Confirmed cases rising in 40 states

The holiday weekend will test Americans' discipline

BY JOHN SEEWER
Associated Press

The U.S. headed into the Fourth of July weekend with many parades and fireworks displays canceled, beaches and bars closed, and health authorities warning that this will be a crucial test of Americans' self-control that could determine the trajectory of the surging coronavirus outbreak.

With confirmed cases climbing in 40 states, governors have ordered the wearing of masks in public, and families were urged to celebrate their independence at home. Even then, they were told to keep their backyard cookouts small.

Health experts agree this will be a pivotal moment in determining whether the nation slides into a deeper mess. The fear is that a weekend of crowded pool parties, picnics and parades will fuel the surge.

"We're not going to be arresting people for having gatherings, but we're certainly going to discourage it," said Dr. Jeff Duchin, public health director for Seattle and King County.

Those who decide they must gather with a small group of family members need to be careful, he said: "Don't share utensils, don't share objects, don't pass them back and forth, because you're passing that virus around as well."

SEE CASES ON PAGE 7

White House to leave some troops in Afghanistan past election

BY DAVID S. CLOUD AND TRACY WILKINSON
Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — Top U.S. commanders believe they have tentative White House approval to leave just over 4,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan beyond November, delaying a full American pullout until after the presidential election.

The plan, worked out at a meeting between Pentagon and White House officials late last month, would represent an about-face for President Donald Trump. He has pushed for a competitive withdrawal of the 8,600 troops now in Afghanistan by the election, seeing a pullout as a much-needed foreign policy achievement as his reelection prospects have deteriorated.

Trump had only recently told advisers that a full and rapid pullout could blunt the controversy over intelligence reports that Russia has paid militants to kill American service members, one official said. The president, who has made clear that he cares little about conditions inside Afghanistan, could still order a full withdrawal by November if he decides it would help him in the election, officials said.

But Pentagon officials warned that a complete withdrawal over the next five months could plunge Afghanistan into crisis, dooming peace talks.

"The timetable is being driven by the election clock, not the Afghan clock," Pentagon official who requested anonymity
EEO complaint filed against Facebook

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — A Black Facebook employee, joined by two others who were denied jobs at the social network, has filed a complaint against the company, saying it discriminates against Black workers and applicants in hiring, evaluations, promotions and pay.

The charge was filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission by Oscar Veneszee, Jr., who has worked as an operations program manager at Facebook since 2017 and claims he has not been fairly evaluated or promoted despite his “excellent performance” at the company. Two others joined Veneszee’s complaint, saying they were unlawfully denied jobs at the company despite being qualified.

Facebook said in a statement it takes discrimination allegations seriously and investigates every case. “We believe it is essential to provide all employees with a respectful and safe working environment,” said spokeswoman Pamela Austin.

Black workers account for 3.8% of all U.S. Facebook employees and 1.5% of all U.S. technical workers at the company.

This isn’t the first criticism a Black employee has leveled at Facebook. Mark Luckie, sent a memo to his coworkers on his last day in 2018 about Facebook’s “black people problem.”

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### Military

#### House committee approves defense bill

**By Steve Beynon**

**Stars and Stripes**

WASHINGTON — A House committee Wednesday approved a $740.5 billion defense spending bill that includes a pay raise for troops, limits on the president’s ability to withdraw troops from Germany and renaming bases that honor Confederate generals.

The House Armed Services Committee passed its 2021 National Defense Authorization Act, which sets yearly policy and funding priorities for the Pentagon, by a 56-0 vote after 14 hours of debate on Capitol Hill.

The bill includes a 3% pay raise for service members that keeps up with inflation and mirrors the Senate version. The military gets a pay raise each year, but the amount has ranged from 2.2% in 2007 to 3.1% this year.

The committee voted 49-7 to adopt an amendment to the NDAA from Reps. Ruben Gallego, D-Ariz., and Don Bacon, R-Neb., to rebuke Trump’s plan to remove thousands of troops out of Germany, which can be used as a quick-reaction force again Russia and be deployed rapidly to the Middle East and Africa.

“Things should be thought about before we announce we’re going to yank 10,000 troops out of Germany,” Smith said. “The president has not yet been clear on what he’s doing.”

The House amendment prevents the administration from reducing troops until 180 days after the Defense Department presents a plan on Capitol Hill certifying the drawdown would not harm the United States or its allies.

The Senate Armed Services Committee’s defense spending bill also includes $1 billion to combat future pandemics, including $750 million for military preparedness, and millions for rapid production of medical gear.

“Vindman came to a close shortly before midnight, making it one of the fastest markup sessions in years. The final amendment approved was offered by Smith and names the defense bill after Rep. Mac Thornberry of Texas, the top Republican on the committee, who is retiring after serving in Congress since 1995.”

The panel passed an amendment as part of the NDAA that would kick off the process of renaming bases honoring Confederates from the Civil War. The Senate Armed Services Committee’s version of the NDAA contains a similar provision.

But President Donald Trump has said an NDAA arriving on his desk with measures to rename those military bases is unacceptable, possibly putting congressional Republicans on a collision course with the White House.

“I would hope the president really wouldn’t veto the bill over this issue,” Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said Wednesday on Fox News. “I hope the president would reconsider vetoing the entire defense bill, which suspends pay raises for our troops, over a provision in there that could lead to changing the names of some of these military bases.”

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#### Senator to block promotions until getting assurances for Vindman

**The Washington Post**

WASHINGTON — A Democratic senator is blocking promotions for 1,125 senior members of the military until she gets assurances from Defense Secretary Mark Esper that he will not retaliate against an Army officer for his role in the past year’s impeachment inquiry of President Donald Trump.

Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., said Thursday that she wants confirmation in writing from Esper that he did not or will not block the promotion of Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman. Until she gets that assurance, she will maintain a hold on Senate confirmation of the hundreds of promotions.

Duckworth is a Purple Heart recipient and a former Army helicopter pilot who lost both her legs in the Iraq War.

Vindman, who received a Purple Heart for his actions in Iraq and later served as a White House aide on European affairs, is among hundreds of officers seen as possible candidates for promotions.

In February, the White House ousted Vindman from his post on the National Security Council. He had testified to impeachment investigators in November that he was disturbed by Trump’s call for Ukraine to investigate the president’s political rivals.

“Our military is supposed to be the ultimate meritocracy,” Duckworth said in a statement. “It is simply unprecedented and wrong for any Commander in Chief to meddle in routine military matters at all, whether or not he has a personal vendetta against a Soldier who did his patriotic duty and told the truth for our troops, over a provision in there that could lead to changing the names of some of these military bases.”

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#### VA allows penalized for-profit schools to enroll GI Bill students again

**By Steve Beynon**

**Stars and Stripes**

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs announced Thursday that it will allow five for-profit schools to accept new GI Bill students, after warning the schools in March that they could lose eligibility after targeting veterans with misleading advertising.

Veterans advocates are claiming the move is illegal.

New students using GI Bill benefits can now attend the University of Phoenix, Colorado Technical University, American InterContinental University, Bellevue University and Temple University, a move worth over $200 million a year total for the again-eligible schools, which were found to have used questionable recruiting practices.

Veterans Education Success, a veterans’ advocacy group in Washington, says the VA move violates a federal law that forbids the agency from approving the enrollment of GI Bill students at schools proven to use “advertising, sales, or enrollment practices of any type which are unfair, deceptive, or misleading either by actual statement, omission or intimation.”

“Veterans are the schools that used their money and political influence to evade the law and harm veterans,” Carrie Wofford, president of Veterans Education Success, said in a statement.

In 2018, a VA Inspector General warned the department could waste $2.3 billion in payments to “ineligible colleges” over the next five academic years. In its report, the IG found 29 of the 35 ineligible or potentially ineligible programs were at for-profit schools. The report did not name any of the schools it investigated.

In March, VA officials notified the five schools that the agency intended to suspend approvals of new GI Bill enrollments. The department after officials found “sufficient evidence” that those schools used “erroneous, deceptive, or misleading” enrollment practices to recruit veteran students, according to a letter sent to veteran advocacy groups and congressional lawmakers.

In a May 7 letter, the department required the schools to enact reforms to become eligible for GI Bill enrollees again. These reforms included changing staff associated with advertisements, hiring an independent third-party auditor to analyze marketing material, and refunding tuition with prohibited practices.

Two weeks later, on May 26, the department sent a follow-up letter to the schools, softening its approach and rescheduling the previous guidance calling for reform, requiring only that schools cease prohibited practices and assure they are in compliance with the law.

Christina Noel, a VA spokeswoman, said without specifics that after “careful review,” the department determined the schools have “taken adequate corrective actions to avoid future GI Bill student enrollments,” which include personnel changes, leadership changes, restitution to impacted students, renewed annual training for school employees and improved oversight.
AUSTIN, Texas — The Army investigation into the Leon County, Texas, disappearance of 20-year-old Vanessa Guillen is under investigation.

The family of Guillen, a Fort Hood soldier, has called for the Army to release details about its investigation of the disappearance.

The Army said Wednesday that the soldier suspected in Guillen’s disappearance had killed himself.

In a press conference Thursday, the Army identified Aaron David Robinson, another soldier in Guillen’s unit who she said was the person harassing her, and said it was pursuing other leads.

The criminal complaint released last Thursday said the soldier suspected in Guillen’s disappearance is accused of having sexual harassment within Guillen’s unit.

The complaint said the soldier had threats against Guillen, was angry about her relations with another soldier, and had been reviewing details of Guillen’s case, saying the civilian helped the other soldier get rid of evidence after he bludgeoned Guillen with a hammer at Fort Hood in the Central Texas area where Guillen was killed.

The complaint said the soldier suspected in Guillen’s disappearance is also accused of tampering with the Guillen case.

The Army said Thursday that Robinson enlisted Aguilar to help hide the body of Guillen’s body, but later chopped it up with a machete. Then, they put cement on the body and buried the remains.

The family had previously said they believed the Army was covering up details of Vanessa Guillen’s disappearance.

The family has spoken out about those allegations to the media and the soldier’s unit, which prompted a command inquiry by the regiment. The results of that inquiry have not been released.

The family identified two suspects in Guillen’s disappearance. One suspect was identified by Khawam as Aaron David Robinson, another soldier in Guillen’s unit who she said was the person harassing her. Robinson killed himself Wednesday as local law enforcement in Killeen attempted to arrest him, according to Army investigators.

The seven-member Army investigation team began its review Tuesday and was to conclude its on-the-ground work Friday focusing on three objectives: examining the sexual harassment program’s implementation at Fort Hood, assessing whether the command climate is supportive of soldiers’ rights and the program’s impact.

The inspection team will brief Fort Hood and FORSCOM leaders upon completion of the inspection, according to Paul Boyce, spokesman for FORSCOM.

An Army report released in April on instances of sexual assault among soldiers for fiscal year 2019 shows a “high rate” of reporting, with 5.5 reports of sexual assault per every 1,000 soldiers, which is the same as the previous year. That was the highest rate ever reported, according to the Army.

While some credit for the high rate is given to victim confidence in reporting, results of the most recent Defense Department Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Members showed an increase in the estimated prevalence of sexual assault to 6,500 Army soldiers in 2018, compared to 5,200 estimated in 2016, according to the report.

