VIRUS OUTBREAK

US SHUTS DOWN

Americans adjust to new life, hunker down amid pandemic

By Chad Garland and Corey Dickstein
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — An American air raid early Friday morning on an Iranian-backed militia group in Iraq was precise, proportionate and defensive — designed to deter the group from launching more rockets at American and anti-ISIS coalition forces, the top general for U.S. Central Command said.

U.S. fighter jets struck five weapons caches south of Baghdad held by the Kataeb Hezbollah militia at about 1 a.m. in retaliation for an attack blamed on the group that killed two American troops and a British service member Wednesday, Marine Gen. Kenneth McKenzie said. He also blamed the militia for at least a dozen rocket attacks during the last six months, at least two of which killed Americans.

“We believe this is going to have an effect on deterring future strikes of this nature,” McKenzie told reporters Friday at the Pentagon. “We’ve seen in the past what happens if you don’t respond [to attacks.] Now people know that we are not going to tolerate these direct attacks on American or coalition service members, and we are willing and able to respond.”

McKenzie stopped short of implicating Iran in ordering the attack, which came on what would have been the 63rd birthday of powerful Iranian Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, who was killed in

SEE RAID ON PAGE 3

The spate of event cancellations that drove home the gravity of the outbreak a day earlier only intensified Thursday, with Disney and Universal Orlando Resort shutting down theme parks, the NCAA calling off March Madness and Broadway theaters closing their doors in Manhattan. All the major professional sports announced they are halting play, and officials ordered a shutdown of every school in the state of Ohio for three weeks.

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With the looming announcement and cascade of closures, a new reality set in for American households.

SEE PANDEMIC ON PAGE 4

By Michelle R. Smith
Associated Press

Workers lost their jobs, parents came up with impromptu lesson plans for children left home from shuttered schools. Families fretted over dwindling retirement accounts, the health of elderly parents, and every cough and sneeze in their midst.

Millions of people settled into new and disrupted routines Thursday as the coronavirus began to uproot almost every facet of American life.

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SEE PANDEMIC ON PAGE 4
Bill helps replace Chinese telecom equipment

**By Kevin Freking**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on Thursday signed into law a bill that provides $1 billion to help small telecom providers replace equipment made by China’s Huawei and ZTE.

The U.S. government considers the Chinese companies a security risk and has pushed its allies not to use Huawei equipment in next-generation cellular networks, known as 5G. Both companies have denied that China uses their products for spying.

The Federal Communications Commission has already voted to bar U.S. phone companies from using government subsidies for equipment from the two Chinese companies. This bill affects mostly small, rural companies, because the major U.S. network providers don’t use the Chinese equipment.

The White House said that using untrustworthy vendors to build communications infrastructure threatens national security by exposing networks to actors who are potentially influenced by foreign entities.

The legislation creates a reimbursement program that small telecom providers can use when removing and replacing equipment manufactured by entities deemed to pose unacceptable national security risks.

**EXCHANGE RATES**

**Military rates**

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**Commercial rates**

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**INTEREST RATES**

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**WEATHER OUTLOOK**

**SUNDAY IN THE PACIFIC**

**SATURDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

**SATURDAY IN EUROPE**

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**STARS AND STRIPES**

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US troops continue Afghanistan withdrawal

By J.P. LAWRENCE Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan – U.S. troops have pulled out of a key base in Afghanistan’s southern Helmand province, a source of some of the fiercest fighting of the war, officials said Friday.

U.S. officials said Thursday that about 100 troops transferred from the airfield to Camp Shorab, a larger base about 12 miles to the northwest, formerly known as Camp Leatherneck.

The Americans have also begun pulling out of Tactical Base Gamberi in Laghman province, east of Kabul, a tribal leader there said.

For the past few days, tribal elder Haji Shah Mahmoud said he has seen large numbers of helicopters flying in and out of the base, which is next to his village.

“I thought there must be a huge military operation going on,” Mahmoud said. “(Afghan) soldiers told me that, actually, they are American forces leaving.”

The drawdown began on Monday, the 1st military said in a statement earlier this week. The terms of the U.S.-Taliban deal state that American forces would pull out from five bases and reduce troop numbers from about 13,000 to 6,800 by mid-July.

The United States will retain two airfields in the region: Bost Airfield outside Helmand’s provincial capital at the time. “We have experience.”

But amid increasing insecurity in the province, U.S. Marines were sent back to the province to strengthen the training and advising for government forces battling the resurgent Taliban.

In addition to the three American deaths, 14 service members with the international anti-ISIS coalition alliance were wounded in the attack, which was a series of rocket and mortar attacks at the base.

“Security is going to get worse,” said Haji Abdul Ali Sarwari, a civil activist living in the provincial capital at the time. “We have experience.”

On Friday, provincial council leader Saiful Malook Noori welcomed the American withdrawal and said he hoped it would usher in peace with the insurgent group.

Under the terms of its deal with the U.S., the Taliban agreed to break ties with international terrorist groups and broker a durable peace agreement.

“We were told by the local authorities that according to the deal with the Taliban, this base will be closed and its forces will finally leave Afghanistan,” Noori said. “Taliban also fulfill what they agreed to, it will be good for Afghanistan.”

U.S. officials have publicly expressed doubts that the Taliban will hold up its end of the agreement. Officials have said the militants are continuing to carry out violent attacks at a level greater than agreed to under the deal, though those specific terms remain classified.

Zubair Babakarkhali contributed to this report.

lawrencejp@stripes.com
Twitter: @jlawrence3

WAR ON TERRORISM

FROM FRONT PAGE

A U.S. soldier and airman were killed in a rocket attack Wednesday at Camp Taji, north of Baghdad. More than 30 107 mm Katyusha rockets were fired in the attack that killed Army Spec. Juan Miguel Mendez, 27, of Hanford, Calif., and Air Force Staff Sgt. Marshal D. Roberts, 28, of Oswasco, Okla.

Mendez served with the 1st Cavalry Division’s 219th Engineering Institution Battalion based in Fort Hood, Texas.

Roberts served with the 291st Engineering Installation Squadron of the Oklahoma National Guard.

British combat medic Lance Cpl. Brodie Gibson, 26, a reservist with the Scottish and North Yeomanry, a light cavalry regiment, was also killed in the attack, the U.S. Defense Ministry said Thursday.

In addition to the three coalition deaths, 14 service members with the international anti-ISIS coalition alliance were wounded in the attack, which was a series of rocket and mortar attacks at the base.

State. Iraqi forces recovered a flattened truck installed with a 36-tube rocket launcher. Three of the projectiles had not been fired.

McKenzie said the strike directly implicated Kataeb Hezbollah.

In the wake of the strike in Taji, the Iraqi government warned that the United States was in the country only to train security forces and fight ISIS. However, a December rocket attack in Kirkuk that killed an American contractor and U.S. retaliatory airstrikes on Kataeb Hezbollah kicked off a series of back-and-forth attacks between Iraq or its proxies and the United States, including a drone strike that killed Soleimani. Iran struck back with its ballistic missile attack on al Asad Air Base in western Iraq.

Iraqi lawmakers, at the time, with ties to Iran pushed the government of former Prime Minister Abdi Abdul Mabdi to expel U.S. forces from the country. The United States had temporarily halted its training and support of Iraqi anti-ISIS operations, but those activities have since resumed.

The U.S. strikes Friday were meant to degrade the Shiite militia’s ability to strike U.S. and coalition forces, the Pentagon said in a statement.

U.S. and senior Iraqi officials discussed the Defense Department’s commitment to protecting coalition service members and preventing militia attacks on them, the statement said.

“These [terrorist] groups must cease their attacks on U.S. and coalition forces or face consequences at a time and place of our choosing,” it said.

McKenzie said the attacks Friday and the killing of Soleimani showed Tehran and its proxies that the United States will respond if it is attacked. He said the strikes overnight were “designed to send a clear, unambiguous signal that we will not tolerate this going forward.”

BY CHAD GARLAND Stars and Stripes

Soldier, airman killed in Iraq attack

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Channel, Friday. Iraq’s military said five security force members and a civilian were killed early Friday in a barrage of U.S. airstrikes.

Iraqi army soldiers inspect the destruction at an airport complex under construction in Karbala, Iraq, Friday. Iraq’s military said five security force members and a civilian were killed early Friday in a barrage of U.S. airstrikes.

Ammar Karim/JP

Twitter: @CDicksteinDC

garland.chad@stripes.com

Dickstein.corey@stripes.com

Twitter: @CDicksteinDC

garland.chad@stripes.com

Twitter: @cdicksteinDC
WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump is preparing to invoke emergency powers as the coronavirus outbreak, according to two people familiar with the planning who spoke on condition of anonymity.

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Trump is poised to speak at 3 p.m. at the White House. “Topic: Coronavirus!” he tweeted.

The moves are as House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the Trump administration are lobbying in parallel for aid package Friday that would fast-track federal aid to anxious Americans and calm teetering financial markets amid the global crisis.

Central to the effort is free testing for the virus and guaranteed sick pay for workers who are taking time away from jobs, along with an infusion of dollars to handle unemployment benefits and boost food programs for children, families and seniors.

