxiety. One is the looming withdrawal of U.S. as part of a recently signed U.S. deal with the Taliban, the declining international interest in their country’s fate. The other is the coronavirus, which has been constantly in the news here as it ravages more developed countries and is now starting to strike in Afghanistan, a poor country with inadequate health facilities.

“I am very pessimistic,” said Zalmai Rassoul, a former Afghan national security adviser. “If there is no breakthrough within the next week or two, the entire situation starts happening that makes things spin out of control.”

“I don’t like the idea of a civil war,” said a U.S. diplomat who spoke on the condition of anonymity. “We don’t see an end in sight.”

Most people interviewed said they preferred Ghani over Abdullah, but several said the difference hardly mattered now, compared to the far more important risk that the current power struggle between the two rivals will delay negotiations between Afghan and Taliban leaders. Those talks were scheduled to begin this week, but most say we are already sidetracked by a dispute over the proposed mass release of Taliban prisoners.
Navy looking to build eSports team in bid to reach Gen Z

Stars and Stripes

A new Navy recruiting effort is getting underway just in time to reach prospective recruits at an appropriate social distance – through online streaming video games and competitions.

The Navy is following the Army’s lead in launching a video gaming team. As of Sunday, any petty officer looking to add a Navy eSports jersey to their sea bag can apply.

Members of the team, dubbed Goats&Glory, will practice, stream and compete from a facility in Tennessee “specifically designed” for their mission, the Navy said in an administrative message last month.

“Centennials are moving into digital spaces for most of their content consumption and social interactions,” the statement said. “The eSports domain is one of the most popular and vibrant online arenas to date.”

The application process and more detailed requirements are outlined at www.cnmc.navy.mil/ESPORTS/index-esports.htm.

Marine officer, NCO fired three months after rifles went missing

Stars and Stripes

By Caitlin M. Kenney

WASHINGTON — The commander and the sergeant major of a Marine battalion at Camp Lejeune, N.C., have been fired nearly three months after two rifles went missing from the unit, the Marine Corps announced.

Lt. Col. Clinton Kappel and Sgt. Maj. Elson Aviles of the 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment were relieved Thursday by Maj. Gen. David Furness, the commander of the 2nd Marine Division, “due to a loss of trust and confidence,” according to a division statement.

In December, two rifles from the battalion went missing during a training exercise, according to news reports. The rifles are still missing and the investigation is ongoing, Naval Criminal Investigative Service spokesman Jeff Houston said Tuesday.

Firing the battalion’s leadership is “taken seriously and with the intent of ensuring a given unit’s continued success in future operations,” according to the division statement.

Kappel took command of 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment on Sept. 20. He enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1996 and commissioned in 2001. He had previously deployed twice to Iraq and once to Afghanistan, according to his official biography.

Aviles enlisted as a combat engineer in the Marine Corps in 1997 and has deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria, according to his official biography.

Lt. Col. Ryan Gordinier has taken command of the battalion, but nobody has been chosen to fill the sergeant major position, according to the division statement.

The 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment is an infantry unit with about 900 Marines and sailors, said Lt. Dan Linfante, a spokesman for the 2nd Marine Division.

Camp Lejeune is the largest amphibious base on the East Coast. It is home to 37,000 active-duty Marines and sailors, the largest concentration of Marines in the country, according to Camp Lejeune spokesman Nat Falty.

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Special operations gunship joins Navy drill in Persian Gulf

Stars and Stripes

By Chad Garland

Special operations gunship directly supported maritime operations in 2019 for the first time during a joint exercise with Navy ships and a patrol aircraft last week, the U.S. military said.

The live-fire exercise came days before coalition deaths in Iraq renewed concerns about Iranian threats in the region.

The AC-130H Stinger II from Special Operations Command Central operated with Cyclone-class coastal patrol ships and P-8A Poseidon aircraft from the Navy’s 5th Fleet in a bid to improve U.S. capabilities to respond to surface threats.

Incorporating the gunship “significantly enhances our ability to detect, track, engage and defeat surface threats in order to control water space in the Arabian Gulf,” said Capt. Peter Mirisola, commander of Destroyer Squadron 50 and Combined Task Force 55 based out of Manama, Bahrain.

The AC-130H is outfitted with 30 mm, 105 mm and precision-guided munitions to provide close air support to troops on the ground and carry out air interdiction missions.

While the exercise on March 8 and 9 marked the first time that particular airframe has been integrated into maritime operations in the Persian Gulf, Navy officials cited joint operations during the “Tanker War” of the late 1980s as a precursor.

Special operations MH-6 Little Bird helicopters were similarly incorporated into Operation Earnest Will from 1987 to 1988, when U.S. Navy ships escorted Kuwaiti tankers to protect them from Iraqi attacks during the Iran-Iraq War, the statement said.

A series of attacks on tankers in the Persian Gulf last summer raised concerns of a renewed tanker war, as the Trump administration raised the threat of Iran after withdrawing from the nuclear deal negotiated under the Obama administration and Iran threatened to block the Strait of Hormuz.

The waterway, a thoroughfare for much of the world’s oil, is one of three strategic choke points in the 5th Fleet’s 2.5-million-square-mile area of operations, which also includes the Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman, Red Sea and parts of the Indian Ocean.

Since last summer, the U.S. and its allies have stepped up maritime patrols and the Pentagon has deployed more troops, aircraft and air defense capabilities to the region. The U.S. has also accused Tehran or its proxies of attacking Saudi Arabian oil facilities, smuggling weapons to Syrian rebels in Yemen and striking Iraqi installations housing U.S. and coalition forces.

The latest fatal rocket strike in Iraq last week killed two American troops and a British soldier at Camp Taji, north of Baghdad, leading the U.S. to respond with airstrikes on the Iran-backed Kataeb Hezbollah militia.

The exchange of fire was similar to a series of attacks in January that culminated with an Iranian ballistic missile strike on a U.S.-occupied base in western Iraq.

Following last week’s fatal rocket attack and U.S. response, Defense Secretary Mark Esper authorized U.S. Central Command’s request to keep two aircraft carrier strike groups in the region’s waters to bolster security and deter Iranian aggression.

CENTCOM boss Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie told Pentagon reporters Thursday that “U.S. Central Command is well-postured to defend our forces around the region and respond to any further aggression against our forces,” he said. “We have the flexibility, the capability and the will to respond to any threat.”

The following day, a second rocket strike at Camp Taji wounded three coalition troops and two Iraqi security forces members.

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DOD rejects calls to stop training recruits

BY DAN LAMOTHE
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon has rejected proposals from senior U.S. military officials to temporarily halt sending new recruits to training amid the coronavirus pandemic, deciding that the process must continue to avoid harming the military, according to a planning document and three defense officials.

The plans would have paused the training of thousands of new recruits who join the military each month and marked a major widening in the Defense Department’s attempt to stop infection. On Friday night, the Pentagon cut virtually all domestic travel for the next eight weeks but said last new recruit training would continue.

Defense Secretary Mark Esper met with the service secretaries and top officers Monday to talk about training, said the Pentagon’s chief spokesman, Jonathan Hoffman.

“The mission was made to continue with training missions while taking precautionary measures to limit any possible spread,” Hoffman said. “This will be continued to evaluate mission-critical requirements are met and our people are kept safe.”

The decision came after discussions over the weekend about how to proceed in facilities that are notoriously susceptible to disease outbreaks due to the proximity in which recruits live and train.

Army officials considered a 30-day freeze on sending additional recruits to basic training. Navy officials, citing the Army’s idea, suggested a modified version of a “hybrid” plan, in which new recruits would stop reporting but recruits who already had begun training would finish, according to the planning document, which was drafted within the Navy and obtained by The Washington Post.

Other senior military officials raised concerns about the negative effects that stopping training could have over time as other service members leave active duty, said two defense officials, who like some others, spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue. The Navy plan raised the possibility that the service might need to consider involuntarily keeping some current sailors on active duty through a policy like “stop loss,” but it was rejected, the officials said.

Former Vice President Joe Biden, speaking during a Democratic presidential debate on Sunday, suggested that the U.S. military could be used to build field hospitals to treat patients, citing U.S. involvement in the Ebola crisis in West Africa in 2014.

Air Force Brig. Gen. Paul Friedrichs, a doctor in the Pentagon’s Joint Staff, acknowledged that those “tent hospitals” still exist and vary in size, but said they are not designed to treat active diseases.

“The challenge is, they’re designed to treat combat patients and trauma cases,” he said. “What we’re trying to be very careful of is not overpromising. We want to be factual about what we have.”

Respond: In an extreme emergency, DOD plan allows for military to impose quarantines

FROM FRONT PAGE

being called up by governors in several states to provide a range of support. More than 1,600 National Guard members have been called up so far to help with food transportation, and numerous other logistical efforts.

President Donald Trump has not federalized the National Guard as was done after the 9/11 attacks.

U.S. Northern Command, which is responsible for defending the U.S. homeland, said in a statement Monday that any Defense Department assistance to the coronavirus crisis “would be secondary to our primary mission to defend the United States.”

A range of planning efforts cover scenarios which include aiding in the establishment of medical treatment sites, providing shelter for displaced persons, assisting with food transportation, and numerous other logistical efforts.

What the military is considering:

There are many ways the military could assist in the COVID-19 crisis, but few decisions have been made.

Air Force Brig. Gen. Paul Friedrichs, the top doctor for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters Monday that defense officials are trying to identify “what’s within the realm of the possible,” while also spelling out what the trade-offs for that would be.

For example, Friedrichs said, if large numbers of National Guard members were mobilized for medical assistance, they would be taken away from their civilian jobs, which in some cases translates to health services already engaged in fighting COVID-19.

The military could deploy mobile hospitals, but they generally are designed to deal with combat casualties, not infectious disease.

Military hospitals include 36 fixed hospitals inside the U.S.; they could be used for the COVID-19 emergency, but in most cases they are relatively small. They exist to support active-duty military members, their families and some military retirees.

Some have questioned why the military cannot contribute to the civilian stockpile of ventilators, which might be in short supply in the weeks ahead. Jonathan Hoffman, the Pentagon’s chief of staff, declined to say how many ventilators the Pentagon has in stock.

Asked why, he replied, “Because the number deals with our deployable medical capability, which is a number that we’re not prepared to give out.”

The Pentagon also has two hospital ships, the USNS Comfort and the USNS Mercy. They can be equipped to perform surgeries and provide other medical services, but the medical profession people who would be called on to staff the ships are currently performing those roles at domestic military hospitals and clinics or private medical facilities.

What the military could do in an extreme emergency:

The Defense Department has a detailed pandemic response plan that lays out the myriad things the military can do if requested, including a last-resort role in helping to impose quarantines and border restrictions.

The military could be called on to help establish “mass casualty” treatment sites, provide shelter for displaced persons, and help provide food deliveries and mortuary tasks.