This increase is very troubling and shows that the Army’s sexual assault prevention strategies have not achieved their intended results,” the report states.
WASHINGTON — A Navy task force established to address biases, such as racism and sexism, is working to create “enduring and meaningful change” within the ranks, Navy leaders said Thursday.

“aright we have not been committed to inclusion and diversity in the Navy for many years and it’s not like we haven’t taken many actions there. But I think it’s safe to say that as we look at current events it’s really put a light on the fact that we need to do more. We need to do it more quickly,” Vice Adm. John Nowell, chief of naval personnel, told reporters Thursday.

The military is creating diversity and inclusion initiatives in response to the national dialogue that has erupted over systemic racism in the United States after the deaths of several African Americans this year involving law enforcement.

On June 18, Defense Secretary Mark Esper announced three initiatives to address diversity in the military, including the creation of a Defense Advisory Committee on Diversity and Inclusion in the Armed Services, which was inspired by the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services.

“Tell me that you these are not figureheads, that’s not why they’re there. But we think that diversity that we build into the task force is important,” he said.

The task force will address the nine key areas not on a ranked basis but in parallel. Nowell said, and will fix things as they find them. The first report from the task force will be submitted to Gilday by the end of July, and a final report by December, according to the task force’s charter.

Nowell discussed the lack of representation in the officer ranks in which African Americans only make up 9% of officers through 13% of the U.S. population is African American, he said. African Americans have greater representation in the enlisted ranks of up to 20%, Nowell said, but the Navy wants to make certain that officers reflect the American population.

“So, as we look at the officer corps the issue is if we don’t bring enough African American officers in the front door, then I don’t have any hope of the person sitting here and telling to you as chief of naval personnel being African American,” he said.

The task force will look at what barriers are in place that need to be removed to allow more diversity and inclusion in the force, according to Nowell.

Goldfein did not specify what measures the service has put in place to improve diversity.

USA chief: Must make lasting push on diversity

By Caitlin M. Kenney
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Air Force’s top officer said Wednesday that the service cannot become distracted in its efforts to bring about long-lasting change to address the diversity of its personnel.

“History is not on our side here. If we follow history, we’ll get a few things going. And then September will arrive, and (the coronavirus) will return and flu will strike and the country will go into high gear and we will get distracted. And we will put this on the back burner. Shame on us,” Gen. David Goldfein, the chief of staff of the Air Force, said during an event at the Brookings Institution, a Washington think tank.

The protests across the country sparked by the death of George Floyd, a Black man who was killed while in police custody in Minneapolis on May 25, has also given the Air Force an opportunity to “make long-term, meaningful and lasting change that quite frankly we should have been doing before and I take that commitment,” Goldfein said.

“We were doing a lot of work towards becoming a more diverse force. But I think we have the opportunity in front of us right now to go — to put on the gas and really move forward in ways that we need to move,” he said.

Goldfein is in his last year as the Air Force chief of staff before he retires. He will be replaced in August by Gen. Charles “CQ” Brown, the first African American to become a service chief.

Because of the diverse mission of the Air Force, the service needs to attract people from all walks of life, Goldfein said. While they should be the best a diversity of people, “we’re not. But we can be,” he said.

“So the measures that we put in place that we’re looking at are not long-term, aggressive measures to change the demographic to ensure that we are building a culture of inclusiveness at the squadron level, which is where it matters most,” he said. “And that we’re arming command teams with the tools they need to shift this.”

Goldfein did not specify what measures the service has put in place to improve diversity.

Miliary: Bayonets issued to troops for DC protest

By Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A Navy task force established to address biases, such as racism and sexism, is working to create “enduring and meaningful change” within the ranks, Navy leaders said Thursday.

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WAR ON TERRORISM

Troops: Officials see problems with earlier exit

FROM FRONT PAGE

talks U.S. officials have been seeking to jump-start between the Afghan government and Taliban militants and worsening already ready surging violence. Officials also warned the White House that getting out completely by November would force them to leave substantial amounts of equipment behind.

“Tensile time is being driven by the election clock, not the Afghan clock,” said one official, who agreed to the administration’s thinking in return for anonymity.

Other administration officials also believe that a sooner-than-planned exit would only worsen the perception that the U.S. and Trump were being driven out of the country after nearly two decades of war.

Marine Gen. Kenneth McKenzie, the top commander in the Middle East, said last month that he could not recommend a full withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan until the Taliban demonstrates it no longer supports al-Qaeda forces there.

“If conditions would allow, we’re prepared to go to zero” by next May, McKenzie said at a videoconference hosted by the Washington-based think tank Middle East Institute. “If asked my question, those conditions have not been fully met.”

It wouldn’t be the first time that the administration had successfully lobbied a president to halt a planned withdrawal from Afghanistan months before an election. President Barack Obama also halted plans for a complete pullout in 2015, leaving the question of whether the U.S. should leave for his successor.

If Trump loses the election, the decision on a final withdrawal would fall to Joe Biden, the presumptive Democratic nominee, who has long favored reducing the U.S. presence in the country.

The president recently revived his talk of a complete withdrawal before the election, amid the public furor over the reports that he was informed earlier this year about the Russian bounties and has done nothing in response.

Trump has denounced the report of Russian bounties as a “hoax” and claimed that intelligence officials never told him verbally about the payments. The bounties were mentioned, however, in intelligence summaries provided to him and other top advisers at the White House. A Taliban spokesman has denied the reports.

U.S. military commanders and intelligence officials say there is strong evidence that Russia paid bounties to the Taliban, and they have been investigating whether payments were made after three American soldiers were killed last year by a car bomb near Bagram Airfield, north of Kabul, officials said.

The U.S. troop level in Afghanistan has already fallen steeply, to 8,600 last month from 12,000 as recently as January. The initial drawdown was part of a Feb. 29 agreement between the Trump administration and Taliban militiamen that calls for a complete American exit by next spring.

Trump wanted to expedite that even as U.S. officials insist that further withdrawals are contingent on the Taliban denying sanctuary to al-Qaeda within Afghan territory under its control and on the power-sharing negotiations with the Afghan government.

A U.S. soldier carries his working dog over a concertina wire fence during a 2009 patrol with the 10th Mountain Division in Afghanistan’s Wardak Province. In late June, the Pentagon and White House worked out a plan to delay a full American pullout of troops until after the upcoming presidential election.

Afghan government officials say more than 400 Taliban attacks this year have claimed the lives of some 200 members of the Afghan security forces. Separately, 42 civilians — including babies in a hospital maternity ward — were killed in a single attack, although other Islamic militants were blamed.

Trump’s insistence on pulling out all U.S. forces has run into opposition not only from the Pentagon but also from lawmakers of both parties.

The House Armed Services Committee on Wednesday moved to restrict his ability to order steeper withdrawals, approving a provision that would block funding for reductions below 8,000 troops unless the administration certifies that doing so would not compromise counterterrorism goals and other conditions. The amendment, attached to an annual defense bill, was approved by a vote of 45-11.

Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, a member of the House Republican leadership, said the provision "lays out, in a very responsible level of specificity, what is going to be required if we are going to make decisions about troop levels based on conditions on the ground and based on what’s required for our own security, not based on political timeframes.”

U.S. diplomats have consulted numerous times with Taliban and Afghan government officials, with the goal of pushing the sides toward enacting the Feb. 29 agreement. But they have made little progress.

“Giving the process a short shrift will undermine our interests and our international reputation,” Earl Anthony Wayne, a former senior U.S. diplomat in Afghanistan, told the Los Angeles Times. "We would pay serious costs to the international community and long term for a precipitous departure this year.”

Pelosi, Schumer rebuke Trump reaction to intel

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The two top Democrats in Congress said Thursday that any threats to U.S. troops must be pursued “recklessly,” rebuking President Donald Trump after receiving a highly classified briefing about intelligence that Russian bounties for killing U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said Trump, who has downplayed the threat, was “soft” on Russian President Vladimir Putin and distracted by less important issues. Trump has called reports of the intelligence assessment “a hoax” and has far declined to address whether the U.S. has or will respond to Russia.

“aroused forces would be better served if President Trump spent more time reading his daily briefing and less time planning military parades and defending relics of the Confederacy,” Pelosi and Schumer said in a joint statement.

Trump and the White House have repeatedly insisted that the president wasn’t originally briefed because the information was unverified, even though it’s rare for intelligence to be confirmed without a shadow of doubt before it is presented to senior government decision-makers. Officials have told The Associated Press and other news organizations that the information was included in one of the president’s written daily briefings last year and again this year.

The criticism comes as Trump is working to change the narrative but has faced increasing pressure from lawmakers in Congress — including some Republicans — who have demanded more answers about the intelligence assessment. The president has repeatedly tweeted about protesters tearing down monuments to the Confederacy and on Thursday held a news conference to tout newly released numbers showing added jobs in the economy. He did not mention Russia.

Top intelligence officials, including CIA Director Gina Haspel and Director of National Intelligence John Ratcliffe, conducted the closed-door briefing for a group of lawmakers dubbed the “gang of eight” — Pelosi, Schumer, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, House Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy and the top Republicans and Democrats on the two intelligence committees.

The group regularly receives classified briefings at the highest levels, and leaders rarely speak about them. Pelosi and Schumer did not address the substance of the meeting, and none of the other lawmakers leaving the meeting would comment on it.

In a news conference shortly afterward, Pelosi called for a consequential level that the intelligence community should have brought to us.

Without sharing details, Pelosi said Trump’s decision not to convene a subsequent level that the intelligence community should have brought to us.

The intelligence committee also received a briefing on the matter Thursday afternoon, according to a person familiar with that meeting who requested anonymity because it was not publicly disclosed.
Military sees steep rise in number of virus cases

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON—The number of coronavirus cases in the military has nearly doubled in the past month and the Army’s cases have now surpassed the Navy in the total number of infected personnel, according to Pentagon data.

The Pentagon reported June 3 that the military had 6,864 cases of the virus. By Wednesday, the number had risen to 12,521. The Navy, which suffered outbreaks on two ships at sea, had the highest number of cases among the services for several weeks. The Army recently surpassed the Navy in cases with 3,836 as of Wednesday to the Navy’s 3,662 cases. Three soldiers with the service have died since the pandemic began.

As of Thursday, the United States has had more than 2.7 million confirmed cases of the coronavirus and more than 128,000 Americans have died, according to Johns Hopkins University. The Defense Department is seeing increases in military cases in locations where there has been a rise in civilian cases, Thomas McCaffery, assistant secretary of defense for health affairs, told reporters Wednesday at the Pentagon.

“In Florida, Texas, and Arizona, some parts of California, so that wouldn’t be a surprise that we’re a part of the community and so where there are some up-ticks, we’re seeing that as well,” he said.

McCaffery also said the military has increased testing and testing of personnel who are asymptomatic.

“So that information is something that we are sharing with our commanders,” he said. “The idea is to use that information to make decisions based upon their local circumstances, their local mission.”

As of Monday, 47 states and the District of Columbia have met the Department’s criteria to lift travel restrictions at 35 as of Monday. The Army has 14 installations, the Navy has 13 and the Marine Corps has eight that have lifted restrictions. Eleven of the 70 installations are in host nations.