Pelosi and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin both indicated a deal was within reach after days of around-the-clock negotiations, with expectations of a Friday announcement. The House could then swiftly vote. Republican leaders are reviewing the details.

GOP leaders in Congress want to be sure that Trump publicly supports the package before they sign on or ahead of any vote, according to a top congressional aide unauthorized to discuss the private talks and speaking on condition of anonymity.

Earlier Friday, Mnuchin sounded an optimistic note. “I think we’re very close to getting this done,” he said in an appearance on CNBC.

On the COVID-19 illness, Mnuchin cautioned that “people should understand the numbers are going to go up before they go down.”

Providing sick pay for workers is a crucial element of federal efforts to stop the rapid spread of the infection. Officials warn that the nation’s healthcare system could quickly become overwhelmed with gravely sick patients, as suddenly happened in Italy, one of the countries hardest hit by the virus.

The ability to ensure paychecks will keep flowing — for workers who stay home as a preventative measure or because they’re feeling ill or caring for others — can help assure Americans they will not fall into financial hardship.

“We’re in an emergency, and we’re trying to respond as fast as we can,” said House Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Nita Lowey, D-N.Y., as lawmakers filed in and out of Pelosi’s office on Friday.

Late Thursday, Pelosi said an agreement on an aid package was near. She also said on “subject to an exchange of paper and we hope to have an announcement tomorrow.” Pelosi and Mnuchin spoke again early Friday.

The potential deal between Congress and the White House would cap a tumultuous week in which Washington strained for a comprehensive response to an outbreak that is testing the nation’s political, financial and health care systems.

Trump has struggled to show he’s on top of the crisis, after giving conflicting descriptions of what the U.S. is doing to combat the virus. Classes, sports events, concerts and conferences have been canceled across the nation, and the financial markets have been cratering.

In one welcome announcement, the administration said Friday it is awarding $1.3 million to two companies trying to develop rapid COVID-19 tests that could detect within an hour whether a person is positive for the new coronavirus.

### Pandemic: Parents search for ways to care for children forced to stay home

FROM FRONT PAGE

In the Pacific Northwest, parents scrambled to devise home-schooling using library books or apps. Others, desperate to get to work, jumped on social media boards to seek child care or exchange tips about available babysitters.

Parents rushed to college campuses and drove away with their children’s belongings and bags of their clothing. College officials scrambled to pay for plane tickets home for others.

A mother in Seattle organized small outdoor play dates where people’s lives were being transformed in profound ways.

Regina Jones, with American Building Maintenance, disinfects a Vicksburg Warren School District school bus to combat the coronavirus, Friday, in Vicksburg, Miss.

In every state, officials were taking dramatic new measures each day to keep the virus from spreading deeper into the country. And with each shuttered school, canceled outing, lost shift and work-from-home directive, people’s lives were being transformed in profound ways.

Mom Natasja Billius came up with a quick homeschooling plan for 8-year-old Victor and 5-year-old Anna Laura after their public school in Seattle closed for the first full day Thursday. They kept as close to their regular school schedule as possible, she said, with recess times and lunch built in.

Billius’s husband was working from home since last week, and the family is moving to a new house in two weeks.

Everything’s up in the air. I don’t know how I’m going to get it done, we’ll see,” she said. “It’s a day-by-day situation.”

She went forward with play dates, but everyone kept apart at a safe distance.

“And of course, as soon as we get home everybody has to wash hands,” she said.

### Sources: Trump set to declare virus emergency

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Nations employ drastic tactics to fight virus

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Dubai announced Friday that it would hold a major horse race without spectators this month in response to the new coronavirus, as a senior adviser to the country's leader was quarantined at home after testing positive.

Persian Gulf countries have been scrambling to contain the outbreak, which has infected thousands of people in nearby Iran— one of the largest clusters of cases outside China.

The Dubai World Cup, planned for March 28, is the world's richest purse for horse racing, with a $12 million prize last year. Dubai's crown prince, Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, separately announced a $400 million stimulus plan for the city-state where the global market and tourism industry have been hard-hit by the virus.

Dubai International Airport, the busiest for internationa l and home to long-haul carrier Emirates, has seen passenger numbers plummet.

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

Exponential spread

The exponential spread of the virus in Europe, North America and the Middle East has drawn contrasts with waning outbreaks in the hardest-hit nations in Asia.

China, where the virus emerged late last year, has seen more than 60% of global infections but on Friday reported just eight new cases and seven deaths.

The size of permitted gatherings dwindled sharply in country after country, state after state. French President Emmanuel Macron, announcing the indefinite closure of all schools, praised the French for taking action.

“That is what makes a great na tion: Women and men able to put the collective interest above all, a human community held together by values: Solidarity and fraternity,” he said.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said the government was returning to normal and now wants to conduct joint research on drugs and vaccines and offer “as much assistance as it can” to countries in need. A Chinese medical crew arrived in Italy and surplus supplies were sent to Iran.

In South Korea, which had nearly 8,000 cases overall, Friday marked the first day recoveries outnumbered new infections since the pandemic's first patient was confirmed Jan. 20. The pandemic's new epicenter is Europe. Italy's death toll topped 1,000 with more than 15,000 confirmed cases. France, Spain and Germany all exceeded 2,000 cases each. Panic buying was seen around the continent.

In Italy's hardest-hit Lombardy region, hospitals were overflowing with both the sick and the dead, the region’s restaurants, cafes and retail shops closed. Grocery stores, pharmacies and most other stores were allowed to operate, with orderly lines of evenly spaced customers forming outside to avoid crowds inside.

The virus shifted close to the halls of power in many countries like Canada and Australia.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was isolating himself after his wife tested positive. The Australian home affairs minister was hospitalized in isolation after testing positive. He returned home on Sunday from Washington, D.C., where he met U.S. President Donald Trump’s daughter, Ivanka.

Though all professional sports teams canceled or postponed games, decisions still loomed for the biggest athletic competitions of the year— the 2020 Summer Olympics — which was still firmly on the calendar. The International Olympic Committee and the Tokyo organizing committee were not considering canceling or delaying the games, “absolutely not at all,” said Japan Olympics minister Seiko Hashimoto.

EUROPEAN STATES....

Gulf nations scramble to contain spread of disease

Associated Press

By Jon Gambrell and Joseph Kraar

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For most people, the coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia. The vast majority of people recover from the new virus and the COVID-19 illness it causes.

Tiny, energy-rich Qatar shut down all cinemas, theaters, museums, children's play areas, gyms and wedding halls overnight.

King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of the island nation of Bahrain announced Wednesday that prisoners would be pardoned. The move appeared aimed at preventing the virus from spreading inside detention facilities.

It wasn't immediately clear if those released included opposition activists detained as part of Bahrain's yearslong crackdown on all dissent.

In hard-hit Iran, state-run TV announced Wednesday that Viktor Voevayati was quarantined at home after testing positive for the virus. He is a close, trusted adviser to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the 80-year-old leader of the Islamic Republic, who was recently seen wearing disposable gloves at a tree-planting ceremony, apparently out of caution about the virus.

The outbreak has not spared Iran's top officials, with its senior vice president, Cabinet ministers, members of parliament, Revolution Guard commanders and Health Ministry officials among those infected.

Iran has reported more than 10,000 cases and more than 400 deaths. There are concerns that the number of infections is much higher. Some Iranian lawmakers even speaking out.

Islamic authorities across the Middle East have cancelled or postponed Friday prayers in response to the outbreak.

In Israel and the Palestinian territories, Jewish, Christian and Muslim authorities said religious services would continue to be held but announced new precautions.

At the Western Wall in Jerusalem, the holiest site where Jews can pray, authorities will limit entry to an enclosed area and set up tents that each accommodate up to 100 people. The moves came after the Israeli Health Ministry barred gatherings of more than 100.

The Western Wall Heritage Foundation said there would be no restrictions on worship in the main plaza as it constitutes a "wide, open space."
South Korea moving backlog anticipated

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY  Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The new 60-day travel restrictions for service members and families will cause a large backlog of people in South Korea who would have left the country during that time for new assignments, the commander of U.S. Forces Korea said Friday.

“We’re going to have a bulge competing with all the inbounds and normal outbounds for the months of May and June,” Gen. Robert Abrams, commander of U.S. Forces Korea, told reporters at the Pentagon during a video teleconference Friday morning.

The travel policy, which started Friday and is expected to end in mid-May, stops travel and military moves in locations that have widespread outbreaks of the coronavirus, which are categorized as Level 3 and includes South Korea.

The Army has established a 24-hour hotline to help provide information to service members and families affected by the ban on military moves to countries categorized as Level 2 and 3. The number is 1-888-276-9472 and additional resources can be found at www.army.mil/covid-19. Level 2 locations are places with a sustained community spread and Level 3 locations have widespread outbreaks.

During the 60 days, service members and families who would have left for their next duty station will be stuck in South Korea and must wait to leave for their next assignment until after the travel ban lifts, according to Abrams. This affects not just people who are leaving the country, but others who are moving there to replace them. The backlog could potentially affect when household goods are shipped, military housing or child care availability, service members who need to move for military courses or are expected to take up a command position at their next unit.