The military could also provide logistics, communications and other support for law enforcement and the National Guard.

Drafted and overhauled several times in recent years, the military’s plan is closely guarded and officials declined to discuss details publicly.

Officials, however, say that there is a broad assumption that local law enforcement, border control officers and the National Guard under the governors’ command would be the first line of defense to stem the spread of any virus through travel restrictions at the borders and along state lines or outbreak areas.

The plan assumes that intelligence oversight laws and the Posse Comitatus Act would remain in effect. Under that Civil War-era act, federal troops are prohibited from performing domestic law enforcement actions such as making arrests, seizing property or searching people.

In extreme cases, however, the president can invoke the Insurrection Act, also from the Civil War period, which allows the use of active-duty or National Guard troops for law enforcement.

Under the military’s pandemic plan, the key goals are to defend the country, maintain the force and provide whatever support is needed to protect the national infrastructure and ensure that the government continues to function.

Nature of the threat:

For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia.

The vast majority of people recover from the new virus. According to the World Health Organization, people with mild illness recover in about two weeks, while those with more severe illness may take three to six weeks to recover.
US bases in Japan curtail additional services

By Caitlin Doornbos
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Fitness classes are postponed, some religious services will move online and bingo games are canceled as U.S. military bases across Japan adapt to everyday life in the time of coronavirus.

Guards at the gates to U.S. bases started a hands-off policy for checking ID cards. At Yokota Air Base in western Tokyo, the Samurai Fitness Center on Tuesday canceled some group exercise classes and intramural sports and put the steam and sauna rooms off limits. At Yokosuka Naval Base, the Morale, Welfare and Recreation office canceled bingo.

Officials with U.S. Forces Japan, headquartered at Yokota, at a Facebook town hall Tuesday, told viewers to stay flexible, expect changes and stay in touch with unit commanders for more information.

“The situation is evolving, and policy is changing,” said Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Richard Winageardner Jr., the USFJ top enlisted leader. “Keep talking to your commanders and medical providers.”

A staff member at Yokota’s child development center was to be tested for possible exposure to the virus, according to an official base Facebook post Tuesday. The center had no comment pending the result.

No one connected to the U.S. military in Japan, service members, Defense Department civilian employees or their families has tested positive for the virus, said Maj. Allen Fisher, the Yokota public health emergency officer, during the town hall.

“We have testing being done and negative results are coming in on a daily basis,” he said.

At Yokosuka, chapel services were canceled for the foreseeable future, according to a Monday announcement on the chapel’s official Facebook page. Chaplains are developing alternatives such as pre-recorded worship services for congregation members to access online.

Tuesday, Yokosuka moved the base orientation class for newly arrived service members and their families, usually held over three days in person, to an online session, said base spokesman Ran dall Baascon. Orientation briefings were recorded ahead of time in anticipation of the change.

Elective dental services such as teeth cleaning, “orthodontic consultations and routine operative procedures” were suspended Tuesday, according to a Navy Hospital Yokosuka public health notice issued Monday. At Yokota, the 374th Medical Group has been postponing elective surgeries until further notice.

Installations across Japan also began conducting “no-touch” ID checks at base gates, according to Navy and Air Force statements.

Instead of handing over ID cards to security personnel, cardholders are asked to hold up their IDs for inspection, then flip them around to allow the guard to scan the bar code.

“This change in procedures is precautionary to protect the health and safety of all visitors and Navy personnel,” Navy Forces Japan spokesman Lt. Cmndr. David Levy said in an email Monday to Stars and Stripes.

The Friendship Day 2020 celebration at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, which annually hosts 200,000 Japanese residents, was canceled Monday by base officials.

Cancelling the 44th annual air show, scheduled for May 3, was a joint decision between the U.S. military and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force’s Fleet Wing 31, all based at Iwakuni, according to a press release Monday.

Misawa Air Base created a “support cell” to help service members and their families navigate the Defense Department restrictions on travel, the air base’s official Facebook page said Sunday.

DOD on Friday imposed a “stop movement” order that froze temporary duty assignments and permanent changes of station for 60 days. A similar ban on U.S. domestic travel was implemented Monday.

At Naval Air Facility Atsugi, the personal property processing office stopped taking in-person appointments on Tuesday. Instead, customers should seek help scheduling shipments using the move.mil website, according to a post on the official base Facebook site Tuesday.

At Yokota, in addition to the gym restrictions, the base discontinued all self-serve food options such as buffets and catered events at the enlisted and officer clubs and other base facilities, according to a post Saturday on the official base Facebook page. All dining facilities on base have also increased the space between tables to encourage social distancing.

Guam closes base schools

By Dave Ornauer
Stars and Stripes

Authorities with Defense Department schools on Guam reversed course after one day and decided Tuesday to suspend classes until further notice to stem the spread of coronavirus, according to Joint Region Marianas.

Concerns expressed by military families and updated recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention prompted the Department of Defense Education Activity to close Guam schools starting Wednesday, according to the statement from Joint Region Marianas. Students will have access to online instruction starting Monday through April 3, the end of the school year’s third quarter.

“Families will receive more information regarding online learning assignments and expectations from their child’s school,” the release stated.

The move came a day after DODEA and Joint Region Marianas announced the schools would remain open, even though the Naval Base Guam commander had declared a health emergency.
Kaiserslautern tightens rules on businesses

By Marcus Kloeckner and Jennifer San
Stars and Stripes

KAIERSLAUTERN, Germany — The home to the largest U.S. military community overseas has announced widespread restrictions and closures, similar to measures taken across Germany to stem the spread of the coronavirus.

In Kaiserslautern, the largest city in an area where about 50,000 Defense Department personnel and their families live, city officials late Monday ordered numerous businesses to close and banned gatherings of more than 75 people until July 10.

While a long list of shops can remain open — grocery stores, beverage markets, pharmacies, drugstores, banks, post offices, gas stations, hairdressers, laundromats, the improvement and construction supplies stores and wholesale suppliers — other places where people come into close contact must close.

They include gymnasiums, playgrounds, bars, pubs, discotheques, concert halls, museums, swimming pools, amusement parks, bakeries and outlets such as clothing stores.

Restaurants in Kaiserslautern can stay open, but only between the hours of 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. for in-house dining. Tables in eateries must be at least 6½ feet apart from each other, with no more than four people seated at one table at the same time. Outside of the allowed opening hours, eateries may offer takeout and delivery services, the rules say.

“This situation is not to be underestimated,” Kaiserslautern Mayor Klaus Weichel said.

As of Monday, no person who comes into the country from abroad is allowed into Offenbach, but only about 750 miles away.

The city measures came after the government in Berlin on Monday restricted restaurant hours, banned long queues at grocery stores and ordered “nonessential” businesses to close across the country.

The national restrictions were announced as the number of confirmed coronavirus infections in Germany rose to 6,012 on Monday — an increase of more than 1,100 cases from the previous day, said Robert Koch Institute, the country’s public health agency. There have been 13 deaths in Germany, the agency said.

Schools have closed their doors, and most travelers can’t get into the country because of border closures. Holiday travel and overnight stays in Germany for leisure are also banned.

The coronavirus’ economic impact is being felt throughout the country and particularly in smaller communities like Kaiserslautern, a city of about 100,000 in Germany’s southwest.

At Cafe Susann in the city’s pedestrian area, business has fallen off sharply, said owner Maike Susann Gemba and Dylan Page.

Even if it’s allowed to remain open under the emergency rules, the cafe, which opened in September 2016, might have to close, they said.

“This won’t be worth opening if no one comes,” said Page, an American. “But we would like to support the employees as long as we can. The longer we can stay open and have that little bit of support for the employees, we’ll do that.”

The two women have already taken a number of steps to meet the new rules and try to allay customers’ fears about being exposed to the virus.

“We’ve removed some tables. People can call in an order, we can pack it ahead, and they can come in and pick it up,” said Gemba. “We’re setting up an online store. We have a little stand selling cakes out front for people who are worried about coming inside. We’re thinking about doing deliveries, but it takes time to set up. We maintain strict hygiene standards and practice social distancing.”

“We’ve obeyed all the rules. We’ll try everything … We’ve become inventive to survive. We just need people to come to the cafe,” she said. Even large businesses, like IKEA, are feeling the pain of the restrictions. The Swedish furniture store closed all 53 of its shops in Germany, starting Tuesday.

Sports club practices and group worship are also off-limits. The German government did not say whether those flying the restrictions would face any punishment.

The Army has already put restrictions on off-base hangouts such as hookah lounges, bars and indoor, sit-down restaurants for some of its soldiers in Europe.

The new German rules have a small silver lining, though. In a break with German custom, businesses that are allowed to stay open can also do business on Sunday. But they must keep their facilities clean and keep customers from forming long lines or grouping closely, the federal rules say.

Pentagon’s top 2 civilians separated amid outbreak

By Corey Dickstein
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon on Monday said at least 37 members of the Defense Department community worldwide have tested positive for coronavirus as of Monday morning, including keeping its top two officials separated from each other.

Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Deputy Defense Secretary David Norquist on Monday began limiting the number of people with access to their offices, screening people who enter them, and communicating with each other exclusively via teleconference, according to Jonathan Hoffman, the Pentagon’s chief spokesman.

“We are attempting to put, for lack of a better term, a bubble around the two of them,” Hoffman told reporters at the Pentagon.

As of Monday, no person who works in the Pentagon has tested positive for the virus, he said. But officials determined they needed to take serious measures to protect Esper, Norquist and others considered essential to national security.
Government issues historic restrictions amid outbreak

BY CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AND TIM SULLIVAN
Associated Press

The United States implemented dramatic new restrictions on Americans going out in public, and 7 million people in the San Francisco area were put on a near-total lockdown to control the coronavirus emergency that has walloped the global economy.

Not everyone was adhering to the clampdown, however.

On the same day that the Trump administration called on Americans to not gather in groups of more than 10 people and urged older people to stay home, Arizona, Florida and Illinois went ahead with plans to hold presidential primaries Tuesday. Ohio called off its primary just hours before it was to begin.

At the iconic “Welcome to Las Vegas” sign, there was still a line of 20 to 30 people Monday afternoon waiting to pose for a picture. And beaches on Florida’s Gulf coast near Tampa stayed open, including one that was flooded with spring breakers. Gov. Ron DeSantis said that he would leave it up to communities whether to restrict access to beaches.

“It’s probably not advisable to have spring break gatherings,” he said, “but that people in small groups at the beach is probably OK, he said. “I think the communities can work that out.”

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, a Republican, praised the federal government’s response as he took only limited action amid the outbreak. Unlike other governors of heavily populated states, Abbott has not made explicit calls for limiting mass gatherings.

“Today is not a time to panic,” he said. “It’s not as if we have never been through this before. We’ve been through this many, many times.”