“We’re seeing that’s there is a level of variance in what our local commanders are doing,” McCaffery said.

The Army, Navy and Air Force have lifted restrictions in response to the coronavirus pandemic, or 30% of major installations, according to a Pentagon document published Thursday.

The list includes installations in the United States and in host nations, with the Air Force having the most installations that have lifted travel restrictions at 35 as of Monday. The Army has 14 installations, the Navy has 13 and the Marine Corps has eight that have lifted restrictions. Eleven of the 70 installations are in host nations.

“We’re seeing that’s there is a level of variance in what our local commanders are doing,” McCaffery said.

The problem, she said, is that the administration promised to lift restrictions where cases are stable.

Mary Halley of Jonesville said her family canceled plans for a week in Put-in-Bay in Ohio did the administration promises will be the biggest in recent memory.

“People want to do what we’re trying to do to keep them safe,” she said.

Families have canceled plans for a week-end outing on Lake Michigan.

“We had some disappointed kids, but we knew as a family we couldn’t do that,” she said.

After hearing Michigan’s governor warn about the need to be smart amid an uptick of cases, Mary Halley of Jonesville said her family canceled plans for a weekend outing on Lake Michigan.

“We had some disappointed kids, but we knew as a family we couldn’t do that,” she said.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advised Americans who do go to the beach to wear face coverings, though not in the water.

During Memorial Day weekend, the Army, Navy and Air Force have lifted travel restrictions in response to the coronavirus pandemic, or 30% of major installations, according to a Pentagon document published Thursday.

The list includes installations in the United States and in host nations, with the Air Force having the most installations that have lifted travel restrictions at 35 as of Monday. The Army has 14 installations, the Navy has 13 and the Marine Corps has eight that have lifted restrictions. Eleven of the 70 installations are in host nations.

“We’re seeing that’s there is a level of variance in what our local commanders are doing,” McCaffery said.

The problem, she said, is that the administration promised to lift restrictions where cases are stable.

Mary Halley of Jonesville said her family canceled plans for a week in Put-in-Bay in Ohio did the administration promises will be the biggest in recent memory.

“People want to do what we’re trying to do to keep them safe,” she said.

Families have canceled plans for a weekend outing on Lake Michigan.

“We had some disappointed kids, but we knew as a family we couldn’t do that,” she said.

After hearing Michigan’s governor warn about the need to be smart amid an uptick of cases, Mary Halley of Jonesville said her family canceled plans for a weekend outing on Lake Michigan.

“We had some disappointed kids, but we knew as a family we couldn’t do that,” she said.

The problem, she said, is that too many people aren’t listening to the experts. “Even in my small, little town, there are lot of people who didn’t comply with the orders,” she said.

Dr. Don Williamson, head of the Alabama Hospital Association, said he is “really, really worried about the Fourth of July.”

“I think that will likely determine the trend for Alabama for the rest of the summer,” he said.

Cases: US sets record as 52,300 new infections are reported on Friday

FROM FRONT PAGE

The warnings were sounded after a Memorial Day weekend that saw many people emerge from stay-at-home orders to go to the beach, restaurants and family gatherings. Since then, confirmed infections per day in the U.S. have rocketed to an all-time high, more than doubling.

The U.S. set another record on Friday with 52,000 newly reported cases, according to the tally kept by Johns Hopkins University. Arizona, California, Florida and Texas have been hit especially hard.

Despite it all, there will still be fireworks and community events scattered across the nation, with many taking social distancing into account. In Ohio, Upper Arlington’s July Fourth parade will take a much longer route through its neighborhoods so residents can stay within social distancing rules.

“We’re calling it the front porch parade,” said organizer Sam Porter. “We can’t just not do something.”

Fireworks will be launched from four spots in the Albuquerque metro area, New Mexico, so that people can ooh and aah from home instead of gathering in a single place.

President Donald Trump was set to travel to South Dakota on Friday for a fireworks show at Mount Rushmore before returning to the nation’s capital for military flyovers Saturday and a mile-long pyrotechnics display show on the National Mall that the administration promises will be the biggest in recent memory.

Up to 300,000 face masks will be given away at the event but not required.

The big party will go on over objections from Washington’s mayor.

“Ask yourself, do you need to be there? Ask yourself, can you anticipate or know who is going to be around you? If you go downtown, do you know if you’re going to be able to social distance?” Mayor Muriel Bowser said.

Beaches that had been open for the traditional start of summer over Memorial Day weekend will be off-limits in many places this time, including South Florida, Southern California and the Texas Gulf Coast.

A medical professional from the Wiesbaden Army Health Clinic administers a COVID-19 test to a soldier Tuesday at the Mission Command Center at U.S. Army Garrison Wiesbaden.

A trainer at Life Time full service health club works with a client Thursday in Phoenix. The club remains open even as Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey has issued an executive order for all gyms to close due to the surge in coronavirus cases in the state.
TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — Several college students in an Alabama city organized “COVID-19” parties as a contest to see who would get the virus first, an official said.

Students hosted the parties to intentionally infect each other with the new coronavirus, news outlets quoted Tuscaloosa City Councilor Sonya McKinstry as saying. McKinstry said party organizers purposely invited guests who tested positive for COVID-19.

She said the students put money in a pot and whoever got COVID first would get the cash.

“It makes no sense,” McKinstry said. “They’re intentionally doing it.”

Tuscaloosa Fire Chief Randy Smith told the City Council on Tuesday that fire officials confirmed some students had attended parties despite knowing they were infected. The department thought the parties were rumours, but McKinstry said hospital admissions turned out to be real.

“Not only do the doctors’ offices confirm that the state confirmed they also had the same information,” Smith said.

State Health Officer Scott Harris said he had seen the news story about the reported parties, but could not officially confirm it. McKinstry and Smith did not say which schools the students attended. Tuscaloosa is home to The University of Alabama and several other colleges.

The University of Alabama issued a statement saying they have heard rumours of such parties and are working to educate students.

“We have been aware for weeks of potential parties and have identified any students who may have partaken and in these types of activities, we will continue to follow up on any information we receive and educate our students about essential precautions,” the university said in a statement.

MIAMI — Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos Gimenez said he’s instituting an overnight curfew and closing some business, as the county’s number of COVID-19 cases and hospitalization rates continue to rise.

Gimenez said Thursday that the 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew, which begins Friday, will be in place indefinitely and “The law is not over, and we will continue our efforts to hold the MCC account- able should it fail to take necessary measures to minimize the spread of this deadly virus within its walls and treat with proper care those who are sickened by it.”

New York

NEW YORK — A Manhattan federal lockup failed to implement common-sense measures to protect prisoners after a COVID-19 outbreak infected dozens of inmates at the facility, a judge said Thursday.

U.S. District Judge Edgardo Ramirez said four inmates who sued over conditions at the Metropolitan Correctional Center on behalf of themselves and others were unlikely to prove deliberate indifference to their plight. Still, the Manhattan jurist allowed their lawsuit to proceed in their quest to improve conditions at the jail and win release for vulnerable inmates.

New Jersey

TRENTON — New Jersey’s playgrounds, water and amusement parks, libraries and museums reopened Thursday after a months-long pause because of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Atlantic City’s casinos also reopened, though without smoking, drinking and indoor dining.

New Jersey continues to re-open businesses from the near-totally closed economy in March, currently in Stage 2 of three.

Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy said Thursday he thanked businesses statewide for their cooperation during the outbreak — faced liability in the state’s new coronavirus lawsuit for businesses statewide, though a trial has been set for April.

The order from the Knox County Board of Health specifically mandates that in most indoor public places, every person aged 12 or older must wear a face covering when they are within 6 feet of another person who does not live in the same household, the Knoxville News Sentinel reported. The order will remain in place until the board of health votes to rescind or change it.

For those who do not have masks, the Knox County Health Department is providing free, state-issued cloth masks. Dr. Pat- rick O’Connor, health officer of Knox County, said he had seen the news story about the reported parties, but could not officially confirm it. McKinstry and Smith did not say which schools the students attended. Tuscaloosa is home to The University of Alabama and several other colleges.

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Arlo Devlin-Brown, a lawyer for inmates, said in an email that it was notable that the judge cited the fact that the facility’s warden has promised to address shortcom- ings as he observed that “the MCC failed short in its efforts to improve its pandemic response.”

“Time will tell whether the MCC practices what it preaches,” Devlin-Brown said.

Now that requirement applies to businesses statewide, though a spokesman for Inslee said the focus will be on education and seeking voluntary compliance first.

West Virginia

CHARLESTON — West Virginia Gov. Jim Justice on Thursday said residents should prepare for a mandatory face mask order as the state’s new coronavirus cases rise to their highest level since the pandemic began.

The Republican governor said he will decide early next week whether he will order that masks be worn inside buildings and when social distancing isn’t pos- sible. Justice has previously re- sisted such a mandate but said he wanted to give people notice that a mask mandate could be coming.

“If that is such a horrible, hor- rible inconvenience in your life, please just think of what it will do to save us and keep us to be able to do all of the things that we’re doing today in West Virginia,” he said.

The warning comes as West Virginia’s virus cases have been steadily rising. Health officials reported the highest single-day tally of new cases since the pan- demic began with 74 positives on Wednesday.

The governor has lifted most virus restrictions implemented to prevent the spread of the virus at the start of the pandemic. Clus- ters have recently emerged after tourism travel to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and after church services.
Trump starts July 4th party at Mount Rushmore

By Stephen Groves  Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. — President Donald Trump was to begin his Independence Day weekend on Friday with a patriotic display of fireworks at Mount Rushmore, an event that was expected to draw thousands where masks and social distancing weren’t to be required as coronavirus cases spiked across the country.

Trump was expected to speak at the event, which had issued 7,500 tickets to watch fireworks that he had said would a “display like few people have seen.”

Republican Gov. Kristi Noem, a Trump ally, had said social distancing wasn’t to be required during the event and masks were to be optional. Event organizers were planning to provide masks to anyone who wanted them and to screen attendees for symptoms of COVID-19.

The Republican mayor of the largest city near the monument, Rapid City, had said he would be watching for a spike in cases after the event, the Rapid City Journal had reported.

“We’re going to have thousands of people, shoulder to shoulder at these events — someone in line to see a president and being able to see fireworks at Mount Rushmore — they are probably not likely to disqualify or require any mitigation they developed a cough the day of or the day before,” Rapid City Mayor Steve Allender had said.

Leaders of several Native American tribes in the region also had raised concerns that the event could lead to coronavirus outbreaks among their members, who they say are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 because of an underfunded health care system and chronic health conditions.

“The president is putting our tribal members at risk to stage a photo op at one of our most sacred sites,” Harold Frazier, chairman of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, had said.

Some Native American groups were planning to use Trump’s visit to protest the Mount Rushmore memorial itself, pointing out that the Black Hills were taken from the Lakota people against treaty agreements.

Protests were expected in Keystone, the small town near the monument. Chase Iron Eyes, a spokesman for the Oglala Sioux, had said protesters were likely to make their voice heard at the memorial itself.

Security was expected to be tight, with the road leading up to Mount Rushmore shut down. The event also raised health concerns.

Jobs surge: Trump more optimistic than Biden

By Steve Peoples  Associated Press

NEW YORK — The U.S. economy just posted its best single-month job gain in history. U.S. unemployment is at one of its worst points since the Great Depression. Both are true.