The military has its main moving season starting in the spring and ending in the fall. About 400,000 service members, Defense Department civilians, and their families are moved each year, with 40% of moves happening between May 15 and August 31, according to the Pentagon.

There are 28,500 service members stationed in South Korea. Abrams did not say Friday how many people were expected to be backlogged during the 60-day travel ban.

Starting April 1, the command is also facing a furlough of several thousand South Korean nationals who support the U.S. mission on the Peninsula, if negotiations for a new Special Measures Agreement falls through between the United States and South Korea. The contributions in the agreement pay for the salaries of more than 9,000 South Korean employees, logistical support and construction projects. Most of the contributions go back into the South Korean economy. The United States wants South Korea to pay up to $5 billion per year, a five-fold increase, to offset the costs of having Americans in the country supporting its defense.

The furlough will not impact people who support life, health, safety or minimum readiness for U.S. forces in Korea, Abrams said. However, it could exacerbate the impact of the backlog, he said.

Abrams also said he is speaking with the Pentagon about getting additional resources and retaining some South Korean nationals to help mitigate the impact of the backlog. He did not say what specific additional resources he was asking for or any specific strategy they are beginning to implement to address the backlog.

Guard troops activated for virus response

BY ROSE L. THAYER  Stars and Stripes

To combat the spread of coronavirus in hard-hit states, about 160 National Guard troops have been activated to do tasks such as cleaning public spaces, coordinating logistics and supporting state emergency centers, according to information from the National Guard Bureau in Washington.

The governors of more than a dozen states have declared emergencies, which gives them the option to activate their National Guard under “state active duty,” which is sourced and paid for by that state. So far, Florida, New York, Rhode Island and Iowa have utilized this option, according to the bureau.

“Other states stand up or right-size their support to requests from civil authorities those numbers can change rapidly,” said Master Sgt. Michael Houk, National Guard Bureau spokesman.

In New York, where the bulk of the 160 service members are activated, troops are assisting with disinfecting and cleaning common public spaces and assisting health care providers. Most of this work is in New Rochelle, where there is a cluster of positive coronavirus cases, which is also referred to as COVID-19.

To this end, there are 28,500 service members stationed in South Korea.

South Korea moving backlog anticipated

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With more than 215 cases statewide, 121 of them are in Westchester County, where New Rochelle is located, according to the New York State Department of Health.

The Rhode Island National Guard is providing liaison assistance to that state’s Department of Health, Houk said. That state has five presumptive positive cases of the respiratory illness, according to the state health department.

Florida National Guard troops are helping with logistics for the state emergency operations center, Houk said. Two Florida residents died from coronavirus and another 34 people within the state have tested positive, according to the Florida Department of Health.

Troops in Iowa are working with the state joint operation center, which is ramping up its capabilities, Houk said. That state has 14 positive cases, according to a news release from the governor.

“Though we are monitoring closely, National Guard Bureau is not currently tasked to support any state-to-state requests for assistance regarding COVID-19,” Houk said. “This may change, and should it be required, we are postured to play a critical role in COVID-19 response alongside officials from both state and lead federal agencies.”

Other states that have declared an emergency, but at this time have not utilized their National Guard include Colorado, Massachusetts, California, Washington, Oregon, Utah, Maryland, Kentucky, North Carolina, New Jersey and Washington, D.C.

Second military commander potentially exposed during dignitary visit

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY  Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON— The commander of U.S. Southern Command has potentially been exposed to coronavirus during a visit by the Brazilian president, the second senior military leader to potentially be exposed to the illness.

Navy Adm. Craig Faller met with Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro during his visit March 8 to the SOUTHCOM headquarters building in Miami. A member of Bolsonaro’s delegation has tested positive for coronavirus, according to a statement Thursday by SOUTHCOM. The command has been working to contact everyone who supported the visit.

As of Thursday afternoon, Faller “has not experienced symptoms and has not been tested,” according to the statement.

A major Brazilian newspaper, O Dia, reported Friday that Bolsonaro tested positive. However, the president posted on Twitter that he has tested negative, Business Insider reported. Bolsonaro’s communications chief has tested positive.

On Tuesday, the Army announced Lt. Gen. Christopher Cavoli, the commander of U.S. Army Europe, had potentially been exposed to coronavirus during a conference and was working from home while self-monitoring his health.
New Yorkers fret as bustling city slows down

Associated Press

NEW YORK — New Yorkers awoke Friday to find that the coronavirus had left their famously bustling city with no Broadway, no basketball games, no big gatherings, and a populace unnerved by an ever-worsening crisis.

A dizzying series of temporary coronavirus-related closures announced Thursday included some of the city's cultural jewels: The Metropolitan Opera, Metropolitan Museum of Art, the American Museum of Natural History and Carnegie Hall.

It wasn't just high culture. The St. Patrick's Day parade will not step off next week. Concerts were canceled. NBA games were scuttled. CBS News, which temporarily shut down its city headquarters Wednesday after two employees tested positive, continued to air its Thursday night broadcast — from Los Angeles.

Restaurants, subway cars and sidewalks were noticeably emptier. Without a flake of snow, the city began to take on the thinned-out look it gets after winter blizzards, with people telecommuting and otherwise staying away.

Colleges across the city were closed or having students attend class online.

"People are scared to come outside," said Justin Rahim, a tour guide at Manhattan's Central Park, who said saving his pedicab drivers — reliant on tourists for their living — quartet of winter storms now sent them all away.

But after weeks of assuring residents that fear of the virus had not been the actual danger, New York's governor and mayor abruptly shifted course.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced Thursday that in an attempt to stop the virus from spreading, gatherings with more than 500 people would temporarily be banned in the state, starting in most places at 5 p.m. Friday, though evening shows on Broadway were called off a day sooner.

Many gatherings in smaller event spaces would have to cut capacity in half.

"The restrictions, imposed by an emergency order, don't apply to schools, hospitals, nursing homes, shopping malls and mass transit, and there were exceptions for other types of businesses, like casino floors. People are also still free to go to work. Mayor Bill de Blasio, while pointing out the outbreak could last six months or longer, counseled against giving up.

"The city has to keep going," de Blasio said on Fox 5 News Friday morning. "We need people to have their livelihoods. We need folks to show up at work. We need our public servants to be where we need them to be to take care of folks — hospitals, schools, first responders."

Yet it was clear the slowdown would be painful for a city that relies on the economic engines of tourism, entertainment and Wall Street.

Restaurants and nightspots around the city are reporting drop-offs of 20-80% over the last week, particularly in the tourist-friendly area around Times Square.

The city has to keep going, the executive director of the NYC Hospitality Alliance.

Lines stretched around the block at supermarkets on Thursday as New Yorkers prepared to hunker down and wait out the virus. Empty shelves greeted shoppers seeking toilet paper and other staples.

Parents citywide fretted about whether New York City's public school system, with its 1.2 million pupils, might be shut down, as happened in nearby New Rochelle, a suburb that has been an epicenter of the outbreak in the U.S.

Virus darkens stages, silences orchestras across the US

By Mark Kennedy

NEW YORK — The stage at the 5th Avenue Theatre in Seattle is quiet. There is no music coming from the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the members of Pearl Jam won't tour. There is no one to admire the treasures at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the American Museum of Natural History and Carnegie Hall.

The ongoing fears surrounding the coronavirus have shuttered places where Americans — and foreign visitors — have long gathered to escape the world and also to engage with it. Almost everything that draws crowds has now sent them all away.

Wisconsin resident Ellen Moodie, 58, found herself in New York, twice rejected for an ever-worsening crisis.

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Walt Disney World to close theme parks through end of month

By Freida Frisaro

MIAMI — Theme parks at Walt Disney World to close theme parks through end of month, the Walt Disney Company announced.

The company said in a statement Thursday that the decision was made “in an abundance of caution” to protect guests and employees amid the global outbreak of the new coronavirus.

The decision came hours after the announcement of the planned closure of Disneyland in California.

Additionally, Disney Cruise Line will suspend all new departures beginning Saturday and continuing through the end of the month, the statement said. The Walt Disney World will pay its cast members during that closure period, according to the release. The latest step by Disney World and Disneyland Paris will remain open, along with the shops and restaurants at Disney Springs at Walt Disney World and Disneyland Village at Disneyland Paris, according to the news release.

Walt Disney World Resort also announced in its own emailed statement that it will temporarily close its theme parks starting at the end of business on Sunday. The company said it anticipates remaining closed through the end of March but will continue to evaluate the situation.

It added that Universal Orlando’s hotels and Universal CityWalk will remain open and that it has instituted flexible programming for guests who had booked travel packages and tickets with the resort.
GOP Rep. Hunter’s son pens letter in effort to keep his dad out of jail

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The teenage son of convicted California Republican Rep. Duncan Hunter has penned a letter asking the court to not send his dad to jail for misspending his campaign funds.

Hunter, who resigned from Congress in January, is scheduled to be sentenced next week after pleading guilty to misspending his campaign funds. The former Marine served six terms, representing a district east of San Diego that is one of the last conservative bastions of Southern California.