The comments came on the same day that the number of infections in the U.S. climbed to nearly 4,500, with at least 81 deaths, two-thirds of them in hard-hit Washington state. Worldwide, more than 7,100 have died.

With the U.S. economy staggering to a near-halt, the Dow Jones Industrial Average plummeted nearly 3,000 points, or 13%, its biggest one-day percentage loss since the Black Monday crash of 1987.

The rapid work stoppage had Americans fretting about their jobs and their savings, threatened to overwhelm unemployment benefit programs and heightened fears that the country could plunge into a recession.

Elections officials in Arizona, Florida and Illinois said that they were taking precautions to make sure voters could safely cast their ballots, despite widening calls for people to avoid going in public.

A handful of other states already postponed their elections.

As growing public unease over the virus spread was causing disruptions to polling places in some states before they even opened.

“In Pasco County, Fla., the number of poll workers dropping out surged from 20 last week to more than 150 Monday after a case was confirmed in the county.”

“We are at the honest end of the rope in terms of who I can grab and who I can get trained and get deployed,” said Okaloosa County Supervisor of Elections Paul Lux.

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In Illinois, counties were moving polling places out of nursing homes, offering ballot drop-off options for jittery voters and scrambling to find replacements for poll workers canceling at the last minute.

And the city elections commission was begging healthy people to volunteer to work at the polls amid a “tsunami” of cancellations.

“Please, please heed our call and volunteer,” said Marisel Hernandez, the commission’s chair. “Help us.”

Meanwhile, millions of Americans were holed up at home, with many thrown out of work until further notice as the list of businesses forced to close across the U.S. extended to restaurants, bars, gyms and casinos.

Officials in six San Francisco Bay Area counties issued a “shelter in place” order affecting nearly 7 million people, requiring most residents to stay inside and venture out only for food, medicine or exercise for three weeks — the most drastic measure taken yet in the U.S. to curb the spread of the virus.

“I know today’s order is a radical step. It has to be. We need to act now, all of us,” said Grant Colfax, director of the San Francisco Health Department.

Health officials, politicians and business leaders are talking about “social distancing” and “flattening the curve,” or encouraging people to avoid others to slow the spread of the virus and keep U.S. hospitals from being overwhelmed with a sudden deluge of patients.

The shutdowns touched every corner of the country: restaurant and bar employees nationwide, blackjack dealers in Las Vegas, theme park workers in Orlando, Fla., and winery workers in California. At least eight states called on all bars and restaurants to close at least part of the day.

The economy appears to be decelerating at a much faster pace than during the 2008 financial meltdown.

“‘This is like an avalanche. It’s all happening at once,’” said Heidi Shierholz, senior economist at the Economic Policy Institute. “And no one knows how long it’s going to last.”

Trump addresses virus’ huge impact on US economy

WASHINGTON — Ahead of an expected surge in coronavirus cases, President Donald Trump on Tuesday moved to blunt the economic fallout, promising sweeping action to save the U.S. economy, fundamentally altered by a push for a nation to stay home.

As the global markets fluctuated amid fears of a recession, the president conferred with tourism executives and club leaders, retailers and suppliers. His administration is expected to propose a roughly $850 billion emergency economic stimulus to address the free-fall while considering checks to American workers trying to make their way in an economy deeply unsettled by the outbreak.

U.S. businesses large and small are reeling from shutdowns, cancellations and public fear about the virus as the number of cases worldwide continued to rise. The stock market tumbled higher on Wall Street on Tuesday, a day after plunging to their worst losses in more than three decades.

And the president again urged Americans to follow sweeping guidelines that for the next 14 days will temporarily rewrite the norms of society, including for older residents to stay home while all people should avoid gatherings of more than 10 at their local restaurants and bars.

“By making shared sacrifices, we can protect the health of our people and our economy and I think our economy will come back very, very strong,” Trump said.

“If we do this right our country and the world frankly, but our country can be rolling again ... very quickly. We can protect the health of our people and we can protect our economy.”

Trump, maintaining his newly somber tone about the crisis enveloping the globe, urged Americans to work from home and urged the nation’s cities and states to issue restrictions to promote distancing in line with new federal guidelines.

He promised a dramatic increase in access to coronavirus tests, ventilators, hospital beds and access to telehealth services. His administration said it would coordinate responses with the states, would push for construction workers to give masks to health care workers and, if needed, use the Army Corps of Engineers to build more hospital space.

Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin, the administration’s lead negotiator with Congress, said tax filings could be delayed and vowed that the stock markets would remain open but that hours could be shortened. Officials said assistance could be offered to the airlines, cruise ships and airplane manufacturers. The president vowed to maintain the safety of elections while voters in three states went to the polls Tuesday even as Ohio postponed its primary.

Trump later warned that the virus, an outbreak like the nation has never seen in more than a century, would be defeated.

One day we’re going to stand up here and say ‘We won.’” Trump told the White House press corps, when he was sitting in alternating seats to maintain a safe distance. “As sure as you’re sitting there we’re going to say that.

The president’s declaration of resolve came a day after, for the first time, he acknowledged that the pandemic may send the economy into a recession and suggested that the nation may be dealing with the virus until “July or August.””

The president and his team on Tuesday cautioned Americans to prepare for a lengthy change to their daily lives as they taught the public more than a month before the impact of his 15-day guidelines can even be measured.

Trump said his coronavirus task force had considered, but was not ready to implement, any sort of domestic travel ban but he urged Americans to forgo trips even to places not heavily impacted, saying, “Enjoy your homes, enjoy your living room.”

Dr. Deborah Birx, who is coordinating the federal response to the virus, on Tuesday called for the “army of millennials” to lead the charge in fighting back against the coronavirus. Birx told ABC’s “Good Morning America” that the nation needs millennials doing everything they can, including staying home from bars, to protect themselves from getting infected but also safeguarding their parents and grandparents.

Trump’s tone Tuesday was far less optimistic than his earlier assurances that the pandemic could be over in weeks.

His admission that the outbreak may send the economy into a recession was startling for Trump who for two weeks had struck a discordantly optimistic tone about the pandemic that endur- gered his presidency. This week, that upbeat demeanor was gone as he acknowledged the virus was “not under control” in the United States or globally.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia.
World hunkers down as travelers scramble

BY CHRIS BLAKE AND FRANK JORDANS
Associated Press

BERLIN — Tens of millions of people hunkered down in government-ordered lockdowns across Europe Tuesday as borders slammed shut, schools and businesses closed and increasingly drastic restrictions on movement took effect. Others were scrambling to get home, caught up in widespread travel restrictions that aimed to slow the spread of the new coronavirus.

From Southeast Asia to Europe to the Americas, people found their lives upended by lockdowns and social distancing.

Shoppers in Malaysia stood in long lines to stock up at picked-over supermarkets. Commuters in the Philippines waited in huge traffic jams at checkpoints set up to take their temperatures before entering the capital of Manila. Seven counties around San Francisco issued a sweeping shelter-in-place mandate, ordering millions to stay at home and go outside only for food, medicine and essential outings.

In Spain, now the fourth-most infected country, saw infections rise Tuesday by more than 2,000 in one day to 11,178 and virus-related deaths jump by almost 200 to 491. Only China, Italy and Iran have more infections.

With the number of cases worldwide topping 183,000, a surge of patients in Madrid's hospitals has fueled worries across Europe of what lies ahead. Pleas for millions to stay at home and go outside only for food, medicine and essential outings.

There is no easy or quick way out of this extremely difficult situation,” Mark Rutte, the Dutch prime minister, said in the first televised speech by a Dutch leader since 1973.

Airlines across the world have slashed flights due to a plunge in demand but also because many countries have been barring foreign arrivals.

A state television journalist who also is a medical doctor gave the warning: "There is no easy or quick way out of this extremely difficult situation,” Mark Rutte, the Dutch prime minister, said in the first televised speech by a Dutch leader since 1973.

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Brothels closed, so sex workers in a bind

By Frank Jordans
Associated Press

BERLIN — It’s 7 p.m. on a Friday night, a time when Aurel Marx, owner of the brothel on the edge of Berlin, said he ordered staff to hot-wash all towels and sheets, and open the windows more often to let the warm, sticky air escape. Still, customers just weren’t showing up anymore.

“Over the past week, business has gone down by 50%,” Marx said, blaming the decline on the general drop in nightlife that’s occurred since the virus arrived in Berlin.

By Saturday, authorities had pulled the plug entirely, ordering the temporary closure of all entertainment venues, including brothels. The city has registered 632 confirmed cases of COVID-19 so far. Several dozen infections have been traced to bars and nightclubs.

Susanne Bleier Wilp, a German former sex worker and spokeswoman for the Association of Erotic and Sexual Services Providers, or BESD, said the virus has caused fear and uncertainty among the estimated 100,000 to 200,000 sex workers in Germany, where prostitution was largely legalised 20 years ago.

“There are those who are withdrawing from the business entirely at the moment for safety reasons,” Bleier Wilp told The Associated Press. Others are requiring that customers disinfect themselves, she added — a measure that medical experts say is unlikely to effectively stop the spread of the virus during close physical contact.

It wasn’t clear how the closure of brothels would affect independent sex workers, and some have come under criticism for suggesting they will continue working.

Salome Balthus, a sex worker in Berlin, said that most of her colleagues would prefer to stay at home.

“But they know that nobody is going to compensate them for loss of income,” she said on Twitter. “90% of all dates are being cancelled anyway. As always, we’re left to fend for ourselves.”

Unlike regular employees, most sex workers won’t benefit directly from the half-trillion-euro package of loans the German government is making available to companies facing ruin because of the coronavirus outbreak.

“Some workers are employed, not employees,” said a spokesman for the Association of Erotic and Sexual Services Providers. “The government is making available to companies facing ruin because of the coronavirus outbreak.

Distilleries using alcohol to make hand sanitizer

By Michael Rubinkam and Lisa Rathke
Associated Press

NEW TRIPOLI, Pa. — A Pennsylvania distillery owner who grew increasingly angry as he saw the skyrocketing price of hand sanitizer has decided to do something about it: He’s temporarily converting his operation into a production line for the suddenly hard-to-find, goopy, alcohol-based disinfectant.

Eight Oaks Farm Distillery filled its first 20 bottles Monday, a batch destined for charitable groups that need hand sanitizer but haven’t been able to get it due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The family-owned distillery plans to dramatically boost production this week and distribute the bottles to charities as well as offer them to farmers’ markets where it sells its spirits and through its website.

The price: whatever people decide to donate.

“Imagine a national emergen- cy,” said brewery founder Chad Butters. “What’s the right thing to do? The right thing to do is support this community by providing something that is in desperate need. We’ll flood the valley with hand sanitizer and drive that price right down.”

This is not the first time the distillery, just down the street from one of the nation’s largest pediatric cancer organizations, has gone above and beyond to help out during a crisis.