As Republicans and Democrats fought to spin Thursday’s job numbers to their advantage, both sides face tremendous political risks in navigating a delicate moment in the presidential campaign’s final months.

Democrats, led by presumptive nominee Joe Biden, seized on the growing threat presented by the coronavirus after the better-than-expected June jobs report. If released, a stance the Republicans called roosting against America’s recovery. President Donald Trump claimed a major economic victory and played down the health threat, even as an explosion of new infections threatened to stall, or even reverse, the economic gains.

Deep uncertainty lies ahead, experts warn, despite two months of record job growth. And with only two more monthly jobs reports expected before the Nov. 3 election, the dueling visions of America’s economy establish a new frame for the high-stakes debate ahead.

“Today’s announcement proves that our economy is roaring back,” Trump exulted to reporters at the White House after the June numbers were released. He later added, “The crisis is being handled.”

Two hours later, Biden offered a darker assessment.

“There’s no victory to be celebrated,” the former vice president said in a video recorded at his home in Delaware. “We’re still down nearly 15 million jobs, and the pandemic is getting worse, not better.”

“Today’s report is positive news, and I’m thankful for it — for real,” Biden continued. “But make no mistake, we’re still in a deep, deep job hole because Donald Trump has so badly bungled the response to coronavirus.”

Thursday’s data showed a surge of 4.8 million new jobs last month, a snapshot of the economy as of three weeks ago. The U.S. unemployment rate improved from 13.3% in May to 11.1% in June as many Americans thrown out of work by COVID-19 were called back. But the jobs numbers were announced just as the nation’s confirmed coronavirus infections soared to an all-time daily high of 50,700, more than doubling over the past month, according to the count kept by Johns Hopkins University.

The spike, centered primarily in the South and West, has led states such as California, Texas, Arizona and Florida to re-close or otherwise clamp down again on bars, restaurants, movie theaters, beaches and swimming pools and主机 events from the White House to megachurch — even as health officials warned against large gatherings and recommended face masks and social distancing.

The Trump campaign believes that nothing matters more to the president’s reelection than the state of the economy. With many Americans reporting that the country is moving in the wrong direction under his leadership, he has a lot of work to do.

Still, the president’s strongest ratings center on the economy, as has been the case throughout his tenure. About half of Americans say they approve of Trump’s handling of the economy, according to a poll released last month from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Justin Wolfers, a professor of economics and public policy at the University of Michigan, said Trump has been the case throughout his tenure. About half of Americans say they approve of Trump’s handling of the economy, according to a poll released last month from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

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Supreme Court blocks Alabama curbside voting

By Kim Chandler
Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — The U.S. Supreme Court in a 5-4 decision Thursday blocked a lower court ruling allowing curbside voting in Alabama and waiving some absentee ballot requirements during the pandemic.

Conservative justices granted Alabama’s request to stay a federal judge’s order that would allow local officials to offer curbside voting in the July runoff and loosen absentee ballot requirements in three of the state’s largest counties. The order will remain stayed while the court decides whether to hear Alabama’s appeal.

Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall said he was pleased the court acted quickly so that Alabama voters will have access to curbside voting in place for the July 14 runoff.

“Alabama is again able to enforce laws that help ensure the fairness and integrity of our elections,” the Republican said.

The court rulings stem from a lawsuit filed by the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Alabama Disparities Advocacy Program. A group of voters had sought more voting options because of health concerns.

U.S. District Judge Abdul K. Kallon last month issued a preliminary injunction after finding that Alabama’s election rules will cause sick or elderly voters to “likely face a painful and difficult choice between exercising their fundamental right to vote and safeguarding their health, which could prevent them from casting a vote in upcoming elections.”

Kallon said Alabama can’t prevent local election officials from offering curbside voting at in-person polling locations in the July 14 runoff. Kallon also ruled Alabama can’t require some absentee ballot voters in three counties to submit photocopies of their identification and witness signatures if it is dangerous for them to get out during the pandemic because of their age and underlying health conditions.

The three counties are where plaintiffs in the lawsuit live.

The state appealed the decision. The state argued that it would be confusing to change absentee ballot rules in three of Alabama’s 67 counties and that curbside voting would be a major change done right before the election.

The conservative justices said that Alabama’s rules are needed to combat voter fraud and are not unreasonable.

“But this dichotomy between voting and safety is false, even during COVID-19. The individual plaintiffs have at least one other person, and they really not find a safe way to have a second person watch them sign a piece of paper?” lawyers for the state wrote in their petition to the Supreme Court.

“Unfortunately, the decision means that Alabama voters who are at greatest risk of severe illness or death because of COVID-19 will be required to risk their health and violate CDC recommendations in order to vote on July 14,” said Deuel Ross, senior counsel at the NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, Inc., said in a statement.

Arguments themselves might not even take place before Americans decide whether to give President Donald Trump a second term.

The delay is a victory for Trump, who also is mounting a Supreme Court fight against congressional efforts to obtain his tax returns and other financial records. Those cases are expected to be decided in the coming days or weeks.

The court’s action also could mean the justices never have to reach a definitive ruling in a sensitive dispute between the executive and legislative branches of government, if either Trump loses reelection or Republicans regain control of the House next year. It’s hard to imagine an administration of Democrat Joe Biden would be as cooperative with Mueller documents and House Republicans would continue to press for them.

The House wants previously undisclosed details from the investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 election.


“Unfortunately, President Trump and Attorney General (William) Barr are continuing to try to run out the clock on any and all accountability. While I am confident their legal arguments will fail, it is now all the more important for the American people to hold the President accountable at the ballot box in November,” Nadler said in a statement.

The federal appeals court in Washington ruled in March that the documents should be turned over because the House Judiciary Committee’s need for the material in its investigation of Trump outweighed the Justice Department’s interests in keeping the testimony secret.

The legal battle has dragged on under President Donald Trump, who has repeatedly argued that it needed access to the underlying grand jury material to make its own determinations about the president’s actions, the court said.

The materials initially were sought last summer, but by the time the appeals court ruled in March, Trump had been impeached by the House and acquitted by the Senate.

The Justice Department said in its Supreme Court filings that the court’s action was needed in part because the House hasn’t given any indication it “urgently needs these materials for any ongoing impeachment investigation.”

The House had opposed the delay on the grounds that its investigation of Trump was continuing and that time is of the essence because of the approaching election. The current session of the House will end Jan. 3, and lawmakers elected in November will take their seats.

Court record: St. Louis couple has pulled out guns on people before

Associated Press

O’FALLON, Mo. — The white St. Louis couple who became internationally famous for standing guard with guns outside their home during a protest have a second term.

As demonstrators marched near the Renaissance palazzo-style home of Mark and Patricia McCloskey on Sunday, video posted online showed him wielding a long-barreled gun and her with a small handgun. No shots were fired.

The protesters, estimated at around 500, were mixed people, were passing the house on the way to the nearby home of Mayor Lyda Krewson. The protest was among dozens in St. Louis since George Floyd’s death in Minneapolis on May 25.

The McCloskeys — he’s 63 and she’s 61 — are both personal injury lawyers and their home is on a private street called Portland Place in St. Louis’ well-to-do Central West End.

Their attorney, Albert Watkins, said the couple have a long-time civil rights advocates and support the message of the Black Lives Matter movement.

As demonstrators marched, the couple yelled “peaceful protesters were met by guns and a violent assault.”

Watkins said in an interview that the McCloskeys have “touched their weapons” just twice in their 32 years on Portland Place — during the incident in 1988 or 1989 cited in the affidavit, and on Sunday.

Armed homeowners Mark and Patricia McCloskey, standing in front of their house along Portland Place confront protesters marching to St. Louis Mayor Lyda Krewson’s house, June 28, in the Central West End of St. Louis.

Justices keep hold on secret Russia investigation testimony

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court is denying Congress access to secret grand jury testimony in special counsel Robert Mueller’s Russia investigation through the November election.

The justices agreed on Thursday to hear the Trump administration’s appeal of a lower court order for the material to be turned over to the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives. The high court’s action will keep the documents out of congressional hands at least until the case is resolved, which is not likely to happen before 2021.

Arguments themselves might not even take place before Americans decide whether to give President Donald Trump a second term.

The delay is a victory for Trump, who also is mounting a Supreme Court fight against congressional efforts to obtain his tax returns and other financial records. Those cases are expected to be decided in the coming days or weeks.

The court’s action also could mean the justices never have to reach a definitive ruling in a sensitive dispute between the executive and legislative branches of government, if either Trump loses reelection or Republicans regain control of the House next year. It’s hard to imagine an administration of Democrat Joe Biden would be as cooperative with Mueller documents and House Republicans would continue to press for them.

The House wants previously undisclosed details from the investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 election.


“Unfortunately, President Trump and
The missions in each campaign also provide a glimpse of the battlefields and well-developed scenarios of medieval history. Some of those glimpses are clouded by the fog of war — or actually the fog of simplified storytelling and a pinch of anachronism. Look to these missions for fun, not a history lesson.

Fans of strategy games will be familiar with the rock-paper-scissors combat style. For example, archers beat spearmen, spearmen beat cavalry, and cavalry beat archers. Woe to you if you send three companies of archers to capture a village and are met by a squadron of charging cavalry. As a result, you'll need to build your army with an eye toward mixing its capabilities and positioning your individual units where they can be most effective in your line of battle. Once you've played through the campaigns, you're well prepared to engage in a skirmish, either against the game's artificial intelligence or against a human opponent.

In the skirmish mode, you can select your culture, battlefield, technology level and number of players. If you're playing against the game's AI, you can even set the difficulty and pacing. However, be aware that even an easy AI opponent is difficult to beat unless you've honed your tactics in the single-player campaigns. In the beginning, it seemed that AI opponents were always optimized to recruit and upgrade units faster than I ever could — unless I stacked the deck by setting my opponents on easy and gave myself a more advanced ally. The game's default pacing seems to be set to accommodate PC gamers rather than the more limited controls offered by consoles.

The major concern with any strategy game that moves from computer to consoles is the control system. Taps on a few keys and a quick bit of mousing are usually preferable to using combinations of controller buttons and a ponderous joystick to train and marshal your forces. However, the game's control system is pretty robust and relatively agile by console standards. Ancestors Legacy benefits from the fact that it's more like Company of Heroes than Warcraft or Age of Empires. You aren't building and maintaining a sprawling settlement. You're equipping, training and leading an army. As a result, everything is streamlined so the focus is on fighting. That dramatically cuts down the mechanics and menus required to play the game.

My biggest complaint about Ancestors is still related to the control system. Many functions aren't mentioned — or at least aren't described very well — in the game's tutorials and info boxes. There are a number of shortcuts embedded in the control system that I discovered only by accident or by trial and error. Once I learned these, my performance and enjoyment improved dramatically. Graphics are a mixed bag. The battlefields are loaded with detail and are very appealing. The units also look pretty good from a bird's-eye view. You also have the option of tapping the joystick and zooming in to watch the battle up close. In this view, however, it becomes apparent that the character renderings are relatively rudimentary — at least for the Xbox One — and that they quickly get lost in the audience.