His defense team is asking the judge to sentence Hunter to 11 months of home confinement. The prosecution is asking for 14 months in prison.

Hunter’s attorneys also submitted to the judge letters from Democratic Rep. Juan Vargas of San Diego and former Navy SEAL Edward Gallagher, who served 20 years in prison and was pardoned by President Donald Trump.

Gallagher and his wife, Andrea, wrote that Hunter visited Gallagher in his pre-trial confinement and fought for Gallagher when few others would. The couple added that “he is a man of character, and the mistakes he made do not define him nor should they overshadow his activism on behalf of service members and their families.”

Hunter’s son said his dad raised him to be a hard worker with a strong Christian faith.

“With everything that has happened in the last thirteen years or so, my father has made it to every single one of my sports games,” the unnamed teen was quoted as saying. “I’m writing in defense of my father, a sentencing memorandum filed Tuesday and made public Wednesday.

“He went on to write: “I truly do not wish to fathom what kind of person I would be if I never knew him.”

Congressman Vargas, a Democrat representing the district next to Hunter’s 50th district, wrote a handwritten letter on blank paper without a congressional letterhead. He stated that while the twoJerry were politically, Hunter needs help not punishment.

“While his behavior is not excused by the afflictions he suffered in several provisions the FBI sees as vital to fighting terrorism but also aim to ensure stricter oversight of how the bureau conducts surveillance.

Lee proposed a deal on the Senate floor Thursday — extension of the current authorities if the Senate would consider several amendments to the House bill that would further limit them. Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Richard Burr, speaking on the floor for McConnell, objected to that deal, saying the Senate should instead pass the House bill.

“We’re not a rubber stamp for the House of Representatives,” Lee said. “We’re certainly not a rubber stamp for the Deep State.”

The House legislation updates the three expiring surveillance provisions, including one that permits the FBI to obtain court orders to collect business records on subjects in national security investigations. Another, known as the “roving wiretap” provision, permits surveillance on subjects even after they’ve changed phones.

The third allows agents to monitor subjects who don’t have ties to international terrorism organizations.

The House legislation, passed Wednesday, is a compromise that reflects angst in both parties about the way surveillance powers have been used, but also a reluctance to strip those powers from the government’s arsenal. Republicans and Democrats in the House broadly agreed that they did not want civil liberties sacrificed in efforts to thwart terrorism and other crimes.

Former Virginia House candidate is charged with revenge porn

Associated Press

CHESTERFIELD, Va. — A former candidate for a seat in Virginia’s House of Delegates has been charged with crimes commonly characterized as “revenge porn.”

Sheila Byrum-Coleman was indicted Monday in Henrico County on two misdemeanor counts alleging that she disseminated nude photos of a woman at her workplace, news outlets reported.

Byrum-Coleman took issue with that characterization of the case in a phone call with the Richmond Times-Dispatch, and then said she did not want to comment.

Last year, she tried but failed to unseat Republican Kirk Cox, who was a House Speaker at the time.

Virginia laws say it’s illegal to disseminate photos or video of another person in a state of undress with the intent to coerce or intimidate.

Authorities said that Byrum-Coleman obtained nude photos of the victim and showed them to the woman’s supervisor at her workplace.

Special prosecutor Robert Cerullo, who was appointed to handle the case, said Byrum-Coleman told the victim’s boss that the nude photos were taken at work and on company time.

He said it’s unclear what Byrum-Coleman’s motive was.

Cerullo also said that Byrum-Coleman posted copies of the nude photos to a stop sign near the woman’s workplace.

Bynum-Coleman, 47, is a Democrat who lives in Chesterfield and works as a real estate agent.
Florida could be knockout punch for Sanders campaign

By TAMARA LUSH AND ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON

MIAMI — Florida has never been known as a place of stability, especially in its politics.

And yet stability is what has been on the minds of many Democrats in the state who say they’ll vote for former Vice President Joe Biden in Tuesday’s presidential primary election instead of Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders.

“I like some of Sanders’ ideas, but he’s a little too extreme for me,” said Jeanne Hilbom, a 76-year-old retired teacher who lives in the suburbs of Tampa. “A lot of Democrats are like me — we want stability.”

As the race for the Democratic nomination enters a penultimate phase, with Sanders’ campaign on the brink of collapse and Biden’s ascendant, attention is turning to Florida, which is holding its primary on Tuesday along with Ohio, Illinois and Arizona.

Sanders’ support in Florida has always been tenuous. In this year’s primary, he lost to Clinton by a nearly 2-to-1 margin. This year, Sanders angered a potentially large voting bloc — Cuban Americans — by praising Fidel Castro for implementing a literacy program in the communist nation.

“There is nothing positive you can say about the conditions in Cuba. If he doesn’t understand that, it is hard to conceive that he will get any votes,” said Xavier Suarez, who was the first Cuban-born mayor of Miami and is now running as an independent in the county mayoral race. “It’s gonna be a massacre.”

That leaves many Florida Democrats looking beyond the primary to November. Several groups have banded together to register people to vote and mobilize for November.

A strong turnout in the Florida primary could give hope to Democrats, though it would be difficult to draw any conclusions for November given the state’s high number of independents. And, to be sure, the coronavirus outbreak could keep some voters away from the polls and muffle any message from the turnout.

Democrats know it will be a challenge to sway voters here. About 3.6 million of the state’s 13.6 million voters are registered independents, which means they can’t vote in Tuesday’s primary but are eligible to cast ballots in the general election.

Democrats don’t have a lock on the Latino vote in Florida, particularly among the nearly 2 million residents who are originally from Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua, where authoritarian socialist regimes have soured many exiles toward any left-leaning politicians.

Democratic presidential candidate former Vice President Joe Biden speaks about the coronavirus Thursday, in Wilmington, Del.

Biden, Sanders give their crisis response plans

By BILL BARROW AND RANDALL CHASE

WILMINGTON, Del. — Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden on Thursday called for a sweeping national response to the coronavirus outbreak, chiding President Donald Trump for a response he said was woefully insufficient and warning that the widening public health crisis should not be viewed through a lens of politics.

“This administration has left us woefully unprepared for the exact crisis we now face,” Biden said in a speech delivered from his hometown of Wilmington, Del., and tailored to draw sharp contrasts between the former vice president and the Republican incumbent he hopes to topple this fall.

A short time later, Biden’s last Democratic presidential rival, Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, said the outbreak may isolate Americans working from home and in quarantine and he suggested the country needed to band together, not divide.

“If there ever was a time in the modern history of our country when we were all in this together this is the moment,” Sanders said. He heaped praise on the government’s White House: “We have an administration that is largely incompetent and whose incompetence and recklessness have threatened the lives of many, many people in our country.”

Biden said he is already up to meeting such challenges better than Trump.

“No president can promise to prevent future outbreaks, but I can promise you this: when I’m president we will be better prepared, respond better and recover better,” Biden declared. “We will lead with science, listen to the experts, heed their advice. We’ll build American leadership and rebuild it to rally the world to meet the global threats that we are likely to face again.

Biden cautioned that the virus, which some Trump allies have dismissed as overblown fodder for the president’s critics, “does not have a political affiliation.”

And in a direct dig at Trump, Biden added another pledge: “I’ll always tell you the truth. This is the responsibility of a president. That’s what is owed the American people.”

Sanders, who was the first Cuban-born mayor of Miami, where authoritarian socialist regimes ousted tried to sow discord by emphasizing social issues such as race and civil rights without favoring any particular candidate or ideology.

The tactics the accounts used to avoid detection — and that Russia has essentially outsourced to countries in West Africa — shows that foreign interference in the U.S. presidential election is getting more sophisticated and harder to detect.

The companies said they have removed dozens of fake accounts and pages from their services.

Facebook said the network of accounts it removed was in the “early stages” of building an audience. It was operated by people in Ghana and Nigeria on behalf of individuals in Russia. The accounts posted about topics such as black history, celebrity gossip and fashion.

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Pregnant woman, 19, dies trying to climb border wall

Associated Press

HOUSTON — A 19-year-old pregnant woman from Guatemala died Saturday night when she fell trying to climb the U.S. border wall near El Paso, Texas, U.S. and Guatemalan authorities said Thursday.

Guatemala identified the woman as Mirian Stephany Giron Luna. Medical personnel tried to deliver her baby, but were unsuccessful, both governments said. The U.S. said Giron was eight months pregnant, while Guatemalan authorities said she was at seven months.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection blamed Giron’s death on human smugglers who encouraged her to try to climb the wall. In a statement, Gloria Chavez, the chief for the Border Patrol’s El Paso sector, said the authorities would work with Mexico “to find those responsible for placing these lives in danger.”

CBP, acting Commissioner Mark Morgan told reporters that Giron and her partner were taken to the border by smugglers and left there in the darkness. They were attempting to climb when she fell.

Border Patrol agents reached her and called medical authorities, who took her to the hospital but “tragically, the mother and the child died from their injuries the next day,” he said.

According to Guatemalan authorities, Giron fell more than 19 feet on Saturday. Her partner, who is believed to have been the baby’s father, eventually found Border Patrol agents who called for an ambulance.