From left, Caitlin Bagenstose, Logan Snyder and his wife Carly Snyder bottle hand sanitizer made at the Eight Oaks Farm Distillery in New Tripoli, Pa., on Monday. Workers experimented with high-proof alcohol and aloe to get just the right consistency.

Eight Oaks was up to, the distillery began hearing from people and groups in need, including one pediatric cancer organization who said they had a regular flu.
Senate extends 3 surveillance authorities

By Mary Clare Jalonick  
Associated Press
WASHINGTON — The Senate has voted to extend, rather than tweak, three surveillance powers that federal law enforcement officials use to fight terrorists, passing the bill back to an absent House and throwing the future of the authorities in doubt.

The 75-day extension pushes off the debate over the surveillance tools as Congress attempts to deal with the economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic.

It is unclear whether the House will accept the temporary extension of the surveillance powers, which lapsed Sunday.

Last week, the House passed a compromise bill negotiated by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy that would renew the authorities and impose new restrictions.

President Donald Trump and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell endorsed the measure, but longtime skeptics of the surveillance tools in the Senate blocked a quick passage.

The House legislation would update the three expiring surveillance provisions, including one that permits the FBI to obtain court orders to collect business records on subjects in national security investigations.

Another, known as the “roving wiretap” provision, permits surveillance on subjects even after they’ve changed phones. The third allows agents to monitor subjects who don’t have ties to international terrorism organizations.

The legislation would scale back some current authorities, such as the government’s access to certain records.

It would also attempt to put stronger checks on some surveillance measures and make the process more transparent.

The 75-day extension pushes off the debate over the surveillance tools as Congress attempts to deal with the economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic.

Idaho bill bans trans girls, women from competition

Associated Press
BOISE, Idaho — An Idaho bill banning transgender girls from competing in women’s sports despite warnings that such a law is unconstitutional went back to the House on Monday after being amended in the Senate.

The Senate voted 21-11 to approve the measure that would apply to all sports teams sponsored by public schools, colleges and universities. A girls’ or women’s team would not be open to transgender students who identify as female.

Backers said that the law is needed because transgender female athletes have physical advantages. They said that allowing transgender women to compete can limit athletic, economic and self-growth opportunities provided through sports made possible by Title IX.

The 1972 law bars sex discrimination in athletic competition for girls and women.

Opponents said that the bill would damage and hurt her reputation and dignity for life,” said Democratic Sen. Michelle Stennett, noting that very young girls would be subject to invasive physical exams. “Beyond the medical inaccuracies, this bill risks harming the physical and emotional health of our children.”

Democratic Sen. Maryanne Jordan said that there was no need for the law because there were no instances of transgender girls or women competing in Idaho sports. She also said that the Idaho High School Activities Association has a policy in place already, as does the NCAA. Both include a requirement for medically prescribed hormone treatment before participating on a girls’ team.
Federal agencies expand telework to staffs

**By Lisa Rein and Missy Ryan**
*The Washington Post*

The Trump administration on Monday directed federal agencies to expand telework to their staffs outside the Washington region as services to the public began to contract to limit the spread of the coronavirus.

After Sunday’s guidance to offer work from home to as many of the 300,000 Washington-area federal employees as they could, the White House budget office told agencies to offer remote work to additional employees across the country in areas with significant virus outbreaks.

The expanded telework to clear out federal buildings came as the government began shifting to more of an emergency footing in order to cope with a crisis that has the potential to overwhelm the nation’s health care system.

The Defense Department quickly found its computer networks overwhelmed by employees trying to connect to its servers from home through virtual private networks — and the loads were prompting cyberattacks, officials said Monday.

White House officials told agency leaders to make sure they were prepared to quickly scale back operations as employees either call in sick or are absent because they cannot work from home — or staffing face-to-face public services becomes too risky, according to administration officials with knowledge of these conversations.

The still-uneven telework policy led 26 Senate Democrats, led by Chris Van Hollen of Maryland, to send a letter to President Donald Trump on Monday, urging him to issue an executive order directing agencies to make telework mandatory "to the maximum extent practicable." The letter criticized the administration for creating anxiety in the workforce by leaving it up to individual managers to decide how to proceed. "Voluntary guidance is not enough — agencies need clear orders," the senators wrote.

The Social Security Administration announced late Monday that its 1,250 field offices and 165 hearing offices across the country will close to the public starting Tuesday.

"This decision protects the population we serve — older Americans and people with underlying medical conditions — and our employees during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic," the agency said in a news release, parenthetically referring to the disease caused by the novel coronavirus.

It was unclear how long the offices would close. The agency said it would continue to provide "critical services" over the phone, including hearing appeals of disability applications.

The decision at the Social Security Administration followed the closing by the Interior Department of some iconic sites, among them the Washington Monument and the Statue of Liberty National Monument and Ellis Island. About 10 other parks closed over the weekend, including California’s Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

Some federal offices acted decisively Monday to send employees home to work if they had not done so last week. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, for example, announced that after an employee at its Washington headquarters showed symptoms of the coronavirus, it sent its Washington-area staff home.

Field offices have already begun conducting intake of discrimination complaints over the phone.

General Services Administration Administrator Emily Murphy put the agency’s headquarters staff on mandatory telework through "at least" April 3, she told the staff.

But Murphy’s missive did not address whether telework would be available to thousands of employees who handle the government’s real estate portfolio outside Washington. The Agriculture Department told Washington-area employees on Monday that they could telework until early April, after an employee at the agency’s headquarters tested positive for the virus.

The department also told managers in Seattle, New York City and parts of California to come up with plans to “maximize telework” for employees who have agreements in place, according to a memo sent to employees.

It was another example that some agencies are moving faster than others to clear their offices. At the Education Department, spokeswoman Liz Hill said there is "maximum flexibility" on telework. "So, we aren’t closing the building but everyone who doesn’t need to be in the office is being encouraged to work from home.”

The U.S. Forest Service had no plans as of Monday to shut its ranger district offices, which provide a vital service in rural areas. Instead, the public is being asked to answer "self-screening” questions before meeting with the staff to determine whether they may be at risk of carrying the virus or came into contact with someone who is sick.

**Surfer sets up toilet paper exchange on Calif. corner**

**By Rob Nikolewski and Hayne Palmour IV**
*San Diego Union-Tribune*

ENCINITAS, Calif. — Jonny Blue, a 33-year-old physical therapist and avid surfer from Encinitas, was seriously bummed Friday night.

He saw reports across the country of people hoarding toilet paper in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak, and one of his good friends had a difficult time finding diapers and essential supplies for his kids from Encinitas Boulevard. He also struggled to find any toilet paper at a nearby store.

So on Saturday morning Blue took a cardboard sign bearing the simple request — “Share your toilet paper” — and camped out on the corner of El Camino Real and Encinitas Boulevard.

"I just inspired me to remind people, listen, if you have a lot of something that probably means there are people who probably don’t have very much of it, because you took it all," Blue said. “So sharing it is probably a good thing to keep in mind.”

The response was immediate and positive, with motorists honking horns in support. Drivers stopped to drop off rolls of toilet paper and, just as quickly, Blue would hand them off in an impromptu TP stock exchange.

“This guy came here and said he just ran out and was going to a bunch of stores and couldn’t find any,” Blue said as cars whizzed by. “Somebody had given me some so I gave it to him. He was stoked.”

“Was he was like, ‘Do you want me to pay you?’ I said, ‘No, man. Somebody gave it to me. Take it.”

A moment later, a driver in a white pickup truck slowed down just enough to toss out a roll to Blue’s burgeoning bundle.

"People are loving it," Blue said. "People are honking, smiling, laughing. It’s actually been good because it’s actually been kind of a rough time right now."  

The run on toilet paper and other items such as hand sanitizers and disinfecting wipes has led local grocery stores and national chains such as Target and Walmart to limit the amounts shoppers can purchase.

Last week, three women in a supermarket in Australia got into a hair-pulling brawl over toilet paper. A moment later, a driver in a white pickup truck slowed down just enough to toss out a roll to Blue’s burgeoning bundle.

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Dem primary uncertain as Ohio scraps vote

WASHINGTON — Joe Biden declared the winner of last week’s Democratic presidential primary in Washington state, giving him victories in five out of six states that voted March 10.

WASHINGTON — The Democratic presidential primary is consumed with uncertainty after leaders in Ohio called off Tuesday’s election just hours before polls were set to open, citing the need to combat the new coronavirus. Officials in Florida, Arizona and Illinois said they would move forward with the vote.

Not since New York City postponed its mayoral primary on the day of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks has an election been pushed off in such a high-profile, far-reaching way. Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine initially asked a court to delay the vote, and when a judge refused to do so the state’s health director declared a health emergency that would prevent the polls from opening.

The decision was a reminder that the most elemental act of American democracy — voting — will be severely tested Tuesday in several states and hold presidential primaries while also confronting the impact of a global pandemic. The contests are playing out as the virus’ impact is becoming more tangible with schools closing across the country, workers staying home and restaurants and bars shuttering.

The U.S. stock market Monday plunged to its worst day in more than three decades.

The rapidly shifting developments amount to a kind of chaos rarely seen in an election in such a high-profile, far-reaching way. Ohio 2001, attacks has an election been pushed off in such a high-profile, far-reaching way. Ohio and its worst day in more than three decades.

Campaigns spent Monday sifting through data and talking to contacts on the ground to assess the impact of the coronavirus on turn-out in places that will hold elections Tuesday. Former Vice President Joe Biden is moving closer to securing the Democratic presidential nomination but could face a setback if the older voters who tend to support him don’t show up. Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, meanwhile, can’t afford to lose support from young voters who have been his most loyal supporters.

The U.S. stock market Monday plunged to its worst day in more than three decades.

But the Vermont senator has also cast some doubt about the entire process, saying no one should risk being infected while voting and noting that it’s important “to make sure that everybody who wants to vote has the right to vote, and that may not be the case now.”

Still, Sanders faces an increasingly tough path to the nomination. About half of the delegates in the Democratic primary have already been awarded and, if Biden has another big night Tuesday, he will pad an already large and perhaps insurmountable lead. Sanders trails Biden by more than 150 delegates nationally, meaning he’d need to win more than 57% of those yet to be allocated to clinch the Democratic nomination.

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WASHINGTON — The Democratic presidential primary is consumed with uncertainty after leaders in Ohio called off Tuesday’s election just hours before polls were set to open, citing the need to combat the new coronavirus. Officials in Florida, Arizona and Illinois said they would move forward with the vote.

Not since New York City postponed its mayoral primary on the day of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks has an election been pushed off in such a high-profile, far-reaching way. Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine initially asked a court to delay the vote, and when a judge refused to do so the state’s health director declared a health emergency that would prevent the polls from opening.