The game has a mature rating — presumably because of the blood-covered warriors, unless I missed something else. I haven't played a strategy game on a console since Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3 — way back in 2008. While Ancestors Legacy didn't exactly make me yearn for a new crop of games in the genre, I found it a fun and satisfying diversion from the shooters, battles royale and open-world sandboxes that dominate the game scene.

Overall grade: B–
CONTACTLESS CAMPING

COVID-19 inspires travel writer to create trip with minimal risk

BY NATALIE B. COMPTON
The Washington Post

Contactless” is just about the last word I would use to describe my travel style. Before the pandemic, some of my favorite travel memories were made possible thanks to contact. But that kind of travel can’t take place right now. The pandemic is continuing to wreak havoc around the world, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention continues to tell us that “travel increases your chances of getting and spreading COVID-19.”

And yet, my impulse to travel has been a constant throughout my hundred days of working at home in isolation. On a Wednesday night, after transitioning from staring at my computer for work to staring at my computer for fun, I started thinking about how I could pull off a trip with the lowest possible risk.

What if I cut out the parts of travel that made it problematic during the pandemic? The parts like going through airports, sitting on planes, interacting with hotel guests, congregating at bus terminals or contaminating a gas station? Instead, I could make contactless travel a thing.

I booked a campsite, went to Target and bought the cheapest tent and sleeping bag combo, plus I got an anxious about spending nearly $150 on a trip that lasted more than a night or two, what wouldn’t take up too much room, and what was durable enough to survive being smashed in my backpack. I went with grapefruit, raisins, pistachios, peanut butter, a water bottle full of Vietnamese coffee, salami and an avocado (which yes, smashed in transit).

If you were doing to do a contactless trip that lasted more than a night or two, you may want to get into the world of Meal, Ready-to-Eat (MRE) foods. They’re backpack-friendly, dehydrated and compact. I’ve eaten some decent ones when traveling in remote destinations, and while they’re not my first pick for standard wining and dining, they’ll do.

I’m not sure why, but when I pictured biking from a metropolitan area to a national park I imagined scenic pathways and leafy trails.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13
More than just Mr. Nice Guy

Martin Freeman shows different facets of acting in 2 new TV projects

BY MICHAEL ORDONA
Los Angeles Times

The Everyman Card has been nice to have in his back pocket; it afforded him entry to a solid career. But British actor Martin Freeman has others to play, as two very different television projects show.

“I didn’t go to drama school just to be likable and funny,” he says over a Zoom chat from his London home. “I like having that facility; it’s very useful. But as an actor, I’m greedy. I want to do as much as I can do.”

The 48-year-old Freeman made his name as the nice young man in the original British “The Office” (think the John Krasinski role), the accidental cosmic tourist in “The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy” and the sensitive porn stand-in in “Love,actually.” Since then, his hits have included the Benedict Cumberbatch-starring “Sherlock” (as Watson), the trilogy of “The Hobbit” (as the hobbit, Bilbo Baggins), the FX series “Fargo” (as Lester Nygaard) and “Captain America: Civil War” and “Black Panther” in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (he says “Panther” director Ryan Coogler has confirmed he’ll be in the sequel).

An hour and a half from my apartment, I also spied a farmers market stand advertising fresh peaches and I cracked. I rolled into the parking lot, ditched my bike, waited in a line six feet from the patrons around me and bought some produce, a pitcher of beer and a bag of teapot Popsicle to eat standing alone by my bike.

The guilt rushed through me stronger than the muscle soreness. I biked the rest of the way home without stopping, feeling guilty for touching the door handles and sink faucet. (I kicked the toilet handle into motion.) I had made contact on my contactless toilet handle; it’s very useful. But like most actors, I’m greedy. I want to do as much as I can do.

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The 48-year-old Freeman made his name as the nice young man in the original British “The Office” (think the John Krasinski role), the accidental cosmic tourist in “The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy” and the sensitive porn stand-in in “Love, actually.” Since then, his hits have included the Benedict Cumberbatch-starring “Sherlock” (as Watson), the trilogy of “The Hobbit” (as the hobbit, Bilbo Baggins), the FX series “Fargo” (as Lester Nygaard) and “Captain America: Civil War” and “Black Panther” in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (he says “Panther” director Ryan Coogler has confirmed he’ll be in the sequel).

An hour and a half from my apartment, I also spied a farmers market stand advertising fresh peaches and I cracked. I rolled into the parking lot, ditched my bike, waited in a line six feet from the patrons around me and bought some produce, a pitcher of beer and a bag of teapot Popsicle to eat standing alone by my bike.

The guilt rushed through me stronger than the muscle soreness. I biked the rest of the way home without stopping, feeling guilty for touching the door handles and sink faucet. (I kicked the toilet handle into motion.) I had made contact on my contactless toilet handle; it’s very useful. But like most actors, I’m greedy. I want to do as much as I can do.

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Researchers say infectious diseases like COVID-19 could go airborne when you flush

By Karin Brulliard and William Wan

The Washington Post

Add this to our list of worries in these anxious times: coronavirus-containing clouds that waft into the air when a toilet is flushed.

Scientists who simulated toilet water and air flow say in a new research paper that aerosol droplets forced upward by a flush appear to spread wide enough and linger long enough to be inhaled. The novel coronavirus has been found in the feces of COVID-19 patients, but it remains unknown whether such clouds could contain enough virus to infect a person. The authors say the possibility of that mode of transmission calls for action in the midst of a pandemic — first and foremost, by closing the lid.

“Flushing will lift the virus up from the toilet bowl,” co-author Ji-Xiang Wang, who researches fluids at Yangzhou University in Yangzhou, China, said in an email. Bathroom-users “need to close the lid first and then trigger the flushing process,” Wang said, and wash their hands thoroughly if closure isn’t possible.

Toilets and modern sanitation systems have been a huge boon to public health and life expectancy since the 19th century. Even so, people have long been leery of germs in bathrooms, and that wariness has only increased during the pandemic. But experts say most of us are focusing on the wrong aspects.

For all our paranoia about the surface of toilet seats — the tissue paper we oh-so-carefully lay down, the thin covers often offered in public stalls — germ transmission from skin contact is a relatively small health risk compared with what happens after you flush. That’s when bits of fecal matter swirl around so violently that they can be propelled into the air, become aerosolized and then settle on the surroundings.

Experts call it the “toilet plume.” The potential for airborne transmission of infectious disease via sewage has been the subject of research for more than a century, and the toilet plume’s role has been scrutinized since the 1950s. Scientists who have seeded toilet bowls with bacteria and viruses have found contamination of seats, flush handles, bathroom floors and nearby surfaces. This is one reason we are told to wash our hands after visiting the john.

Even though public bathrooms are known to contribute to the spread of viruses that transmit via ingestion, such as the noroviruses that haunt cruise ships, their role in the transmission of respiratory viruses has not been established, said Charles P. Gerba, a microbiologist at the University of Arizona.

“The risk is not zero, but how great a risk it is, we don’t know,” Gerba, who has studied the intersection of toilets and infectious disease for 45 years, said of the potential for flushing to spread the coronavirus. “The big unknown is how much virus is infectious in the toilet when you flush it ... and how much virus does it take to cause an infection.”

A study published in March in the journal Gastroenterology found significant amounts of the coronavirus in the stool of patients and determined that viral RNA lasted in feces even after the virus cleared from the patients’ respiratory tracts. Another study in the journal Lancet found the coronavirus in feces up to a month after the illness had passed. Scientists around the world are now studying sewage to track the spread of the virus.

Researchers say the virus’ presence in excrement and the gastrointestinal tract “could contribute to the global fight against the virus.”

The resulting study was published June 16 in the journal Physics of Fluids. It found that flushing of both single-inlet toilets, which push water into the bowl from one port, and annular-inlet toilets, which pour water into the bowl from the rim’s surrounding edge with even greater energy, result in “massive upward transport of particles to heights of more than three feet and float in the air for more than a minute, it found. The paper recommends not just lid-closing and hand-washing but urges manufacturers to produce toilets that close and self-clean automatically. It also suggests that toilet-users wipe down the seat.

Gerba, however, said seats shouldn’t be a major concern. Research has found that public and household toilet seats are typically the cleanest surface in restrooms, he said, probably because so many people already wipe them off before using them. Also, he said of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19: “I don’t think it’s butt-borne, so I don’t think you have to worry.”

Gerba has been studying coronavirus transmission for two decades, and in 2003 he was sent by the World Health Organization to Hong Kong to investigate the role of toilet flushing in a SARS outbreak at an apartment complex called Amoy Gardens. Investigators suspected cases were driven in part by the apartment’s sanitary system, because the outbreak seemed to begin after an index patient suffering from diarrhea used a toilet in the apartment complex. Gerba said improper ventilation in the building, not flushing, seemed to be the culprit.

But Gerba does not rule out the possibility that the novel coronavirus might be spread by flushing. He said he once did an experiment, never published, in which he placed six cages holding mice at different heights in a small bathroom and then flushed a mouse pneumonia known only to transmit by inhalation. More than a quarter of the mice were infected, though none of those that had been placed at six feet above toilet level, he said.

In the absence of clear evidence, Gerba said, his advice remains the same: “Flush and run” when using a public toilet without a lid. Wash hands well post-flush and use hand sanitizer after leaving the restroom. Choose well-ventilated bathrooms if possible, and “don’t hang around the restroom” in any case.

But most important, Gerba said, is closing the lid before flushing. He’s been doing it for decades, even at home. “I have my toothbrush too close to the toilet,” Gerba said. “I don’t want to brush my teeth with what’s in the toilet.”
The revolution comes again

BY JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

In-Manuel Miranda likes to picture the millionnaire, Mr. Howell, from “Gilligan’s Island,” saying the brag. You know the one. “Well, I saw it with the original cast.”

On Friday, Miranda will steal that boast from anyone who ever saw “Hamilton” in its blistering first year and a half on Broadway. A live capture taken from two of the last performances at the Richard Rodgers Theatre in January 2015 and moved to Broadway that October 2021. “We need a reminder of how magical live theater is,” says Miranda of the film originally set to open in theaters in March of 2020 but then pushed back due to the pandemic. “There’s a level of inspection of the show that can be different than the endorphin rush of watching it that might be your one chance,” says Kail. “In some ways, this will allow it to settle because now it’s yours.”

Since “Hamilton” was first performed at the Public Theater in January 2015 and moved to Broadway that August, the words mostly haven’t changed (though two expletives have been scrubbed to make the film PG-13). But as a rhyming, hip-hop omnibus of national history and identity, slavery and immigration, its power has resonated differently at different times. Now, the “Rise up!” verses of “My Shot” will sound to many like they’re channeling the protest spirit that has swept across the country since the death of George Floyd. “Hamilton” remains a story of revolution—a triumphant and tragic one told passionately by performers of color. Everyone who perishes in “Hamilton,” Miranda points out, dies from gun violence.

Everything present at the founding is still present,” says Miranda. “When I am sitting still and listening right now, it’s to the young people who are leading these protests who are saying: This is what we stand for and this is what we won’t stand for. I’m struck by a section that was always treated as comic relief when the show first came out where there’s Samuel Seabury and he’s telling everyone to remain calm. And there’s Hamilton saying there’s nothing calm about what’s happening. ‘The revolution is coming,’ Hamilton says.”