Giron suffered a cerebral hemorrhage, a pelvis fracture, and a femur fracture, a Guatemalan government statement said. She was pronounced dead later Saturday night.

The child died from their injuries as well, the statement said. She was about 19 weeks pregnant.

Giron was from Guatemala’s San Pedro Carcha, near the country’s border with Mexico. CBP says it has no record of her trying to enter the U.S. at an official port of entry or having been placed in the “Remain in Mexico” program, in which tens of thousands of migrants have been forced to pursue their immigration cases from Mexico.

Family members, the Guatemalan consul in Del Rio, Texas, said he spoke to Giron’s partner, who remains in Border Patrol custody.

“He said that if he had known that the risks were this high, he would not have done it,” Paniagua said.

Paniagua said he could recall at least seven cases in 2019 in which Guatemalans had injured themselves trying to climb U.S. border walls. He says such cases are rising because more migrants are seeking to cross the border in a manhunt for the Border Patrol.

Policy changes such as “Remain in Mexico” and a ban on asylum claims at the border have deterred many migrants from Guatemala and other Central American countries, who now risk being placed in Mexico to await their immigration cases.

The U.S. has already built or replaced about 25 miles of primary border barriers with Mexico, with several contracts awarded for more construction.

A border in and around El Paso, across from Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, already has some form of fencing.

As it grapples with the coronavirus pandemic, President Donald Trump’s administration has continued to promote the border wall and move to condemn land for construction.


Omar marries political consultant, months after accusations of affair

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar of Minnesota has married a political consultant who worked for her, months after the two were accused of having an affair, which she denied.

A marriage license filed in Washington, D.C., shows Omar married political consultant Tim Mynett on Wednesday. Omar announced her new marriage Wednesday night on Instagram, with a photo of her and a bearded man smiling and displaying wedding rings. "Got married! From partners in politics to life partners, so blessed," the post says, without identifying Mynett by name.

Filings with the Federal Election Commission show Omar’s campaign paid Tim Mynett or his firm nearly $600,000 since July 2018. Though it may raise questions about whether Washington, D.C., shows Omar’s campaign has been paying Mynett or his firm nearly $600,000 since July 2018. Though it may raise questions about whether Washington, D.C., shows Omar’s campaign has been paying Mynett or his firm nearly $600,000 since July 2018.

Manning is fighting extradition to the U.S. for construction.

Judge orders release of ex-Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning

Associated Press

FALLS CHURCH, Va. — A federal judge on Thursday ordered the release of former Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning, ending roughly a year of incarceration that she had served for refusing to testify before a grand jury.

U.S. District Judge Anthony Trenga ordered Manning’s release from jail after prosecutors reported that the grand jury that subpoenaed her had disbanded.

The Alexandria sheriff’s office confirmed Thursday night that Manning had been released.

The judge left in place more than $256,000 in fines he imposed for her refusal to testify to the grand jury, which is investigating WikiLeaks. The fines had been accumulating at a rate of $1,000 a day.

In the case that had been scheduled for Friday was canceled. Manning had fought to show that she had shown through her protracted stay at the Alexandria jail that she proved she could not be coerced into testifying and therefore should be released.

Manning’s legal statement asked for privacy and said they were relieved at her release. On Wednesday, her lawyers said she had attempted suicide while at the jail.

Manning was held since May for refusing to testify before a grand jury investigating WikiLeaks. She spent an additional two months in jail earlier in 2019 for refusing to testify to a separate grand jury.

She could have faced nearly six more months of jail time if the grand jury had continued its work. The civil contempt citation was designed to coerce her testimony.

Federal prosecutors had maintained that Manning could easily effect her own release by complying with the grand jury subpoena. They said she had the same duty to provide testimony that all citizens face.

Under federal law, a recalcitrant witness can only be jailed for civil contempt if there is a reasonable belief that incarceration will coerce the witness into testifying. If the jail time has no coercive effect and is purely punitive, the recalcitrant witness is supposed to be released.

Manning has said she believes grand juries in general are an abuse of power and that she would rather starve to death than testify. Judge Trenga, in originally sending Manning to jail, said there was no dishonor in testifying to grand juries, which are referenced specifically in the U.S. Constitution.

Manning had previously spent seven years in a military prison for delivering a trove of classified information to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who is under indictment at the Alexandria courthouse and is fighting extradition to the U.S.
Second chance at controversy

Violent, bipartisan farce ‘The Hunt’ comes to theaters after long delay

BY JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

l last fall, the violent satire “The Hunt” became ensnared by some of the very politics it so playfully parodies.

Universal Pictures pulled “The Hunt” from release after a series of deadly shootings and wave of right-wing criticism, including from President Donald Trump. He called it a movie “made in order to inflame and cause chaos.” Conservative commentators came out in force against it. Fox News’ Dan Bongino declared that “the Hollywood hate machine appears to be taking its anti-Trump derangement syndrome to disturbing new levels.”

Now, the makers of “The Hunt” want a do-over. And they feel they have a movie worthy of not a second chance but a legitimate first impression.

The latest from the low-budget, high-impact horror production company Blumhouse Productions, “The Hunt” isn’t the liberal screed it was accused, sight unseen, of being. It’s a heightened, bipartisan farce that puts the red-vs-blue vitriol of social media into a bloody action-movie blender.

The film, penned by Damon Lindelof (“Watchmen,” “Lost”) and Nick Cuse, is a loose take on “The Most Dangerous Game,” in which wealthy liberals kidnap a dozen “rednecks” and “deplorables” to hunt on a private preserve. That may sound one-sided — its summary helped stoke the controversy — but “The Hunt” lampoons conservatives blame “crisis actor” migrants and “godless elites.” For anyone in the film spouting conspiracy theory or one-sided rhetoric, well, things don’t end well.

“The Hunt” may have gone from the frying pan into the fire. It opens in theaters statewide Friday just as coronavirus fears are spiking in the U.S. But its filmmakers are just happy “The Hunt” is seeing the light of day.

“It’s an absurdist melee in which liberals smugly brag of a tweet liked by Ava DuVernay and shout “Climate change is real!” while hunting their prey, and conservatives blame “crisis actor” migrants and “godless elites.”

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“The Hunt” may have gone from the frying pan into the fire. It opens in theaters statewide Friday just as coronavirus fears are spiking in the U.S. But its filmmakers are just happy “The Hunt” is seeing the light of day.

“It’s coming out on Friday the 13th. It already is a zombie. It died and it is now back to life,” said Lindelof, who’s also a producer on the film. “I feel like it’s a huge victory that it’s just being released. Everything else is gravy.”

Universal initially pulled ads for “The Hunt” last year after a pair of shootings on Aug. 3, one at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, the other in downtown Dayton, Ohio. The timing wasn’t right for a movie that conflated gun violence with sport. Once the movie became a target of political debate, the Sept. 27 release date was canceled. Jason Blum, founder and chief of Blumhouse and a producer on “The Hunt,” said that decision was unanimous.

“But it was always the plan to bring it back,” said Blum, who added “not one frame, not one line” of the film has since been changed. “Everybody jumped to conclusions about what the movie was and nobody had seen the movie.”

Still, the backlash caught the filmmakers off guard.

“I know this sounds ridiculous in hindsight, but I was genuinely surprised when what happened happened,” said Lindelof. “I’m not someone who views myself as a provocateur. I knew that this movie was playing in quote-unquote ‘dangerous’ territory, but I didn’t think that the movie was in and of itself dangerous or was advancing some sort of dangerous message.”

Made for about $15 million, “The Hunt” was inspired in part by Jordan Peele’s “Get Out.” Lindelof and Cuse were jolted by its combination of social satire, thriller and horror. They endeavored to channel the extreme divisions of American politics — and their own liberal biases — into something that audiences from both sides of the aisle could laugh at.

“As a liberal myself, I feel like I have more license to make fun of myself and the people I spend time with because I know them better,” Lindelof said. “One of our weak spots, as a broad generality, is that we don’t have a great sense of humor about ourselves about certain things and we do tend to be too finger-waggy at points. So I took those things that I don’t like about myself and made them the villain of the movie.”

The movie’s star is Betty Gilpin, who plays Crystal, one of the hunted. She’s ex-military, largely disinterested in politics and, through grit and cunning, turns the table on her captors, ultimately facing off with the group’s leader (Hilary Swank). In a bit of wry casting, the native New Yorker refers to as “deplorables,” for sport. The film stars, clockwise from top, Hilary Swank, Betty Gilpin, Sylvia Grace Crim and Justin Hartley.

“When the movie was canceled, that was the thing that I was most sad about,” Lindelof said. “People aren’t going to get to see what Betty did.”

Universal has revamped the marketing for “The Hunt,” making its satirical nature more evident and playing up the past controversy. Trailers call it “the most talked-about movie of the year is one that no one’s actually seen.”

Craig Zobel, the film’s director, thinks the uproar was, in its way, perfect.

“We were living through a version of what happens in “The Hunt,’ in a way,” Zobel said. “The movie has kind of proved its own thesis.”

That thesis could be said to be that extreme partisan-ship will only lead to our mutual destruction.