The decision was a reminder that the most elemental act of American democracy — voting — will be severely tested Tuesday in several states and hold presidential primaries while also confronting the impact of a global pandemic. The contests are playing out as the virus’ impact is becoming more tangible with schools closing across the country, workers staying home and restaurants and bars shuttering.

The U.S. stock market Monday plunged to its worst day in more than three decades.

The rapidly shifting developments amount to a kind of chaos rarely seen in an election in such a high-profile, far-reaching way. Ohio 2001, attacks has an election been pushed off in such a high-profile, far-reaching way. Ohio and its worst day in more than three decades.

Campaigns spent Monday sifting through data and talking to contacts on the ground to assess the impact of the coronavirus on turn-out in places that will hold elections Tuesday. Former Vice President Joe Biden is moving closer to securing the Democratic presidential nomination but could face a setback if the older voters who tend to support him don’t show up. Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, meanwhile, can’t afford to lose support from young voters who have been his most loyal supporters.

The U.S. stock market Monday plunged to its worst day in more than three decades.

But the Vermont senator has also cast some doubt about the entire process, saying no one should risk being infected while voting and noting that it’s important “to make sure that everybody who wants to vote has the right to vote, and that may not be the case now.”

Still, Sanders faces an increasingly tough path to the nomination. About half of the delegates in the Democratic primary have already been awarded and, if Biden has another big night Tuesday, he will pad an already large and perhaps insurmountable lead. Sanders trails Biden by more than 150 delegates nationally, meaning he’d need to win more than 57% of those yet to be allocated to clinch the Democratic nomination.
In city of Idlib, Syrians fear end is nearing

By Sarah El Deeb
Associated Press

IDLIB, Syria — “There’s nothing new. Nothing at all,” said Yasser Aboud, as he looked away from his family’s few remaining belongings, dusted off the floor of the bare single room that would now be their home in the northwest Syrian city of Idlib.

It was a far cry from the house, the farm, and the job that he, his wife and three children left behind two months ago, fleeing their hometown just 9 miles down the road as it was overrun by government forces in an attempt to reclaim a rebel-held area of Idlib province.

Complete displacement for the family has been a reality since 2015, when Syria’s civil war, which entered its 10th year on Monday, has shrunk in geographical and demographic terms. The Idlib province, once a bastion of anti-Assad insurgency, is now in the hands of government forces and their Syrian rebel allies.

The government offensive has been gradually shrinking the space for opposition fighters and civilians. It has left the enclave that includes Idlib city, in a state of perpetual limbo. They are skeptical that the enclave, including Idlib city, in a state of terrorism, will see a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

The cease-fire has allowed deliveries of humanitarian aid, but the government has been increasing pressure on the enclave to accept its rule.

The Associated Press traveled to Idlib last week on a trip arranged through Turkish authorities. Its team, like other journalists who have been into the enclave recently, was escorted by members of a media outfit linked to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, an Al-Qaeda-linked group that dominates the area.

Driving into Idlib city, the AP team witnessed the scale of the displacement. Dozens of tents lined the main road into the city. Other families were crammed into bombed out buildings, the city’s stadium or unfinished construction sites. Shops have sprung up around the enclave bearing the names of different cities and towns in Syria — a testimony and a token to the past.

The city has been shaped by the different layers of conflict. Many city streets are clean and well maintained by the opposition administration. But on other streets, buildings are in ruins — some wrecked in previous fighting and all during the most recent offensive. Residents can point out buildings and remember the date they were hit. The city gets only two hours of electricity a day, and Aboud said he chose to buy bread over more power from generators.

If President Bashar Assad resumes the government offensive, everything here will be vulnerable.

In past advances, the government’s tactic was to bombard urban areas relentlessly — including with Russian warplanes — flattening residential areas and pummeling the population into submission. Residents, opposition activists and fighters were offered the choice either to stay under “reconciliation” deals or be evacuated to the rebel-held north.

In Idlib, the residents overwhelmingly fear living under government rule but have nowhere else to run, with Turkey refusing to open its border wall to more refugees.

Aboud said it was out of the question for him to accept “reconciliation.” Holding his 2-year-old twins by the hand, he said his family fled his hometown of Saraqeb “not fearing death but fearing to be under the rule of Assad again.”

He took part in the early anti-government protests in 2011 and was detained for it; two of his brothers were shot and killed by government forces in 2012; his mother-in-law was killed in an airstrike the same year.

If Assad captures Idlib, “we will run to Turkey, we will sleep under the (border) wall,” Aboud said. “The most crucial thing is that we won’t enter territories” held by the government.

Turkey has deployed thousands of troops in the enclave, operating alongside its Syrian opposition allies. That has diminished the lock on power that the al-Qaida-linked Nusra Front, now known as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham has held over Idlib since it drove out rival factions in past fighting.

Mustafa Berro, a commander of a Turkish-backed rebel faction from Aleppo that has now sent forces to Idlib, said his fighters “have not lost faith.”

“We are worse off than in 2014” — when rebels held nearly half of Syria — “but we are better off than 2011” when they had no territory to control, he said. “We still have an area to work from and operate in.”

The massive displacement of past weeks has strained international aid deliveries into the enclave, where 1.5 million receive food assistance. In January alone, 1,227 trucks were sent across the border from Turkey, the largest number in seven years of cross-border operations, said U.N. Assistance Coordinator Deb Marshall.

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Women walk in a neighborhood heavily damaged by airstrike last week in Idlib, Syria.

Iraq ex-governor named PM-designate as Baghdad awaits curfew

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iraq’s president on Tuesday named a former governor of the city of Najaf as prime minister-designate following weeks of political infighting, as Baghdad residents rushed to stock up on supplies hours before a dawn-to-dusk curfew was set to take hold amid a global pandemic, and as the city faces a resurgence of the coronavirus.

Adnan al-Zurfi was appointed premier-designate by President Barham Saleh after tense meetings between rival political blocs that for weeks had struggled to reach a consensus over a candidate to replace outgoing Premier Adil Abdul-Mahdi.

The development came after an earlier premier-designate, Mohammed Allawi, withdrew his candidacy after political parties rejected his proposed Cabinet lineup.

Al-Zurfi, 54, was appointed by Iraq’s U.S.-administered administrator Paul Bremer as governor of Najaf in 2004, and later served in the same post for two terms between 2009 and 2015. His second term was cut short following his dismissal by the provincial council.

The administration he run under former Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi’s list.

According to Iraq’s constitution, al-Zurfi has 30 days to propose a lineup of ministers and form a new government. President Barham Saleh wished al-Zurfi success, “in his new tasks to work for early and fair elections and to achieve the aspirations of the Iraqis,” according to a statement from his office.

Early elections have been a key demand of anti-government protesters, who have camped out in the capital’s Tahrir Square since last October, when thousands took to the streets to decry government corruption, poor services and unemployment. Abdul-Mahdi resigned under pressure from the demonstrations.
**Eugene Sheffer Crossword**

**ACROSS**
1. Gloomy
2. Earl Grey, for one
3. Some corp.
4. recruits
12. Differently
13. PC port
14. Aviation prefix
15. Natural
16. sweeter
17. Round of
18. applause
19. So far
20. Stock units
21. Life story
22. Third son
23. Poke
26. Bottom line
28. Blue cartoon
29. character
31. Winged
33. Roofing goo
35. Oaxaca water
36. Comes to
38. Chest muscle
40. Pvt.’s superior
41. Monumental
43. Altar
45. constellation
49. Soft felt hat
50. “Game of
48. Thrones”
51. actress Turner
52. German river
53. Windbag
54. “I smell —!”
55. Actor Carlucci
56. Sport shirt brand

**DOWN**
1. Arrears
2. Bread spread
3. Secondhand
4. Detox center
5. Ignore
6. Jargon suffix
7. Void
8. Title for Gandhi
9. Hearty embraces
10. “Rule, Britannia!”
11. Lays down
12. the lawn
13. Elevator name
14. “— a Rebel”
15. Mandible
16. In the manner of
17. Aliases
18. Twisty letter
19. Say it isn’t so
20. Easter entrée
21. Pirate’s chart
22. Bad hairpiece
23. Corpulent
24. School papers
25. Justifications
26. Knightly address
27. Cornfield intruder
28. Suspension
29. Bridge support
30. Pest
31. Drescher or
32. Tarkenton
33. Continental
34. Currency
35. Visibility
36. Hindrance
37. Launder
38. Appliance
39. Vortex
40. Guitar master
41. Paul

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**Answer to Previous Puzzle**

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U C L A T O W  A V I S
R H O S T O W  N A S H
L A U S A N N E  N I N O
S I T S  S A N  L E N T O
A I L  J I F
F L Y L L C O U R A G E
W E A N  Y A R E S
D E M E R  I T  A N K L E
O P  I C K
K A N Y E  A D A  M S N
E C O L  J U L I A N N E
T I N E O R  H O A X
O D O R  B A D  A P P T
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**CRYPTOQUIP**

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M A N M  F Y D  J V P Q  Q H N C C
A J K Q B Q  N P S  L Q
Y P V L C C L P F  M J  Q Z B P S
H Y T A  H J P B D  J P  M A B H.  V A N M
N  Z J P D - Z L P T A B K.
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Yesterday’s Cryptoquip: I HARBOR THIS FANCIFUL NOTION THAT I’LL BECOME A PONTIF
ONE DAY, BUT IT’S ONLY A POPE DREAM.

Today’s Cryptoquip Clue: Z equals P
Let's hope Trump has learned from COVID-19

By DOYLE McMANUS
Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON

In a crisis, Americans expect leaders to tell the truth about the problem, do what needs to be done to tackle it, and tell citizens how they can help.

We've seen plenty of that kind of leadership over the last few weeks as coronavirus became a global pandemic.

We saw it from governors of both parties — Jay Inslee, of Washington; Andrew Cuomo, of New York; Mike DeWine, of Ohio — who closed schools and banned large gatherings, including sports events and Broadway plays. We saw it from business leaders who closed retail outlets and asked employees to work from home. We even saw it from the National Basketball Association.

One place we didn't see much leadership was the White House. For weeks, President Donald Trump downplayed the epidemic, promised it would end on its own, and claimed tests were available to anyone who wanted one. (They weren't, and still aren't.)

It seemed discordant that so many other leaders were grappling with the virus as a growing crisis, only to hear the president insist as late as Thursday: "We're in great shape. We're doing great." So it was a welcome change last week when the president finally offered a strategy: to make widespread virus testing available, weeks after public health professionals began demanding it.

The details were still blurry. His only specific proposal was that hospitals and health care providers sign up to perform tests. Even that turned out to be only a beta version aimed at the San Francisco Bay Area.

Over time, Trump said, more tests will be available, thanks to the Swiss pharmaceutical giant Roche. Thank heaven for Swiss ingenuity! (Also for the scientists in the Bay Area, Germany and China who worked the problem before Trump arrived.)