“Hamilton” has already been woven into contemporary history. Miranda’s first performance of a song from it came at Barack Obama’s White House. Ever since, the history-making musical has been indelibly linked to the Obama era. Michelle Obama called it “the best piece of art in any form that I have ever seen in my life.”

But after the election of Donald Trump, “Hamilton” took on a more magnified aura of resistance. Just days after polls closed, Mike Pence, then the vice-president elect, attended a show. The cast, doubting Trump and Pence’s support for minorities, read a letter from the stage asking him to “uphold our American values and to work on behalf of all of us.”

Trump’s angry response in a series of tweets, Miranda considers “a very early glimpse of the Trump playbook.” Soon, the line “Immigrants, they get the job done” became a more pronounced rallying cry.

“I wrote it as kind of a throwaway line and in the Trump administration it gets this roar of approval,” says Miranda. “You almost feel the audience trying to say, ‘This anti-immigrant sentiment embodied by the current administration is not who we in the audience are.’ Things hit differently than they did in the Obama administration. And they’ll hit differently next year.”

Kail can’t sit in the back of a theater to see how this version of “Hamilton” plays. There were no test screenings except for one a few weeks ago for the cast, including original members Daveed Diggs, Leslie Odom Jr., Jonathan Groff and Renee Elise Goldsberry. But through Disney’s subscription streaming service, it will be out to the theater community, everywhere — to meet another moment in American history.

“Maybe it can be used of use and of service in a way that was totally different than when we played our last performance two months ago or opened four months ago,” says Kail. “Access was always the challenge for us. Access is always a challenge for theater. Here was a chance for us to make the door wider and lower the barrier.”

‘Hamilton’s’ leap from stage to Disney Plus shows how brilliant the show really is

By Peter Marks
The Washington Post

Let’s have another round tonight. And heck, why not tomorrow night, too! Pour as much “Hamilton” as your heart desires, now that Disney Plus is streaming a masterly film of the smash Broadway musical, recorded on the stage of the Richard Rodgers Theatre, with its peerless original cast.

I’m not in the habit of hawking subscriptions to digital platforms. But the movie version directed by Thomas Kail is from an economic as well as an aesthetic standpoint well worth the over-$9.99 price of the few consistent knocks on Lin-Manuel Miranda’s Tony- and Pulitzer Prize-winning musical, an account of the rise and demise of Alexander Hamilton in warm tones of rap, rock, jazz and traditional show tunes, has been outrageous ticket prices. The show allows itself for $6.99 a month to become, at last, a truly populist piece of entertainment.

Filmed theater inevitably loses something in the translation: that electric sense of human energy, the ineffable appeal that actors make, as they reach out to you, and seemingly only you, be-seeming your eye and your approval. But Kail, who won a Tony for his direction of the Broadway production, finds other means of expressing the intensity of the “Hamilton” experience, through close-ups and overhead shots and a camera moving through ensemble numbers like a rush-hour rider through a turnstile. (Kail supplemented the live footage with onstage cameras when there was no audience present.)

The visual boundaries of the film are the dimensions of the Rodgers; this is a movie in the passionate thrill of the stage. The head of conductor-orchestrator Alex Lacamoire pops out of the orchestra pit; Howell Binkley’s lighting sprays beams onto David Korins’ warehouse set and the tasteful opulence of Paul Tazewell’s costumes. You can hear the reaction of the audience, so that you’re spared the hollow ring of performance into a theatrical void. You’re aware, too, that actors are going all-out, as on any given night at an ecstatic hit. You may even notice remarkable Renee Elise Goldsberry, the production’s Angelica Schuyler, wiping away tears at the tumultuous curtain call.

The added advantage for a viewer is a camera that can stop and study Miranda’s face for theater. Here was a chance for us to make the door wider and lower the barrier.”
WV MORGANTOWN — A West Virginia police officer will not be disciplined after a video emerged of him shooting a opossum on a residential street because the animal was injured, a spokesman said Thursday.

A resident reported that the opossum had been hit by a car Wednesday evening and an officer arrived to find it severely hurt, said Morgantown Police Department spokesman Andrew Stacy.

A video of the incident posted on social media shows the officer using a long piece of wood to move the animal onto a grassy area before shooting it from a distance with a handgun, which drew criticism from Twitter users. Stacy said the officer was putting the opossum out of its misery.

“You see the video without any context behind it and say, ‘What is going on?’ but the reality is that he was trying to help the animal and not have it suffer anymore,” he said.

Police investigating hate graffiti on dam

VT WATERBURY — State police are investigating after graffiti from what is being described as a white supremacist hate group was painted on a portion of the Waterbury dam, the Vermont State Police said.

Police say the graffiti, identified as coming from a known hate group, was reported to police Wednesday after it was discovered by a state worker.

The graffiti was applied quickly with the help of a stencil.

There are no known witnesses or suspects. State police reported the incident to the attorney general’s office under the Bias Incident Reporting System. State workers painted over the graffiti.

Bird's-eye view

Cam Norman Sr., left, drives against his son, Cam Norman Jr., while playing basketball Wednesday at Padonia International Elementary School in Cockeysville, Md.

The minimum fine for violating South Dakota’s new “move over” driving law — an increase from $122.50. If a driver fails to move over on the roadway and causes a crash with an emergency vehicle, the offense is now a Class 1 misdemeanor, according to the Department of Public Safety.

2 children unharmed when man steals car

PA PHILADELPHIA — Two young children were unharmed when the car they were in was stolen early Thursday from a Philadelphia takeout restaurant while their mother was inside the business, authorities said.

The mother was picking up food and had left the vehicle running as the children — a toddler and infant — slept in the backseat. A 25-year-old man then entered the vehicle around 1:30 a.m. and drove away.

The mother gave police a description of the vehicle and it was spotted minutes later by an officer. The man driving the car was soon captured following a brief struggle, police said.

The two children apparently slept through the whole incident and were not injured. No one else was in the vehicle when the theft occurred, authorities said.

The theft suspect’s name was not released.

2 children unharmed when man steals car

MD ANNAPOLIS — A mural of a Black woman who was killed by police in Louisville, Ky., will be painted in a historically Black neighborhood in Annapolis.

The Capital Gazette reported that artists and volunteers will paint a 7,000-square-foot mural of Breonna Taylor on Saturday.

Taylor was shot and killed by police in her Louisville apartment in March. She was sleeping when officers executed a no-knock warrant. Her death sparked protests and calls for the officers involved to be arrested and charged.

Muralist Jeff Huntington said the mural will be painted on a basketball court.

New report says that blue crabs in the Chesapeake Bay are not being overharvested.

Daily Press in Newport News reported Thursday that the bay’s blue crab population isn’t depleted and that there’s no need for any big changes in how many crabs watermen can catch.
Good-news job numbers are likely to get better

By Henry Olsen
The Washington Post

Thursday’s jobs report was another good one, good enough for a nation sorely in need of one. There’s also reason to believe next month’s report will be nearly as good despite the recent rise in coronavirus cases.

Let’s recap the report’s highlights. The unemployment rate dropped from 13.3% to 11.0% as the economy added 4.8 million jobs in June. The rate dropped even though the labor force participation rate — the share of adults either working or looking for a job — rose by 0.7 points to 61.5%. That means enough jobs were added to draw more than a million new people into the labor force at the same time as re-employing millions of people. That’s stunning news that should not be taken lightly.

The good news was also spread across nearly all sectors of the economy. Construction and manufacturing employment are up, leisure and hospitality is gaining, retail trade employment jumped by nearly 750,000 as stores started to reopen nationwide. Employment levels remain down from the record highs in February, but the rate of change is dramatic and in the right direction.

We should also expect more good news next month. Twenty states have announced significant reopening moves since the middle of June when the employment survey was taken. This includes large states such as New York, Georgia, Illinois, New Jersey, Massachusetts and Virginia. These moves suggest that it will continue to gain momentum.

Experts didn’t all prescribe masks from the start, but the evidence has become ever clearer that they help slow the spread of the virus. Which you would think, given how intuitive that sense, wouldn’t be all that hard to sell: We shouldn’t have had scientists to tell us a barrier between dangerous droplets and the air everyone else is breathing exist.

The jelling of expert opinion left Trump with no choice but to manufacture facts (one of his special talents). “Masks are a double-edged sword,” he insisted, because “people touch them.” Even this, however, proved too controversial to sustain, so while those while climate change may play out over the course of centuries, the confluence of masks-makes-are-playing-out is not.

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Thursday’s jobs report suggests that it will continue to gain strength if permitted. Federal and state policymakers should keep that in mind as they continue to think about how to open.

Henry Olsen is a Washington Post columnist and a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center.
Redman in three-way tie

Texas A&M put on probation

**Briefly**

Texas A&M head coach Jimbo Fisher was given a six-month show cause order by the NCAA on Thursday after the Aggies were found to have violated recruiting rules beginning in January 2018.

**Associated Press**

**REDMAN**

**By LARRY LAGE**

DETROIT — Doc Redman is playing his best golf, priming him to perhaps earn his first PGA Tour victory this weekend.

Redman shot a 7-under 65 on Thursday to share the first-round lead with two-time major winner Kevin Kisner in the Rocket Mortgage Classic.

Bryson DeChambeau, the only player with top-10 finishes in each of the last three tournaments, topped the group a stroke back.

The 22-year-old Redman closed with four straight birdies and seven over the last eight holes at the Detroit Golf Club. Last year, he just had to try to save a Monday qualifier to finishing second at the inaugural Rocket Mortgage Classic.

At last week’s Travelers Championship, Redman closed with a 63 to tie for 11th — his best performance this season after tying for 21st at the RBC Heritage.

“I’ve come off two good finishes and a really good finish from the event, which has never really happened to me,” he said. “So, I’ve never had this kind of expectation externally or even internally.”

Stallings, who tied for sixth last week, birdied his last two holes and three of four. Players with afternoon tee times didn’t fare as well, but Kisner was an exception with a bogey-free round.

DeChambeau surged up the leaderboard with four birdies and an eagle over an eight-hole stretch covering the last nine. He gave a stroke back, though, with a bogey at the 18th after pushing an 8-foot putt just to the right.

“That really got me a little agitated,” DeChambeau said. “It’s going to put a little fire in my belly.”

Peter Malnati, Emiliano Grillo, Chase Seiffert, J.J. Spaun, Matt Wallace and Charles Howell matched DeChambeau at 66.

Rickie Fowler, who has missed three of his last four tournaments, has played since the restart, was among the many players another shot back.

**Penzel 150 at the Brickyard**

**CARLOS OSORIO/AP**

Doc Redman shot a 7-under 65 on Thursday at the Rocket Mortgage Classic in Detroit. He’s tied for the lead with Scott Stallings and Kevin Kisner.

**By LARRY LAGE**

EDISON, N.J. — The 2020 USL Championship season will begin with the addition of Ross Rix to the men’s coaching staff.

The 29-year-old Rix will join the Las Vegas Lights FC for the 2020 USL Championshp season.

Rix has 10 years of professional coaching experience. He has served as an assistant coach to the University of Detroit Mercy and also as the head coach of the Las Vegas Lights FC and the U.S. Soccer Development Academy.