“We’re about to go into a fall that will be a torrent of media aimed to divide us during this election,” Zobel said. “I think it’s the perfect time for this movie to come out.”

Few would call this weekend an ideal moment for any movie. With the spread of the coronavirus, health experts are advocating social distancing to limit exposure.

“I have more anxiety about people getting sick than if they go to the movies,” Blum said. “It’s too late because the media has been spent. But if you’re asking me if I had a crystal ball, is now a good time to release a movie? The answer is no. But there’s no way to reverse it because you’ve spent the media and you’ve got to go forward.”

Lindelof is pleased mainly that “The Hunt” will finally be judged for its merits, not the chatter around it.

“I’ve only always wanted the conversation to be: Is this movie good or not?”
An experiment in magical realism

Point-and-click adventure Kentucky Route Zero presents the fantastical alongside the everyday

By Gieson Cacho
The Mercury News

Kentucky Route Zero: TV Edition is a lot of things — experimental, literary, strange — and it could come across as boring to players unprepared for what it’s trying to achieve. On the surface, it looks like a traditional point-and-click adventure game, one of those classic Sierra titles from a 1980s childhood.

That isn’t what Kentucky Route Zero is aiming for. The project is more like experimental fiction that happens to arrive in video game form. Players won’t encounter much in terms of gameplay. They won’t find many puzzles. They’ll explore the map in some acts of the campaign. The graphics are simple and stylized.

What Kentucky Route Zero has going for it is the writing, which turns players into a character and brings the player into magical realism. Players initially follow a deliveryman named Conway who is looking for Dogwood Drive — in vain. He uncovers a clue at a gas station, when the attendant says the only way there is through Kentucky Route Zero.

That path takes players through bizarre locales as they venture through coal mines, odd museums, distant forests and the underground Echo River. Everything verges on the cusp of a fairy tale fantasy, but it stays grounded in the sobering sadness of the state.

The Kentucky that players travel through is one of decay. It’s a neo-nerdy Gothic tale as Conway and his companion, Shannon Marquez, search for the Zero and at the same time pick through the remains of workers and residents who roamed its waysides. The two pick up other travelers on the way and together they snowball toward a finish that poses an important question about whether one should stay or leave home.

The way players answer that question is one of the better parts of Kentucky Route Zero. Although the narrative is linear, players have choices in how it’s shaped — at least partly. That’s done through the responses in conversations or internal monologue. The responses themselves give each character a background and personality.

For example, the musical duo Johnny and Junebug can be added to their group. Players can choose options to encourage that possibility, or create division between the two with Johnny wanting buddy and Junebug rejecting the proposal.

The array of choices shows how player decisions color in a character’s portrait and add depth. In a way, the player and the developer, Cardboard Computer, become co-authors in how Kentucky Route Zero unfurls through its five acts.

The only issue is that not all scenes are created equal, and some interactions are boring. It’s reminiscent as players follow the meandering journey and deal with the oddities of magical realism. Like “One Hundred Years of Solitude” by Gabriel García Márquez, the acts have interludes that seemingly appear out of place, but players discover the connections between the scenes and the main narrative.

These elements often feel fantastical, but that’s how the plot deals with the trauma of the subject matter. Kentucky Route Zero doesn’t paint a rosy picture of the state, but instead shows a world and characters that have been beaten down. The Consolidated Power Company holds sway over Conway’s family and other subsidiary businesses, and the more desperate and dire the situation, the more fantastical the scenarios seem to end up.

Hurt legs turn to skeletal limbs. A car becomes a technician behind a community-access television station during a life-threatening rainstorm.

Accepting the incredible alongside the harshness of everyday life is one of the hallmarks of magical realism. For those who like that thread of storytelling, Kentucky Route Zero is a piece of experimental fiction that’s worth exploring.

Platforms: Nintendo Switch, Xbox One, PlayStation 4, PC
Online: kentuckyroutezero.com

The Longing furnishes a space to wait, contemplate

By Christopher Byrd
Special to The Washington Post

Very often, a game comes along that is so audacious it reminds me how conventional and pedestrian many of the games that I’ve reviewed — and liked — are by comparison. This level of creativity reinvigorates my expectation of what games can be. They lift my standards. On a short list of games that meet this standard, I would include titles such as The Witness, The Beginner’s Guide, Nier: Automata, Disco Elysium and now The Longing.

The Longing is a point-and-click game about waiting based on an old German legend about a ruler who goes to sleep in an underground cave. It commences with a giant King addressing his trusted servant, the Shade — a yellow-eyed, beak-nosed, sooty-looking figure — whom he stands on the palm of his hand. Upon informing his servant that his power is waning, the King tells him that he will sleep for 400 days to regather his strength after which time his servant is to wake him so that he may “end all fear and longing.”

Once the king falls into his slumber, the Shade repairs to a smaller nook within the sprawling underground network of caverns where he contemplates the weight of his task. The 400 days of which the king spoke equate to 400 actual days in gameplay. So, if you start The Longing and come back after 400 days, you’ll discover one of the game’s different endings.

In the Longing, the player (the Shade) must discern how best to spend his time in an underground cavern while waiting for his King to awake from a 400-day slumber.

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The Shade finds a door that takes a couple of minutes to open, so slowly does it move on its old hinges. Seeing the door wide open is enough for him to pass, I naturally tried to send him over the threshold, but he didn’t budge and instead observed “I could squeeze through already, but not to wait until the door is open in full glory would be blasphemy.” Wait you must, for two hours, a week or a month for some of the events in the game to occur. The Longing makes a mockery of the idea that games depend upon instant gratifications. It is a minimalist game that creates ample space for the mind to wander and philosophize along with the Shade as he considers his existential condition, his loneliness and his lack of control over his situation.

The part of me drawn to The Longing is close to the same part of me that appreciates some of the Hungarian filmmaker Béla Tarr’s work. In both, there is the purposeful use of glacial pacing to stimulate thought. Wandering through caves devoid of distraction, it’s natural for the imagination to take flight, for the mind to look for meaning in the situation.

Last night I had the Shade read through “Moby Dick” when he turns the pages at a faster clip than I do. A nifty feature is that you can bookmark locations to which Shade will return, so you can send him hiking while you cook dinner. I’m only 387 days in (seven days of real time), so obviously I can’t make a conclusive judgment, but I’m invested.

Platforms: Mac and PC
Online: 399d-23h-59m-59s.com
The prescient game Pandemic asks players to cooperate to stop the spread of a virus

**LIFESTYLE**

By Christopher Borrelli

Chicagoland Games Dice Dojo is one of the many hobby shops in the Chicago area that are part of the growing gaming scene in the city. The store, located in Edgewater, Ill., has seen a surge in sales and popularity in recent years, with Pandemic being one of the most popular games in the store's inventory.

**In the Pandemic board game, created by Matt Leacock, players work together to stop the spread of an infectious disease around the globe.**

**Matt Leacock**

Creator of Pandemic

**Really, it’s the grandfather of cooperative gaming. Pandemic was not the first game to introduce the idea — you don’t roll the dice, then come to a winner — but it did bring the concept of cooperative board games into the mainstream. Now you see these games in Walmart.”**

Pandemic was created by Matt Leacock, a former Chicago graphic designer who studied visual communication at Northern Illinois University. He’s unsure of the exact inspiration for Pandemic but notes he developed it between the SARS epidemic of 2003 and the H1N1 swine flu outbreak of 2009, with warnings about the spread of infectious diseases in the 21st century on his mind. Now 48, he lives with his family in Silicon Valley, Calif., and like everyone else, he’s intently following coronavirus news and contemplating the endgame.

We spoke the other day about the legacy of his scarily prescient creation.

**Chicago Tribune: Have you ever heard from the CDC about Pandemic?**

**Matt Leacock**

Creator of Pandemic

**Leacock: They are using it in an exhibition on cultural reactions to the spread of infectious diseases (opening in late May). And there’s been some contact from epidemiologists who worked in West Africa and loved the game.”**

**What was your goal in creating it?**

I didn’t set out to teach anything. I wanted something that made your heart beat and got people working together. It was a design problem to me — could you create an artificial opponent out of cardboard and paper that engaged kids and adults sitting for an hour around a table? It’s a daunting challenge, but I found how to do it by experimenting.

**Did developing it give you a window into how we handle actual pandemics?**

I don’t know. I’m certainly more attuned now to the spread of disease. I’ve had to read a lot of books about it just to work on the products based around Pandemic. I guess I’m not surprised now when something like coronavirus happens? I certainly see how the real world works and think of how those actions might work their way into future versions of the game. The earliest versions didn’t have quarantines. It was one thing too many. We later introduced it. You can kind of see the advantages and disadvantages of real-world quarantines, but we can’t necessarily capture everything in a game. We have three different expansions, and it’s hard to add more to the base game without making it too complicated.

**Did you interview medical professionals?**

No, just casual research. I was sort of an indie game designer, doing this game as a hobby on the side. There was no pressure to have a well-researched product.

The pressure was, will I ever get a game published? I didn’t even name the diseases in the game because I didn’t want it too clinical — which, actually now, makes it kind of topical.