Let's hope those plans work better than the initial testing program of the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That turned into an embarrassing — and potentially deadly — failure.

And let's hope Trump's promise on Friday comes true: "We will turn a corner on the very early in the first week of the month. But even as we root for the president to succeed, we should also hope he learns some hard lessons.

President's don't get a free pass if they fail to notice impending threats. Trump has said things that no one else said before. (It was an unforeseen problem that) came out of nowhere," he said.

If he wants the federal government to be effective in a crisis, you need to give it the tools to act.

You'd think a Republican president from the business world would know that bureaucracies can be inefficient and slow-moving.

That's why the Obama administration set up a White House office on health security to coordinate the health care system and make sure the government's health programs worked together.

If you want the federal government to be effective in a crisis, you need to give it the tools to act. Whatever plans Trump has need to be better.

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In 2018, a survey of American grandparents by AARP, 38% said they considered themselves caregivers or babysitters to their grandchildren, including 11% who lived in the same household as their grandchildren. A 2014 Pew survey found that 22% of grandparents provided regular child care to their grandchildren.

Run into them all the time at the park, at community events and in the workplace. I've got my copy of USA Today, I'm an elderly person and I'm a reader, too. I'm a librarian, too, and I read books and magazines and newspapers. I know what's going on in the world.

I never thought that I would have to be a caregiver to my grandchildren, but that's what I am. And I don't have the time or energy to do that.

The appearance of advertising in this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the products or services advertised.

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Don’t let the Pentagon silence Stars and Stripes

By Thomas Bishop
Special to The Washington Post

With the coronavirus outbreak spreading, panic-buying abounds, as countless pictures on social media of empty supermarket shelves attest. This behavior is nothing new. Panic-buying has always been a hallmark of disaster. The first civilian people often take during a time of crisis is to grab their wallets and head to stores. However, there is also an opportunity for people to impose order on a situation seemingly spiraling out of control. To that end, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, newspaper outlets observed a “rush of drivers heading to the pumps” to fill up on gas, while others loaded up on “wood, lumber and nails and water.” When disaster hits, consumers react.

And when national uncertainty and misinformation escalate, fly-by-night companies often set out to take advantage of public panic by promising that their products hold the key to a family’s survival. During such times, it falls to government regulators to curb the actions of these new “survival merchants” looking to make a quick buck.

Although the specifics of the business practices change according to the crisis, survival merchants typically build family panic rooms and bunkers. Second, the opportunity to buy “survival essentials,” including vast quantities of dehydrated food, purified water, gas masks and even weapons and ammunition, to protect the family during a social breakdown. Perhaps the most famous example of such businesses was the newly branded construction company Simons, at the state and federal levels. The company had been accused of profiteering, warmongering and spreading, panic-buying proposals.

In 1981, as part of the so-called “nuclear freeze” movement, families had been encouraged to sell survival. “People were confused, frightened, angry,” Cline recalled. “I was acutely aware of the frightening, warmongering name it.”

But there is a risk for merchants beyond being so tastelessly crass that they alienate potential buyers. It’s all about trust. It’s a surprisingly short life cycle. When it came to the fallout shelter salesmen, businesses were remarkably ineffective at persuading the public to buy their products. Time magazine reported that over the course of 2013, 2014, and 2015, companies filed for bankruptcy. “The market is now dead,” Time noted at the start of 2016, adding that “the industry has had to adapt. With the decline of the shelter salesman can be easily attributed to the ending of the Cuban missile crisis. But this is only part of the story.

The Federal Trade Commission also steadfastly monitors their practices and business practices. In 1962, Paul Rand Dixon, the commission’s chairman, announced that businesses selling unverifiable claims were committing “treason.” Setting out to curtail “Fraudulent and dangerous advertisements,” Dixon introduced new advertising guidelines designed to “root the exploiters of human fear.” Any shelter firms caught claiming a sale “Federation Armed Shelters” without the approval of the Office of Civil Defense faced fines and potential criminal prosecution.

As these features of consumer life in moments of disaster become more prevalent today in the age of social media — with images of empty shelves, long lines of people waiting for “COVID-19 survival kits” on Facebook — the government is once again taking action to self-regulate. When the Food and Drug Administration and the FTC sent a letter to a holistic clinic in Ontario that encouraged patients to follow a course of action to a “website selling products intended to prevent and cure the illness.” The product was never going to do anything to help those with “active infection.” Fiasco for the product was posted alongside descriptions, with one comment stating: “I have a baby on the way and a husband working in a hospital, and I fear for my child’s life. This is not going to happen to me and my family, or the country.”

Now that the United States is more open to the fallout shelter salesmen, businesses are increased in number, and the public is more willing to believe in their schemes.

What’s the purpose of that mission? To provide the credible news the troops, dependents and DOD civilians overseas deserve, so they can better exercise their own rights as they serve democracy far from home. Some say the mission is obsolete, that there’s plenty of news available from other sources today, especially online. But internet access is poor or restricted on many posts, especially away from work areas, and troops are sometimes not able to connect to the internet. Just as important, most of Stars and Stripes reporting is unique content, not covered by other news organizations. Where others focus on big-picture geopolitics, Stars and Stripes reporters are on bases and in the field. Sometimes that’s local news, both good works and bad stories. Operations speak directly to one another, which would go unnoticed otherwise. It’s often about troops in harm’s way. Late last year, Stars and Stripes reported on the strange, unexplained death of an infantryman from the 2nd Cavalry Regiment stationed near the Afghan border.

Stars and Stripes also publishes useful guides that help PCS-ing troops and families get set in a new location, community-oriented weeklies with local events, notices and advertising; and service-oriented content about such topics as financial planning, educational opportunities and transitioning to civilian life.

Stars and Stripes audiences can get all of that in print, on the web, or on the screens of their mobile devices. Started by soldiers during the Civil War and published continuously since World War II, Stars and Stripes today is a contemporary multimedia news organization.

Congress has long supported Stars and Stripes as a way to help the military’s public relations efforts with their state staff members already, and hope to talk with their bosses. If you want to tell your own members of Congress to keep the Pentagon from silencing Stars and Stripes, go to www.usa.gov/elected-officials for help with contact information.

Restoring the $15.5 million before Oct. 1 is essential, but that’s only one key to get cycle. Long term, this is a question of value. What’s Stars and Stripes’ value to you? Please give me your answers by email (ombudsman@stripes.com), on Facebook or on Twitter.

So I’ll keep responding to readers’ concerns and submissions wherever you choose to be heard.

Enrique Gates is the independent ombudsman for Stars and Stripes, a congressionally mandated position in which he has held since 2004. He served as the newspaper’s ombudsman from 2004 to 2009, as well as 30 years in Virginia, where he lives today.
Drake raking in the hits

Rapper sets record for most Billboard Hot 100 songs with 208

By Mesfin Fekadu
Associated Press

Drake landed his 208th song on the Billboard Hot 100, setting a new record for most songs on the music chart.

The rapper’s latest track, “Oprah’s Bank Account” with DaBaby and Lil Yachty, debuted at No. 89 on The Hot 100 this week and helps Drake surpass the 207-song run the cast of “Glee” held on the chart.

“Glee” aired its popular run from 2009 through 2015, and its cover versions of well-known songs debuted on the charts after episodes aired. The cast released several platinum- and gold-selling albums and earned a Grammy nomination in a category reserved for pop groups, pitting the cast against the likes of Maroon 5, Sade, Paramore and Train.

Drake, who launched his entertainment career as a cast member of the high school series “Degrassi: The Next Generation,” first charted on the Hot 100 with “Best I Ever Had” in 2009, eventually reaching No. 2. He has since topped the chart with the songs “One Dance,” “God’s Plan,” “Nice for What” and “In My Feelings.” His collaborations with Rihanna — “What’s My Name?” and “Work” — also reached No. 1.

Lil Wayne is behind Drake and “Glee” with 168 songs to reach the Hot 100 chart. The top 10 also includes Elvis Presley, Nicki Minaj, Kanye West, Jay-Z, Chris Brown, Taylor Swift and Future.

Broadway stars stream, rock stars stay home

Associated Press

From helping others cope to sheltering in place to canceling events, here’s a look at some of the ways the entertainment industry is reacting to the spread of the coronavirus:

Singing at home

Broadway shows may be shuttered, but that’s not stopping some Broadway voices.

Stage stars like Audra McDonald, Idina Menzel, Kristin Chenoweth, Norbert Leo Butz, Kelli O’Hara, Wayne Brady, Betty Buckley and Laura Benanti will appear singing and performing live from their homes in two daily mini-online charity shows starting Monday night.

The shows are the brainchild of Seth Rudetsky and James Wesley, the host and producer of Sirius XM’s “On Broadway,” and will follow the traditional theater times of 2 p.m. Eastern and 8 p.m. Eastern.

The shows will encourage viewers to donate to The Actors Fund’s services for those dealing with the coronavirus outbreak and its financial costs.

“Broadway at Home” will kick off Monday with Kelli O’Hara. The shows can be seen at The Actors Fund YouTube channel, as well as Playbill.com and BroadwayWorld.com.

Online concerts have taken on a new appeal as the virus keeps people inside. Latin singers Juanes and Alejandro Sanz recently performed on YouTube Live, a pair of Metropolitan Opera stars have belted out tunes on Facebook and Instagram, the Russian-German pianist Igor Levit took to Twitter on Thursday to stream his music and the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra live streamed a Beethoven symphony.

Met Gala must wait

The Met Gala, annually one of the biggest nights in fashion, has been postponed due to the coronavirus.

Host Anna Wintour announced Monday on Vogue.com that the gala will not be held on its usual first Monday in May, due to the “unavoidable and responsible decision by the Metropolitan Museum to close its doors.”

This year’s previously announced celebrity hosts include Lin-Manuel Miranda, Meryl Streep and Emma Stone.

The Met Gala was one of the last remaining Off the road

Elton John is postponing part of his North American tour due to the coronavirus pandemic. The superstar said Monday that the March 26 through May 2 shows of his Farewell Yellow Brick Road Tour will be rescheduled. Tour performances for May 22 through July 8 remain as scheduled.

Foo Fighters’ Dave Grohl says he didn’t cancel shows when he broke his leg — and performed from a wheelchair onstage — but he must postpone his band’s tour because of the coronavirus. The rocker wrote Monday on Twitter that “playing a gig with a sock full of broken bones is one thing, but playing a show when YOUR health and safety is in jeopardy is another.” The band has postponed April dates of its Van Tour 2020.

It’s not just musicians.

“Diary of a Wimpy Kid” author Jeff Kinney on Monday postponed his new book and his spring tour. Kinney had planned an unusual promotion for the spinoff book “Rowley Jefferson’s Awesome Friendly Adventure,” which now is planned for August.