Rix served as Las Vegas Lights FC’s assistant coach in 2019 and has been working primarily with the Las Vegas Lights FC’s Under-16 and Under-18 Academy teams.

Rix was named the head coach of the Las Vegas Lights FC’s Under-23 squad in 2019.

Rix played for the Las Vegas Lights FC’s Under-16 team from 2010-2012 and was a part of the 2011 USL PDL championship-winning team.

Rix was a member of the University of Montana soccer team from 2013-2015.

Rix has been named to the United States Soccer Coaches Association’s Women’s Coaching Academy from 2019-2020.

Rix was named to the United States Soccer Coaches Association’s Men’s Coaching Academy from 2017-2020.

Rix graduated from the University of Montana with a Bachelor of Science degree in Sport Management.

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Most athletes are true to word in confirming dates with drug testers

By PAT GRAHAM and EDDIE PELLS

I t's almost as easy as sending a text. Open an app on the cell phone, type in a few words, click a box or two. To really make the system work, athletes have to be where they say they'll be at the time they say they'll be there.

Lately, some high-profile names in track and field have been making a mess of what's supposed to be a simple process of letting drug testers know where they will be for one hour each day.

World champions Christian Coleman and Salwa Eid Naser could miss the Olympics for what are known in the antidoping world as whereabouts failures — the failure to be where they said they'd be when testers came calling, unannounced, to collect a urine or blood sample. It's part of a system of no-notice, out-of-competition testing that is considered the best deterrent to illicit drug use in sports.

Other recent cases — one involving a British hammer thrower who says he was fishing when he really went to see his mom, another involving a Russian high jumper whose whereabouts forms were forged by team officials — have only heightened the feeling that a routine piece of bookkeeping can be anything but that. They've also placed the tint of doping on athletes who haven't tested positive, but are accused of breaking the rules, nonetheless.

The cluster of recent cases runs contrary to the reality that most athletes have very little problem keeping their whereabouts information current, then being where they say they'll be. Since early 2001, when the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency's whereabouts system began, there have been 21 whereabouts failures, 17 of which were from season to season), virtually all of whom are tested multiple times during a single year.

“Just respect the hour slot, be where you need to be,” British race walker Tom Bosworth told The Associated Press in an email, referencing a time he interrupted his beach vacation to wait in a hotel for testers. “If athletes are missing more than three (tests), then simply for respect and integrity of sport, they shouldn't be anywhere near the top level of sport.”

Coleman is face-to-face with that possibility.

The 100-meter world champion has been battling the whereabouts system for more than a year now. His latest incident, made public this month, came Dec. 9, when he said he was out Christmas shopping when testers arrived at his residence. It marked his third infraction in a 12-month period, which drew a provisional suspension that threatens his eligibility for next year's rescheduled Tokyo Games.

Coleman's latest case brought a flurry of Monday morning quarreling from the track world, much of it on social media.

American distance runner Kara Goucher, long an outspoken advocate for clean sport, posted on Twitter her “Top 3 tips on how to not miss a doping test.”

1. “YOU pick your guaranteed window. Pick an hour you KNOW you'll be home. Ex: 6AM - 2. Set a recurring daily alarm 15 minutes before your hour window.

Hire someone to call you everyday before your window. You're welcome,” Goucher wrote.

Many athletes meticulously plan their itinerary weeks in advance. Since her kids get up early, U.S. distance runner Stephanie Bruce makes sure she's available at 6 a.m. If she has an early morning workout, she changes the time.

Athletes can also be tested outside their primary window, which is why they give detailed accounts for the day (5 a.m. to 11 p.m.). If, for example, Bruce goes on a long training run, she will record that so everyone knows she will be difficult to reach during that block.

Bruce said she was tested 10 times in 2019.

“And I haven’t won a medal. I haven’t made an Olympic team,” she said. “It shows they’re doing their job.”

The whereabouts system came under a uniform global protocol in 2009. Since then, it has become more streamlined with each passing year. These days, virtually all athletes have access to an online portal or an app on their cell phone, that allows them to input and update their whereabouts data. The phone apps allow athletes to opt in to daily reminders about the information they’ve provided.

“The expectation is that if an athlete has a first strike, he or she will be doing more of what’s necessary to make sure they don’t have a second one,” said Stuart Kemp, the World Anti-Doping Agency's expert on whereabouts.

“And if they get a second one, that should be a real wake-up call.”

After his latest missed test, Coleman lashed out on social media, arguing the situation could have been avoided had testers simply called him, as they had done in the past. But calling an athlete

Salwa Eid Naser, of Bahrain, celebrates after winning gold in the women’s 400-meter final at the World Athletics Championships in Doha, Qatar, in 2019. She had three whereabouts failures prior to the event, but was not suspended until recently.
Zooming in to summer camp

Players start workouts as baseball begins unprecedented season

BY ROB GILLIES
Associated Press

TORONTO — All 30 Major League Baseball teams will train at their regular-season ballparks for the pandemic-shortened season after the Toronto Blue Jays received a Canadian federal government exemption on Thursday to work out at Rogers Centre.

Toronto will move camp from its spring training complex in Dunedin, Fla., where players reported for intake testing. The Blue Jays will create a quarantine environment at Rogers Centre and the adjoining Toronto Marriott City Centre Hotel, which overlooks the field.

This exemption does not cover the regular season and player travel between the U.S. and Canada. Blue Jays President Mark Shapiro said the team hopes to know within 10 days where it will play regular-season games.

MLB required an exemption to a requirement that anyone entering Canada from a U.S. and Canada. Blue Jays President Mark Shapiro said the team hopes to know within 10 days where it will play regular-season games.

Texas Rangers manager Chris Woodward was going to address his entire team before the start of MLB’s unprecedented summer training camp, just like he did when spring training opened about 4½ months ago. It was on a Zoom call instead of in person this time.

When the New York Mets resume practice, 60-year-old hitting coach Chili Davis will be working with hitters remotely and not initially at Citi Field with players and other staff members. The Seattle Mariners have three assistant coaches who fall into the high-risk category for the coronavirus and will work remotely all season.

At Fenway Park, weights and other exercise equipment were set up Thursday in the concourse under the seats that Red Sox fans won’t be allowed to occupy when the season finally starts.

Things certainly are different for baseball’s resumption amid the pandemic, three weeks before the start of a 60-game regular season. The Rangers, Mets, Mariners and Red Sox were among the teams set for their first official summer workouts Friday, along with the defending World Series champion Washington Nationals and Blue Jays.

The Rangers will hold the first official team activity in their new retractable-roof stadium, even though some players have been working out there for several weeks. Players will be in different groups and times for workouts after Woodward’s remarks by video conference.

Along with some similarity to what he said in February when the team initially gathered at its spring training complex in Surprise, Arizona, Woodward is focusing on getting the players in place by MLBM in response to COVID-19, and the urgency of being ready for the sprint of a season that will be 102 games shorter than usual.

“This is a little different. Following protocols, being safe, making sure we’re on time, sticking to schedules, those are things that are critical for our success this year,” he said. “If we can limit the amount of exposure we have, or the risk factor in getting this virus, the team that keeps their players on the field, their players on the field, is probably going to have an advantage.”

While the home ballparks are bigger than those at spring training, teams have to adjust to making a camp environment without having several extra fields next to each other, and the absence of some additional workout-specific spaces.

“It’s a great challenge. I mean, last week I think I grew a few more grey hairs just brainstorming through this,” first-year Mets manager Luis Rojas said. “But we’ve had fun definitely with the excitement of getting baseball back and going through this path. But we did come up with different ideas, and we’re going to stagger the guys. I mean, we’re going to come in groups.”

Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker signed an order Thursday allowing the Red Sox to open Fenway Park without fans. The weights and exercise equipment in the concourse will allow players to work out with more social distancing than would be possible in the usual cramped facilities.

Managers bullpen coach Brian DeLunas won’t be on the field in Seattle because of long-term kidney issues. The team said hitting coach Tim Laker (colitis) and 68-year-old first base coach Perry Hill, who is also the infield coach, will also work remotely all season.

The Mets will be at Citi Field without Davis, and Rojas said the timeline for the hitting coach to join the team there is uncertain.

AP baseball writers Ronald Blum and Mike Fitzpatrick, and AP sports writer Jimmy Golen contributed to this report.

Source: NFL to play Black anthem before national anthem in Week 1

BY ROB MAADDI
Associated Press

“Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing” will be performed live or played before “The Star-Spangled Banner” prior to each NFL game during Week 1 and the league is considering putting names of victims of police brutality on helmet decals or jersey patches, a person familiar with the discussions told The Associated Press.

“The NFL announced last month it is committing $250 million over 10 years to social justice initiatives, targeting what it calls “systemic racism” and supporting “the battle against the ongoing and historic injustices faced by African Americans.”

Following the nationwide protests sparked by the death of George Floyd, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell denounced racism in a video prompted greatly by a players’ video seeking NFL action.

BY STEPHEN HAWKINS
Associated Press

The NFL announced last month it is committing $250 million over 10 years to social justice initiatives, targeting what it calls “systemic racism” and supporting “the battle against the ongoing and historic injustices faced by African Americans.”

Former NFL player Anquan Boldin, right, speaks about the death of his cousin as the New Orleans Saints’ Malik Jenkins listens during a session to discuss criminal justice issues with other current and former NFL football players at Harvard Law School on March 23 in Cambridge, Mass. Boldin’s cousin, Corey Jones, died after being shot by police in 2015 while sitting in a disabled car.
Short season, no minors may hurt prospects

Rebuilding teams have complicated choices

By Tim Booth
Associated Press

SEATTLE — Seattle Mariners general manager Jerry Dipoto had at one point expected former first-round pick Logan Gilbert to be pitching at T-Mobile Park by the time June rolled around.

He also believed Jarred Kelenic, one of the top prospects in all of baseball, would likely soon follow him to the big leagues, set to join a group of prospects expected to be at the core of the Mariners’ rebuilding project.

“Eventually, our players are still going to hit the ground running and achieve whatever ceiling they were able to achieve,” Dipoto said. “It may just take a little bit longer.”

From Seattle to Kansas City, Baltimore to Miami, rebuilding teams that were hoping to see their young prospects play in the majors this season are reevaluating their plans.

The challenge: figure out how to get a substantive season in for some of the top talent in the minor leagues that these clubs are banking on to eventually become contributors if they ever want to climb out of division basements. And do it amid the coronavirus pandemic, which is knocking out all minor league play this year.

Is it worth starting the clock on the career of a top prospect for a truncated 60-game season? What about the taxi squad or in some sort of fall league, what can they get out of that?

All key questions. None with straightforward answers.

“It is affecting all 30 clubs,” White Sox GM Rick Hahn said. “And it is something that as we head into the fall, winter, the 2021 season we’re going to have to adjust our expectations in terms of guys’ pacing, in terms of guys’ likelihood and timing at making an impact at the next level.”

The list of teams facing a significant rebuild is short. Seattle is there. So, too, are the Royals, Orioles and Tigers in the American League. In the National League, it’s more muddled outside of the Marlins, with a mix of teams good enough to stay in the race for 60 games but also looking ahead to the future.

The Marlins thought top prospect Sixto Sanchez might pitch in the majors this year. Now, is it worth it? Same for their top draft pick, Max Meyer out of Minnesota.