**What’s Pandemic’s origin?**

Well, I had learned I enjoyed playing cooperative games with my family more than playing games based around negotiation. I had played a negotiation game with my wife one night and won, but it became a horrible experience where it crossed over into the real world.

Games reveal qualities you don’t necessarily like to acknowledge.

I think the best thing about cooperative play is it promises a safe space where you can experiment without (those qualities) affecting actual life. But it’s not always true — it’s just the promise. Cooperative games are a way to go up against artificial enemies together, which is a good skill to practice. I kind of find it weird that so many games are competitive when in fact, in life, we cooperate much more than compete head-to-head.

**What’s the biggest mistake people make when they play Pandemic?**

They focus on short-term objectives. They run around the world and try to put out local fires without thinking about a long-term goal, which is the only way they can win.

**Does Pandemic sell better when there is actual pandemic?**

My suspicion is that it does better because people are trying to understand. There is some aversion — nobody wants to feel that they are trivializing human suffering. ... I would guess, just from the references I have seen to it on social media lately, it is being played right now.
A cow is on the loose and wanted by police

**FL PEMBROKE PINES** — A cow is on the loose in South Florida. Not considered dangerous, but police have been trying to corral it for weeks.

The Pembroke Pines Police Department said Wednesday the animal has been spotted near Interstate 75 in southern Broward County. Somehow it has eluded capture since late January.

The police department put out a tweet: “Wanted: Unknown Cow.”

**MD BALTIMORE** — A Baltimore worker operating a trash loading machine rescued a severely injured dog after the animal fell 30 feet into a garbage incinerator.

The front-end loader operator noticed something moving among the piles of debris, stopped his machine and jumped into the trash to save what turned out to be a critically injured dog, Baltimore Animal Rescue & Care Shelter said in a statement Wednesday.

The dog was taken to the shelter, where veterinarians found he was covered in trash, unable to walk and suffering from multiple cuts and puncture wounds, according to Animal Rescue. The center named him Donut, and he has since been recovering, Bailey Deacon, a spokesperson for the shelter, told The Baltimore Sun.

**MD** Mountain lion attacks 2, including deputy

**CO FORT COLLINS** — Authorities in northern Colorado say a mountain lion attacked one person and bit a sheriff's deputy who was responding to the scene.

David Moore, a spokesperson for the Larimer County Sheriff's Office, says the attack happened in Big Thompson Canyon in Loveland on Wednesday afternoon.

The deputy suffered non-life-threatening injuries, and the other person who was attacked was taken to a hospital.

No other information about the victims has been released.

**CO** Bank robbery suspects arrested after chase

**MO KANSAS CITY** — Two bank robbery suspects are in custody after leading police on a chase through parts of the Kansas City area that reached up to 110 mph.

The Kansas City Star reported that the suspects robbed the First Federal Bank in Independence, Mo., on Wednesday morning and fled with an undisclosed amount of money.

Police spotted the suspects’ black SUV and a chase began along Interstate 435 through south Kansas City, Mo., and into Kansas, where at one point the SUV reportedly reached speeds of about 110 mph.

The suspects abandoned the SUV and ran into a neighborhood before Overland Park, Kan., officers arrested them.

Names of the suspects have not been released.

**UT PROVO** — State prosecutors dismissed a charge and canceled a jury trial scheduled for a man accused of starting one of the largest wildfires in Utah history.

The state dismissed a misdemeanor charge of burning during a closed fire season against Robert Ray Lyman on Tuesday, The Daily Herald reported.

A misdemeanor reckless burn charge involving starting a fire that endangers the lives of animals was dismissed with prejudice Feb. 25.

Lyman, 63, pleaded not guilty to both charges in Provo district court in June.

The wildfire that burned 112 square miles in Iron and Garfield counties destroyed 13 homes and caused more than $40 million in damage.

**NY NEW YORK** — A man was struck and killed by a New York City subway train Thursday after he grabbed someone’s cellphone and jumped onto the tracks to flee, police said.

The unidentified man snatched a phone at the Canal Street station on the No. 1 subway line at about 4 a.m., police said. He jumped onto the tracks and was hit by a northbound train, they said.

The man was pronounced dead at the scene. Subway service was delayed in both directions while police investigated.

**NY** Chief snatches phone, is hit by subway train

**MN DULUTH** — A U.S. Coast Guard cutter has started ice breaking activities in the Twin Ports of Duluth and Superior, an annual ritual that signals the approach of spring.

The cutter Alder began cleared the channels Tuesday for the upcoming shipping season. It’s the 1,100-foot long ships loaded with taconite, coal, limestone and other cargo can maneuver through without getting stuck.

Minnesota Public Radio News said the Coast Guard is also responsible for maintaining the ports in Two Harbors and Silver Bay and may help break ice in the Thunder Bay, Ontario, harbor.

The Great Lakes shipping season begins March 25 when the Soo Locks open between Lake Superior and lakes Huron and Michigan.

High water levels have delayed the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway on the eastern side of the lakes by two weeks.

**IL CHICAGO** — A rides in a horse-drawn carriage in downtown Chicago may turn into nothing but a memory after a City Council committee voted in favor banning them at the start of next year.

The council’s Committee on License and Consumer Protection’s vote Wednesday sent the proposed ordinance to the full City Council for a vote next week. The full council rarely fails to pass measures that are endorsed by its committees.

The vote could be a final chapter for the carriages that have been popular with tourists, new-lyweds and others for generations but have also been the subject of harsh criticism by animal rights activists and others in recent years.

Alderman Brendan Reilly said it is time for the carriage rides to clip clop into the history books.

“There are folks that have an issue with this industry entirely related to traffic and public safety, (and) there are others who care about whether these animals are being treated in a humane fashion,” said Reilly, who has spent years trying to regulate the industry to little effect. “For me, it’s a combination of both.”
Welcome progress on cyberattack preparedness

BY DAVID IGNATIUS
Washington Post Writers Group

A mid the chaos of coronavirus, it was encouraging this week to see a bipartisan, blue-ribbon commission announce a coherent plan to respond to this potential catastrophe — a major cyberattack against the United States.

COVID-19 has given us all a foretaste of what revamping security would look like: Transportation, infrastructure and health care services would all be severely disrupted and klar by untrusted experts and competent leadership at the top — all qualities that have been in short supply in the Trump administration’s response to the pandemic.

Democrats often aren’t great at planning, normally; that’s the cruel efficiency of authoritarian governments. But in a welcome change, Congress took the initiative more than a year ago to create a group to revamp cyber policy that would cut across political and bureaucratic lines — drawing in members of Congress from both parties; representatives of defense and intelligence agencies; and top private-sector experts.

This rare exercise in preparedness was known as the Cyberspace Solarium Commission. The idea was that Dwight D. Eisenhower’s 1953 “Solarium Project” that developed a “New Look” approach for the United States could serve as a reference point. Two of the policymakers dubbed it “the best example of long-term strategic planning in the history of the American presidency.”

The Cyberspace Solarium Commission’s two co-chairs were Sen. Angus King, a Maine Independent, and Rep. Mike Gallagher, who represents Wisconsin’s 8th District and a Marine combat veteran in Iraq. The panel had 12 other members, including the FBI director and the deputy secretaries of defense, national intelligence and homeland security. Of the 15 members across this administration’s response to the pandemic.

The group’s marquee recommendations were for clearer leadership and accountability at the top. To coordinate planning across the walled gardens of the federal government, it proposed a national cyber director, or “CyberNGO.” What makes this proposal unconfirmed by the Senate, who could drive policy in an emergency. We can see the need for such a policy czar in the Trump administration’s chaotic ad-hoc response to coronavirus. We weren’t ready for a pandemic, just as we aren’t ready for a cyberattack.

Because the biggest risks in a cyberattack would be to the civilian economy, the commission designated the Department of Homeland Security as the lead, under Secretary Chad Wolf. But in a cyber war, the Secretary of Homeland Security will lose coordination to the cyber czar. As a DOD newspaper, the U.S. government, especially in this period of public anxiety and division.

The group welcomed comments from readers, and can be contacted by email at ombudsman@stripes.com, or by phone at 202-886-0020.

Smartphones could be essential to fight coronavirus

BY DAN HANFLING AND TARA O’TOOLE
Special to The Washington Post

The steady spread of COVID-19 through the United States and elsewhere. Containing the virus requires that people who are symptomatic be isolated and not reckless with their health care access to care. How can concerned citizens access reliable medical information and obtain decent medical care from doctors, nurses and other health professionals are overwhelmed? How can we preserve the continuity of health services when quarantine measures limit travel, the public is incapacitated by anxiety, and the government encourages people to stay home and mandatory rationale for transmission? Digital health tools, including telemedicine and smartphone-based messaging applications, can and should play a role.

The health industry is already using these digital tools. Several large health systems have used digital health tools to meet patient demands for routine care. But regulatory and reimbursement hurdles have prevented the widespread adoption of these tools. With the outbreak of COVID-19, there is an urgent need to adjust these restrictions to help deal with the crisis.