With everything else in sight shutting down, “The Crown” is forging ahead, for now. The Netflix show is set to wrap principal shooting. This cycle of the show about Queen Elizabeth II and her family stars Olivia Colman as the monarch, Tobias Menzies as her husband and Helena Bonham Carter as her sister, Margaret.

Actor Idris Elba tests positive for coronavirus

Idris Elba, 47, is the latest celebrity to test positive for the coronavirus.

“I feel OK. I have no symptoms so far but have been isolated since I found out about my possible exposure to the virus,” the actor said Monday in a post on Twitter. “Stay home people and be pragmatic. I will keep you updated on how I’m doing. No panic.”

Elba recently spoke at the massive WE Day 2020 event in London on March 9 and apologized to the crowd after an apparent cough, days before he tested positive for the virus.

‘Saturday Night Live’ on hold indefinitely

“Saturday Night Live” is officially the latest TV show to be delayed by the coronavirus pandemic, NBC confirmed Monday.

The TV sketch comedy program, previously slated to return with new episodes on March 28, has halted production indefinitely for safety of its cast and crew.

No new start date has been set.

Actress-director Idris Elba and singer Dua Lipa were set to be featured next on “SNL” as host and musical guest, respectively.

“A Quiet Place Part II,” the film Krainski was supposed to produce, has also pushed its release because of the outbreak.

Salaam plans novel on wrongful imprisonment

One of the former “Central Park Five” is teaming with an acclaimed children’s author on a young adult novel with a personal theme — being wrongfully sentenced to prison.

Dr. Yusef Salaam and author Ibi Zoboi are working together on “Punching the Air,” according to HarperCollins Children’s Books. The book is set for Sept. 1.

Salaam was among five black and Latino teenagers from Harlem who were coerced into confessing to a rape they didn’t commit in 1989. They were exonerated in 2002, but not before all had served prison time.

“Punching the Air” tells of a gifted but troublesome teen, Amal Shahid, who is convicted of a crime he didn’t commit.

“Punching the Air” reflects not only my story, but the stories of millions of young boys and girls of color who face the injustice of mass incarceration and the criminal justice system,” Salaam said in a statement Tuesday.

Other news

- Tom Hanks and his wife, Rita Wilson, were released from an Australian hospital on Tuesday, days after they were diagnosed with coronavirus.

The 63-year-old celebrities are self-isolating in a rented house.
Robber doused store clerk with burning liquid

MD OXON HILL — Police in Maryland arrested a man accused of dousing a convenience store worker with a burning liquid and stealing cigarettes.

Raymond Williams, 25, of Washington, walked to the convenience store counter early Saturday morning with a cup in his hand, Prince George's County police said in a news release.

The cup contained a liquid that smelled of gasoline, police said. Williams is accused of asking the clerk for cigarettes, starting a fire in the cup while the clerk had his back turned and then dousing the clerk with the burning liquid when he turned back around. Williams then jumped over the counter, stole about 20 packs of cigarettes and run, police said. A witness called 911.

The clerk was taken to a hospital to be treated for critical burns, the release stated.

At least 4 arrested over illegal turkey hunts

MS JACKSON — At least four people were arrested following an 11-month investigation that determined nearly 100 turkeys had been poached, according to wildlife officials in Mississippi.

The group was believed to have trespassed on 15 properties in Claiborne, Copiah, Franklin, Jefferson and Lincoln counties, according to a news release from the state Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks.

Of the four people arrested and named in the news release, Kenneth Ray Britt, 39, had been charged with the most violations — 142.

The investigation determined that the illegal hunt during the 2019 season wasn’t constrained to Mississippi.

Tugboat crashes into bridge, 2 barges sink

LA LULING — A tugboat leading a train of barges of grain crashed into a Louisiana bridge, causing two of the barges to sink in the Mississippi River.

The tugboat, identified as Cooperative Spirit, collided with the Luling Bridge early Sunday morning, news outlets reported.

Two of the 29 barges being pulled by the tugboat sank. The Coast Guard was working to recover the rest of the barges. No injuries were reported. Coast Guard spokesman John Michelli said.

A portion of the river near the bridge was closed after the crash.

Man waves gun at drive-thru for hot sauce

AZ YUMA — An Arizona man facing charges after police said that he waved a gun at a fast-food drive-thru window and demanded hot sauce.

Abel Lerma is facing multiple charges after the incident in June. The Yuma Sun reported Lerma was arrested earlier this month on aggravated drunken driving charges.

Police said video surveillance cameras captured Lerma pulling a gun on an employee at a Füh-erito's Mexican Food restaurant and demanded hot sauce, which is given for free with every food purchase.

Lerma and the driver of the car were later arrested.

Lerma, who was out of custody after posting a $50,000 bond and under the supervision of pretrial services, was arrested March 5 and has been charged with aggravated DUI for having a child under the age of 15 in the car and endangerment.

Princess’ needs help managing large estate

HI HONOLULU — A judge ruled Friday that a 93-year-old Native Hawaiian heiress needs someone to handle her estate. The so-called princess testified last Monday that she didn’t need a conservator because she’s still alive.

“Ms. [Abigail] Kawananakoa is a charming and gracious lady, in the best sense of the word,” said state Judge James Ashford. “Nevertheless, the Court finds … that for reasons other than age, Ms. Kawananakoa is unable to manage her property and business affairs effectively…”

Kawananakoa’s $215 million trust has been tied up in a court case since she had a stroke in 2017. Kawananakoa said that she’s fine.

After the stroke, she married her partner of 20 years, Veronica Gail Worth. Board members of her foundation and ex-employees said that the wife is manipulating Kawananakoa. Lawyers for the couple dispute that.

Kawananakoa inherited her wealth as the great-granddaughter of James Campbell, an Irish businessman who made his fortune as a sugar plantation owner and one of Hawaii’s largest landowners. Native Hawaiians consider her a princess because she’s a descendant of the family that ruled the islands before the overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom in 1893.

State: 1 flushes drugs, 1 jumps out window

VT BRATTLEBORO — Two men who sold cocaine to a confidential informant tried to evade arrest by jumping out a window and flushing their stash down the toilet, prosecutors in Vermont said.

Matthew Sinclair, 24, and Jorge Delapaz, 31, were charged with federal drug violations in January and February in a Brattleboro apartment, according to a statement from the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Vermont.

Authorities searched the apartment Thursday. Delapaz jumped out of a second-story window in an attempt to flee, officials said. He had a suspected cocaine base and heroin at the time of his arrest, the statement said.

Sinclair is accused of attempting to flush about 37 grams of cocaine base down the toilet.

Pier scraps plans for cruise ship business

MI GREILICKVILLE — A waterfront project along Lake Michigan is scrapping plans to pursue the cruise ship business.

Discovery Center & Pier previously announced plans to transform a coal dock at Greilickville near Traverse City into a site that ships could use to land passengers. But CEO Matt McDonough said Tuesday that cruise ships weren’t aligned enough with the pier’s mission, the Traverse City Record-Eagle reported. The organization said that its focus is on local partnerships to make changes that will make the pier better suited for multiple uses.

None of the cruise lines that had expressed interest in docking there had ships small enough to tie up to the pier.

They would instead need to anchor in Grand Traverse Bay and use smaller boats to carry passengers to shore.

From wire reports
Kentucky Derby moved to September

Associated Press

The Kentucky Derby was postponed until September on Tuesday, the latest rite of spring in sports to be struck by the new coronavirus along with the Masters, March Madness and baseball season.

The Derby, America’s longest continuously held sports event, had been scheduled for May 2, but will now be run on Sept. 5, kicking off Labor Day weekend.

"We will work with the purse, but feel very good that September is the right date,” said Bill Carstanjen, CEO of Churchill Downs Inc., said on a conference call.

It’s the first time the Derby won’t be held on its traditional first Saturday in May since 1945, when it was run on June 9. The federal government suspended horse racing nationwide for most of the first half of the year before World War II ended in early May, but not in time to get the Derby in that month.

The date change still must be approved by the Kentucky Horse Racing Commission at its meeting Thursday.

Carstanjen said the date was chosen after talks with NBC Sports, which televises the Triple Crown races, based on the limited number of sports events that weekend and hotel availability in Louisville.

The status of the other Triple Crown races remains unclear. As of Tuesday morning, the Preakness had not responded to the Derby’s announcement. The New York Racing Association said Tuesday it intends to run the Belmont Stakes this year but that the date could change.

The Preakness is scheduled for May 16 at Pimlico in Baltimore, and the Belmont is set for June 5 in New York. Carstanjen said Churchill Downs alerted the other two tracks as it neared a new date with NBC.

“They were receptive and had their own questions,” he said. “There is time in the calendar that NBC can make available,” he said. “They just have to work it out together.”

New US soccer chief disavows argument vs. women

BY ANNE M. PETERSON  Associated Press

As a different set of lawyers took over for the U.S. Soccer Federation, new USSF President Cindy Parlow Cone disavowed papers submitted by the previous attorneys who argued women’s national team players had lesser skills and responsibilities than their male counterparts.

Parlow Cone took over as head of American soccer’s governing body last week when Carlos Cordeiro abruptly resigned because of the backlash over the documents, submitted by the USSF as it defended a gender discrimination lawsuit filed by women’s national team players.

Soyuthaw Shaw had represented the federation since the suit was filed in March 2019. Latham & Watkins replaced it in Monday’s night’s filing, made simultaneously with a statement by Parlow Cone, a former World Cup and Olympic champion for the U.S.

“Last week’s legal filing was an error,” Cone said. “It resulted from a fundamental breakdown in our internal process that led to offensive assertions made by the federation that do not represent our core values.”

Both sides have moved for summary judgments, asking U.S. District Judge R. Gary Klausner to decide in their favor without a trial, scheduled for May 5. They filed final documents associated with those requests late Monday night.

Cone, who had been the federation’s vice president since last year, became the first woman president in the USSF’s 107-year history. She struck a conciliatory tone.

“The WNT is the most successful soccer team in the world. As it relates to the lawsuit filed by the women, I offer the perspective of a former player. I know how important it is for both the federation and the players to move beyond this and keep working together on what unites us,” she said. “We only have one federation and one senior women’s national team. We have to work together and move forward in a positive manner toward what I know are mutual goals, growing the game and winning.”

Players claim they have not been paid equally to the men’s national team and asked for more than $66 million in damages under the Equal Pay Act and the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The federation’s claims in court documents that the women’s team didn’t have the physical abilities or the same responsibilities as the men’s team drew criticism from sponsors, including The Coca-Cola Co. and The Proctor & Gamble Co., as well as MLS Commissioner Don Garber, a USSF board member.

The outcry prompted Cordeiro to issue an apology last week while the women’s team was playing Japan in the SheBelieves Cup.

The women protested by wearing their warmup jerseys inside out before the game — obscuring the U.S. Soccer crest.