Will the Royals bring up Billy Witt Jr.? What about Adley Rutschman in Baltimore or Kelenic in Seattle?

“You want to be 100% sure a player is ready to help you at the major league level before you add them. ... There’s no minor leagues to send them down to if they struggle at the major league level,” Royals GM Dayton Moore said. “So it’s a unique situation, a unique challenge that we’re looking forward to, but we also have to think big picture as well.”

The teams caught in the middle are those who expected 2020 to be a springboard. They may have had key players who had a taste of the big leagues in 2019 and were hoping this season would be the transition into becoming contenders in 2021.

A prime example is Hahn and the White Sox.

“I’m of the mindset, and have been of the mindset, is what we’re building here is a multyear project. It’s a multyear endeavor,” Hahn said. “This was going to be sort of that first year of transitioning from the rebuild into that competitive stage, so it’s extremely important from our perspective to get these guys out there and competing.”

“We obviously have a young club, a team that’s only going to grow and benefit from playing experience during the regular season and hopefully the postseason, so getting a taste of that this season was of the utmost importance,” he said.

For the White Sox and others on the fringe of contention, it could mean taking a different approach to a 60-man group that includes the taxi squad. As in, would it be better to have players with big league experience available immediately if need be, or prepare prospects for the future?

In Seattle’s case, Dipoto said he’s now viewing the development of their prospects in a 17-month window. Whether it’s on the taxi squad or in some sort of fall league, what can they get accomplished this year? And how does that alter the time frame for how they should be in their development come 2021?

For a club that expected to start turning the corner next year, the developmental loss this season could be significant.

“We are viewing this as almost the beginning of an onboarding for the next 17 months and messaging it to the players like that,” Dipoto said. “We have your best interests in mind. We are going to preserve your health and well-being above all other things, and along the way we’re going to compete our butts off and try to win as many of these 60 games as we can win.”

And who knows what can happen in a season like that, when it’s 60 games? Anybody can get hot and make a run. And I guess to that extent we have as good a shot as anybody, but we’re also highly focused on the big picture and it will stay that way.”

TOP MLB PROSPECTS

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<th>Rank</th>
<th>Player</th>
<th>Pos.</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Wander Franco</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Rays</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Gavin Lux</td>
<td>SS/2B</td>
<td>Dodgers</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Luis Robert</td>
<td>OF</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Adley Rutschman</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>Jo Adell</td>
<td>OF</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Bobby Witt Jr.</td>
<td>SS</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Jarred Kelenic</td>
<td>OF</td>
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<td>Jesus Lazardo</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Cristian Pache</td>
<td>OF</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Joey Bart</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Brendan McCay</td>
<td>LH/DH</td>
<td>Rays</td>
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SOURCE: MLB.com

Outfielder Jarred Kelenic hits during the MLB All-Star Futures game in Cleveland. He’s considered one of the prime prospects in the Seattle Mariners’ rebuilding efforts.

MATT YORK/AP

Chicago White Sox general manager Rick Hahn, center, is charged with the team’s rebuilding efforts. He said teams will have to adjust expectations of when their prospects will be ready for the majors.

DARRON CUMMINGS/AP

Miami Marlins pitcher Sixto Sanchez run drills during spring training in Jupiter, Fla. For a number of rebuilding teams, the 2020 baseball season was supposed to be another step in the progression of their top prospects eventually reaching the big leagues. With a truncated 60-game season in the majors and no minor league season, some clubs are concerned the development of prospects may be stunted.

DAVID SANTIAGO, MIAMI HERALD/AP
NASCAR meets with minister pushing for racial equality

By Dan Gelston

Associated Press

As the Rev. Greg Drumwright watched members of his ministry create a giant noose banner to hang from a NASCAR overspeedway to cheer for Black driver Bubba Wallace, he realized his first NASCAR race was the start of his immersion into stock car racing.

Less than three weeks later, Drumwright, who has a seat at NASCAR’s leadership table and said he is ready to disrupt the industry’s traditional hierarchy and get more Blacks involved, from the board room to the grandstands to the track.

“We want to see that the call for diversification and true equity in the sport extends beyond the banning of the Confederate flag,” Drumwright said. “It extends into partnering with the minority community, specifically the millennial minority community. These are the organizers, these are the demonstrators, these are the colleges and universities that could be mentoring and accepting internships. We know that those opportunities exist. But they don’t scale on large numbers. We want to see that NASCAR is true to the message that they’re saying, that this is a new day in NASCAR and they understand what it means to the African-American community.”

NASCAR seems willing to listen.

Drumwright, a senior minister at the Citadel of Praise Church and Campus Ministries in Greensboro, N.C., met with two NASCAR officials for what he described as a serious discussion about the industry’s push for racial diversity.

Drumwright was denied a chance to talk with NASCAR President Steve Phelps about the issues that matter to his group.

“We are concerned about the commitment that’s been stated to furthering this dialogue and this call for action and this community for change,” Drumwright said after the meeting.

In an interview last week, NASCAR said “we had a good conversation with Rev. Drumwright this afternoon. We share the same goal, and that is advancing diversity in our sport in an impactful way.”

NASCAR has been swept up in the reckoning over the nation’s racist past. Wallace — the lone Black driver in the Cup Series — helped prod NASCAR to ban the Confederate flag just a few weeks ago. The 29-year-old Wallace emerged as social activist but two weeks later a member of his race team found a garage door pull-down rope fashioned as a noose in their garage at Talladega.

The 40-year-old Drumwright had finished protesting in Atlanta with members of his Greensboro-based coalition, “Justice for the Next Generation,” when he got word of the noose. He organized a call with members of his coalition that included a Black pit crew member at the track, Keiston France, a collegiate tennis player who joined NASCAR as part of its Drive for Diversity pit crew development program.

“I said, ‘Son, should we come, or should we stay home?’ He said, ‘We need you,’” Drumwright told The Associated Press. “The only concern was, will we be safe? We all came to a unanimous decision that we needed to be in Talladega.”

The group checked out of their hotels and made the drive to Alabama. The group was about two dozen strong but only one had been to a NASCAR race before.

The Confederate flag was still easy to see around the track, though not inside and attendance was capped at 5,000 because of the pandemic. There were informal protests, with cars and pickup trucks driving around nearby roads flying the flag and parading past the entrance. A small plane flew overhead pulling a banner with the flag and the words “Defund NASCAR.”

“This not something that’s going to be easily dismantled, the stigma that’s attached to the sport,” Drumwright said.

They got to their seats late and missed one of the most poignant and important moments in memory when NASCAR stood and marched together in solidarity with Wallace.

When the race ended, the fans — several in “Black Lives Matter” T-shirts — rushed the fence and shouted for Wallace, who walked over and slapped their hands and thanked them on national television for coming.

“We were there to stand with Bubba but what we learned through the media coverage is that it seems as if we’re standing with NASCAR,” Drumwright said. “NASCAR got the video and photo opportunities to show that there were African-Americans in those stands.”

The group found that some fans at Talladega were happy to see Black fans at the track.

“We had time getting back to our cars that day because there were some very good white folks here before and we just wanted to say thank you for being here,” Drumwright said. “There were about two dozen white families here and we did get that message that a change is going to come.”

He added: “But let me be clear about the other side of that. There was more than a thousand folks who ignored us, looked at us, stared us down, avoided us, wouldn’t speak to us, refused to engage us.”

Drumwright is just getting started; he even showed up to talk to the owner of a North Carolina drag race called “Bubba Ropes” for sale. The track owner teared up and shook hands with Drumwright and other coalition members.

NASCAR has been down this road before of railing behind Black advocacy groups, notably making contributions to Jesse Jackson’s Rainbow/PUSH Coalition. The sport has sped along with NASCAR drivers before Wallace.

NASCAR’s latest pairing also seems poised to pay off. Penske’s offer to broker such a weekend in Talladega will make its debut later that day on the same road course. The Cup Series races Sunday on the 2.5-mile oval. COVID-19 restrictions mean Indycar and NASCAR teams and drivers will not mingle, use different entry points at the speedway and work from different garages.

The inability to open the gates to spectators is the one downside to what is an otherwise monumental moment for both series.

“And that’s what makes Talladega so special,” Penske said. “And this is just another story of how Penske Transportation Group can be such an outstanding partner to the sport.”

The presence of Wallace in the Cup Series is the start of the next generation of Black drivers before Wallace.

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The presence of Wallace in the Cup Series is the start of the next generation of Black drivers before Wallace.

Track: Indycar, NASCAR will race at same venue on same weekend for first time

FROM BACK PAGE

Indycar, Steve Phelps, just the fifth president in NASCAR history, has never held a longstanding vendetta against the series.

Most important, though, is that motivation. More than Penske now owns Indycar and the speedway and has the juice to broker such a weekend. When the coronavirus pandemic blew holes in both series’ schedules, Penske poached the IndyCar road course race originally scheduled for May on the shared weekend with NASCAR.

Indycar will open the spectacle on Saturday with its second event of the season, that NASCAR’s second-tier Xfinity Series will make its debut later that day on the same road course. The Cup Series races Sunday on the 2.5-mile oval. COVID-19 restrictions mean Indycar and NASCAR teams and drivers will not mingle, use different entry points at the speedway and work from different garages.

The inability to open the gates to spectators is the one downside to what is an otherwise monumental moment for both series.

“To me, that’s the unfortunate part, we don’t get to have fans in here,” Penske said. “But I went to Jim France and Steve Phelps and said, “Look, the Brickyard has not been able to enter the facility until IndyCar has entered the facility. We can make the decisions and not be able to be what you have hoped, and now that we run the series and the speedway and has the speedway and has the speedway and has the speedway and has the speedway and has the speedway and has the speedway.”

Both IndyCar and the Cup Series will work from the garages once used by Formula One, and the NASCAR group can even enter the garages once the pandemic has been cleared out. It means drivers can’t socialize the way was initially imagined on a weekend and thus won’t have to watch the other series on television.

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The once-frosty schism between the two biggest racing series in the United States has finally thawed and the result is a blockbuster event at Indianapolis Motor Speedway — even without fans.

NASCAR's elite Cup Series will share a venue with IndyCar on the same weekend for the first time, a doubleheader conveniently forced by the frantic rescheduling required by the coronavirus pandemic. Even so, it is an important step in putting forth a united front for the sake of motorsports.

“'We're all racers. We want racing to be successful.'”

Kevin Harvick
NASCAR points leader

The fracture between the two leagues dates to at least 1954 when NASCAR founder Bill France Sr. was allegedly told by IMS security he'd been ordered to leave the speedway. France was already working on his own big race track, Daytona International Speedway, and he vowed it would give Indianapolis a run for its money.

The battle was on and neither side had any desire to build a working relationship. IndyCar, called CART in its heyday, dwarfed the Southern-based stock car series. But the open-wheel racing split in the mid 1990s in which Tony George created his own series gave NASCAR an opening to capitalize, as CART and the Indy Racing League fractured their base. NASCAR exploded in popularity and blew past its bitter rival as the place to race.

As years passed and NASCAR became an annual staple at Indianapolis, the relationship between the two series has improved. Jay Frye, who spent decades working in NASCAR, is now president of

SEE TRACK ON PAGE 23