New US soccer chief disavows argument vs. women

By Anne M. Peterson  Associated Press

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UNBIASED NEWS WHATEVER WAY YOU WANT IT.
By Ronald Blum  
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Major League Baseball pushed back opening day until mid-May at the earliest on Monday because of the new coronavirus. The opening date, which was supposed to be March 26, was postponed for at least two weeks. The rest of the season will be pushed back in accordance with that guidance," Major League Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred said.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend Sunday that gatherings of 50 people or more be canceled or postponed across the country for the next eight weeks.

“Any change to the 162-game schedule would necessitate bargaining over an array of issues, including when and how many players get paid and how much major league service they are credited for. Service time determines eligibility for free agency and salary arbitration.

Players made a counteroffer to MLB on Sunday, and management told the union it would not respond until Tuesday at the earliest.

March 26, was postponed for at least two weeks. Teams and players agreed that two to four weeks of additional spring training will be needed before the season begins.

“I’ve just treating this as January of the winter time,” Arizona catcher Stephen Vogt said in a text to The Associated Press. “I am working out with the anticipation of baseball activities ramping up over the next month. But my mentality is back to preparing for the season.”

Under an agreement last week, between MLB and the players’ association, players are allowed to decide whether to stay at spring training or go home, but some teams have ignored that deal and told players to leave.

“There should be no organized activities in the camps,” Manfred told the Post-Dispatch. “We did agree with the MLBPA that spring training sites would remain open, but the thought there is with a skeleton crew, really, to give players some place to use a gym, as opposed to being forced out into a public gym and the like. And we’re really encouraging players to make a decision as to where they want to be over an extended period of time and get to that location as soon as possible.”

The players’ association sent an email to agents on Monday saying that for players who want to return to their team’s regular-season city it would pay $1,100 allowances through April 9 to players on 40-man rosters as of March 13. That amount also would go to players with minor league contracts at big league spring training camp who were on 40-man rosters at the end of last season.

The union is negotiating with MLB over resetting the dates for players with opt-out clauses in their deals, and the sides are likely to agree on a roster freeze. They are discussing the possibility of payments to major league players who have not reached the point of big-money deals to make up for paychecks they won’t be getting in April and May.

This year marked the earliest opening day other than for international games. As it stood, Game 3 of the World Series would have been Oct. 28, and teams and players could push the postseason into November.

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The opening of the 2020 regular season will be pushed back in accordance with that guidance,” Manfred said.

The NHL and NASCAR announced they also will follow the same guidance.

The French tennis federation announced Tuesday that the French Open is postponed, shifting from May to September.

Main-draw matches for the clay-court tournament at Roland Garros in Paris were scheduled to begin on May 24.

The NHL and the players association met Monday they can go home — even outside of North America — and must self-isolate through March 27 while the season is on hold. But the NHL also cautioned that it will not be able to even provide guidance on the potential reopening of team practices for another 45 days, which could push any potential return to play into May.

“I think in light of the CDC recommendations, it’s hard to foresee that we’re looking at happening here in March or even April, in my opinion,” NHL player agent Jay Grossman said.

NASCAR’s decision came after at least two Monday conference calls between the sanctioning body and its team owners. It affects seven total races — Atlanta and Homestead had already been postponed.

There’s no telling at this point when baseball games will start. The All-Star Game at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles on July 14 could be in jeopardy.

“We’re not going to announce an alternate opening day at this point. We’re going to have to see how things develop,” Manfred told the St. Louis Post-Dispatch at Cardinals camp in Jupiter, Fla. He didn’t want to speculate about the possibility of playing in empty stadiums, saying part of that decision would depend on timing.

MLB called off the rest of the spring training schedule on Thursday and said opening day, which had been scheduled for March 26, was postponed for at least two weeks. Teams and players agreed that two to four weeks of additional spring training will be needed before the season begins.

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By Kyle Hightower  
Associated Press

For two decades, Tom Brady was the face of the Patriots, and even of the NFL. When he turns 43 in August, his home address no longer will be in New England.

The six-time Super Bowl champion plans to keep playing. But the centerpiece of the Patriots’ dynasty, the most successful quarterback in league history, says he is leaving the only pro team he has ever known.

Brady posted Tuesday on social media “my football journey will take place elsewhere.”

The comments were the first indication the Patriots icon would leave New England. Statements later by team owner Robert Kraft and coach Bill Belichick made it clear that Brady’s remarkable stint is over.

In a two-part message, Brady thanked the Patriots and the fans and said “FOREVER A PATRIOT.”

“I don’t know what my football future holds, but it is time for me to open a new stage for my life and my career,” he wrote. “Although my football journey will take place elsewhere, I appreciate everything that we have achieved and am grateful for our incredible TEAM experiences.”

The one-year contract Brady signed before last season expires Wednesday afternoon, and his agent could negotiate a deal with another team on Tuesday, though it can’t be official yet. He will count $13.5 million toward New England’s salary cap due to the signing bonus money he received in 2019.

Kraft said of Brady: “I had hoped this day would never come, but rather that Tom would end his remarkable career in a Patriots uniform after yet another Super Bowl championship. Unfortunately, the two sides were unable to reach an agreement to allow that dream to become a reality. While sad today, the overwhelming feeling I have is appreciation for his countless contributions to our team and community.”

A four-time Super Bowl Most Valuable Player and three-time league MVP, Brady has been the enduring face of the Patriots during a run that added another layer to Boston’s already rich sports history. Only Bill Russell, who won 11 NBA championship rings in the 1950s and ’60s with the Celtics, has won more titles as a member of one of New England’s four major professional sports teams.

Brady would be the oldest starting quarterback in the league at 43 at the beginning of next season. The Colts, Buccaneers, Chargers and Dolphins are among the teams expected to be in a Brady derby.

“TB12,” as he has been dubbed, a nod to his 2017 book detailing his diet and exercise approach, arguably is coming off his worst non-injury season. He threw for 4,057 yards and 24 touchdowns in 2019, with eight interceptions. But he completed fewer than 56% of his passes six times in the final eight games of the year, including a season-ending loss to Miami that cost the Patriots a first-round playoff bye.

They lost at home to the Titans in the wild-card round, Brady’s earliest postseason exit in a decade — and likely his last game in a Patriots uniform.

Brady had a one-year contract for 2019 that paid him $23 million. After franchising offensive lineman Joe Thuney and coming to terms on new deals with Matt Slater and Devin McCourty, the Patriots have only about $18 million in salary cap space.
League bars player and personnel travel

All-Pro WR Hopkins sent to Cards, Dallas signs WR Cooper for $100M

BY BARRY WILNER
Associated Press

The NFL has barred in-person interviews with free agents, a move that is requiring local physical examinations for them rather than team-conducted exams.

The league announced Sunday night that 32 franchises on Monday, the league also banned travel by team personnel to meet with free agents as well as those players traveling to team facilities. The league’s business year begins Wednesday, and the period in which players’ representatives could negotiate with clubs began Monday — though no deals could be finalized.

All offseason activities such as meetings, practices and minicamps have been delayed indefinitely as a safeguard against the new coronavirus. No players can enter a club facility through March 31, with the exception of those receiving medical treatment.

The restrictions were first reported by ESPN.

The first day that players’ representatives could talk with teams would be Monday, meaning there would be more about trades than free agents — with one of the NFL’s biggest stars, DeAndre Hopkins, headed to Arizona.

In a stunner that overshadowed several other deals, the Texans sent their three-time All-Pro receiver to the Cardinals for running back David Johnson, a second-round draft pick this year and a fourth-rounder in 2021.

In a flurry of activity Monday night, the Indianapolis Colts traded standout lineman, Arik Armstead, to San Francisco for the 13th pick in this year's draft, and the Falcons got a second- and fifth-round picks in this year's draft, and the Falcons got a fourth-rounder.

Fourteen franchise tags were handed out, the most since 2012, with only one to a quarterback in Prescott. The other big names among those franchised were Titans running back Derrick Henry; Bengals receiver A.J. Green; Chiefs defensive tackle Chris Jones; and Buccaneers' linebacker Shaq Barrett, the league leader in sacks in 2019. The move by Tampa Bay with Barrett almost assures that quarterback Jameis Winston is headed elsewhere.

Moving back Kenyan Drake got a transition tag from Arizona, but with Johnson traded to Houston, he has an open path to the starting job.

In other pending deals or moves:

■ A person familiar with the idea said Buckner will receive a new contract worth $21 million a year from the Colts. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the deal and contract can’t be finalized until the start of the league year Wednesday.

The trade came just after San Francisco opted to keep another standout lineman, Arik Armstead, who got a five-year deal worth $85 million. And later, the 49ers agreed with safety Jimmie Ward on a three-year deal.

The NFL's business year is just beginning, as planned, despite the spread of the new coronavirus. For now, all moves are being done remotely with basically a ban on travel within the league.

Also traded was Baltimore tight end Hayden Hurst to Atlanta, which is losing tight end Austin Hooper to Cleveland in free agency (four years, $44 million). The Ravens received second- and fifth-round picks in this year's draft, and the Falcons got a fourth-rounder.

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In other pending deals or moves:

■ A person familiar with the situation says the Saints and record-setting quarterback Drew Brees have agreed on a two-year, $50 million contract.

■ Brees has said repeatedly that he is taking career decision one year at a time. His new contract gives the 41-year-old, 19-year vet the leverage to decide after this season whether he wants to continue playing.

■ The Panthers are moving on from quarterback Cam Newton. The team announced they have given the 2015 league MVP permission to seek a trade — although Newton responded by saying he never requested one.

■ Former Patriots linebacker Jamie Collins has agreed to a new three-year deal with the Detroit Lions. Collins’ agent, David Causer, confirmed the pact on Twitter.

■ Free-agent tackle Jack Conklin agreed to a three-year, $42 million contract with the Browns. A 2016 All-Pro as a rookie, he will get $30 million guaranteed and earn $20 million in his first year. Cleveland also released veteran safety Morgan Burnett.

■ Denver agreed to a $44 million, four-year contract with free-agent guard Graham Glasgow that includes $26 million in guarantees.

■ Defensive tackle Jarran Reed agreed on a two-year contract that keeps him in Seattle with a deal reportedly worth $23 million.

■ The New York Jets and former Seattle Seahawks offensive tackle George Fant agreed on a three-year contract worth $30 million.

■ Starting defensive tackle David Ojulari will re-sign with New Orleans.

■ Minnesota reached an agreement with punter Britton Colquitt on a three-year, $9 million contract in which he will get $5 million in guaranteed money.

■ Washington agreed to re-sign inside linebacker Jon Bostic to a $6.6 million, two-year deal. The Redskins are also set to sign guard Wes Schweitzer, who spent his first three seasons with Atlanta.
As the sports world pauses to join the rest of the world in fighting the coronavirus pandemic, you will see fewer sports stories in Stars and Stripes. We look forward to resuming our normal coverage when the leagues and governing bodies determine it is safe for athletes and fans to return to competition.