There are several important contributions that digital health tools could provide in responding to COVID-19. Patients could use digital health tools to report symptoms and health care providers could conduct clinical evaluations remotely, letting patients self-triage while avoiding crowded doctor’s offices and overburdened emergency rooms. Patients suspected of being infected with the virus could be advised to self-quarantine and appropriate facilities. Meanwhile, the tools could support rapid response efforts by providing critical real-time data about the disease, such as geographic location and patient demographics. In the event that providers are exposed to the virus and must be quarantined at home, they could still provide medical services remotely, an important strategy in maintaining the health care workforce and promoting safe practices.

Federal and state governments should move quickly to remove regulatory barriers to use of these digital health tools and other steps to encourage their deployment. Passage of the $8.3 billion funding package appropriated to appropriate facilities. Meanwhile, the tools could support rapid response efforts by providing critical real-time data about the disease, such as geographic location and patient demographics. In the event that providers are exposed to the virus and must be quarantined at home, they could still provide medical services remotely, an important strategy in maintaining the health care workforce and promoting safe practices.

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**Pro football**

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**College basketball**

**Pro basketball**

**NBA**

Eastern Conference

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**College baseball**

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**College volleyball**

**Washington Commanders**

**Spring Training**

**AMERICAN LEAGUE**

Boston 124, Detroit 106

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**Tennis**

**ATP rankings**

1. Novak Djokovic (Serbia) 10,220
2. Rafael Nadal (Spain) 10,080
3. Daniil Medvedev (Russia) 8,850
4. Andy Murray (GB) 6,350
5. Matteo Berrettini (Italy) 5,260
6. Fabio Fognini (Italy) 4,450
7. Alexander Zverev (Germany) 3,950
8. Stefanos Tsitsipas (Greece) 3,650
9. Gael Monfils (France) 3,260
10. Dan Evans (GB) 2,760
11. Diego Schwartzman (Argentina) 2,625
12. Roberto Bautista (Spain) 2,360
13. Diego Schwartzman (Argentina) 2,265
VIRUS OUTBREAK

MLS opts for 30-day shutdown

**By Tim Reynolds**
Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Major League Soccer is shutting down for 30 days because of the coronavirus, delaying the home opener for the expansion team co-owned by former England captain David Beckham.

“Our clubs were united today in the decision to temporarily suspend our season — based on the advice and guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Public Health Agency of Canada and other public health authorities,” MLS Commissioner Don Garber said in a statement Thursday.

Inter Miami, co-owned by Beckham and Jorge Mas, had been scheduled to play its home opener Saturday. MLS started its season on Feb. 29 and each of the 26 teams has played two league matches.

In addition, the U.S. Soccer Federation canceled exhibitions in March and April for its men’s and women’s national teams as a precaution.

The men had been scheduled to play the Netherlands in Eindhoven on March 26 and Wales four days later in Cardiff, preparation for the scheduled start of World Cup qualifying in September. The women had been scheduled to play Australia at Sandy, Utah, on April 10 and Brazil four days later at San Jose, Calif.

The Confederation for North and Central America and the Caribbean Football association Thursday.

MLS announced Thursday they have postponed the world’s most famous sled dog race and other public health authorities,” MLS Commissioner Don Garber said in a statement Thursday.

“The event,” he said. “If you’re over 60 years of age, you shouldn’t come to the event.”

Meanwhile, the leader is taking a day’s rest at the halfway point of the race.

Brent Sass, a native of Minnesota living near the Alaska community of Eureka, was the first musher to the checkpoint in Cripple, the race’s halfway point. He arrived late Wednesday with 13 dogs in harness and planned to take his mandatory 24-hour rest period.

He said he was pleased with his team’s performance, telling the Iditarod Insider, “Everybody is just smooth trotting, and they’re doing their job.”

Sass is the two-time defending champion of the 1,000-mile Yukon Quest International Sled Dog Race, run between Fairbanks and Whitehorse, Yukon. He won this year’s Yukon Quest on Feb. 11.

He said most of the dogs on his team are 3 and 4 years old and were part of the two Yukon Quest championship runs.

Sass said the Iditarod is a new trail for all but one of his dogs and they’re “super excited.”

“They definitely have the mental ability to do it so it’s just about getting down the trail and making a lot of good decisions,” he said.

For being first to Cripple, Sass won his choice of $3,000 in gold nuggets or a cellphone with a service plan for a year.

Other mushers who have arrived in Cripple include Michelle Phillips of Tagish, Yukon; four-time champion Lance Mackey of Fairbanks; Paige Drobný of Cantwell; three-time champ Mitch Seavey of Seward; Kelly Matixen of Big Lake, and Aly Zirkle of Two Rivers.

The remainder of the top 10 includes Jessie Royer of Fairbanks, Richie Diehl of Aniak, and Thomas Waerner of Norway. All three are en route to the Cripple checkpoint and have already taken their mandatory 24-hour layover.

The race started Sunday in Willow for 57 mushers, down to 55 after two scratches.

Iditarod continues, but post-race events are postponed

**By Mark Thiessen**
Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Officials with the world’s most famous sled dog race announced Thursday they have postponed post-race events in Nome in response to the new coronavirus.

The Iditarod has postponed both the awards banquet set for March 22 and the post-race events in Nome in response to the new coronavirus.

American SAMAR, an official with the Iditarod, said the event was postponed because of the coronavirus.

“We are monitoring developing events and their related to our regular-season schedule and are monitoring developing events and their potential impact,” NWFL Commissioner Lisa Baird said. “We are deeply appreciative of our fans and partners for their continued support of our league and all our world-class players.”

Mac told Inter Miami players and coaches of the MLS suspension late Thursday morning, then held a news conference at the team’s temporary stadium.

“We think it is a prudent decision by the league, because obviously we want to protect our players and protect our fans as much as is possible for us to undertake,” Mac said. “We look with optimism that we can continue building here in South Florida.”

IndyCar was scheduled to open its season Sunday on the streets of downtown St. Petersburg without fans. Formula One also canceled its season opening race in Australia, leaving the first full weekend of global motorsports without a major event.

“We want to race as much as you want us to race but this is the right decision,” John-son wrote on Twitter. “This is so much bigger than sports right now and the health and safety of our fans, industry members and the overall public is top priority.”

There was no announcement of any plans to reschedule the races.
MLB delays start at least two weeks

By RONALD BLUM

NEW YORK — Baltimore slugger Chris Davis was driving down Florida’s west coast on Interstate 75 from Sarasota to Fort Myers for an exhibition game against the Minnesota Twins when he got the call.

No game tonight. No games for a while.

“Pretty shocked,” Davis said, “just how quickly things have escalated.”

Major League Baseball delayed the start of its season by at least two weeks because of the coronavirus outbreak and suspended the rest of its spring training schedule.

Opening day had been scheduled for March 26. The decision announced by Commissioner Rob Manfred on Thursday left open whether each team would still play 162 games.

“It’s unfortunate but I think it’s the proper measure we need to take now given the situation the country’s in and the world’s in,” New York Yankees star Giancarlo Stanton said. “It’s important to know that some things are bigger than baseball, bigger than sports at the moment. Once we’re able to hopefully get a hold on some things and get some questions answered we can figure out when things can continue.”

The announcement came while some spring training games in Florida were still in progress. MLB followed the NBA, NHL, MLS and college basketball tournaments in altering schedules because of the pandemic.

The minor league baseball season, which was to start April 4, also will be delayed along with qualifying in Arizona for this year’s Olympic baseball tournament and the next year’s World Baseball Classic.

“We’re ultimately all people. We all love the game of baseball, but this is a far bigger issue for all of us right now, and we’re trying to work our way through it together,” Seattle Mariners owner John Stanton said at the team’s camp in Peoria, Ariz.

“I believe that this is going to be something that will have a lot more twists and turns to it. I don’t have a high degree of confidence that we will start on April 9,” he said.

MLB had continued to play into Thursday, two weeks before the season had been set to start with a pair of simultaneous games: Detroit at Cleveland and World Series champions Washington at the New York Mets.

Texas had been looking forward to the opening of its retractable-roof ballpark, Globe Life Field, first with an exhibition against St. Louis on March 23 and then a formal opener against Mike Trout and the Los Angeles Angels on March 31.

Both baseball changed course after Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said at a morning news conference he had strongly recommended a limit on all mass gatherings.

“MLB and the clubs have been preparing a variety of contingency plans regarding the 2020 regular season schedule,” the commissioner’s office said in a statement. “MLB will announce the effects on the schedule at an appropriate time and will remain flexible as events warrant, with the hope of resuming normal operations as soon as possible.”

Players with big league contracts likely will be allowed to leave spring training and go home if they want to, but no decision on that was made public.

“There are so many questions that I have, and I know a bunch of guys have approached me with questions I just don’t have answers to,” he added. “It doesn’t seem real.”
PGA Tour shuts down for month

BY DOUG FERGUSON
Associated Press

PONTE VEDRA BEACH, Fla. — The Players Championship was on hold until April 22; the men’s tour said its tour’s decision-making, the International Tennis Federation said its lower-tier events would be on hold until April 22; the men’s tour said its tournaments would not resume before the end of that week.

The next Grand Slam tournament, the French Open, is scheduled to start on May 24, 2020. The tour decided to halt ATP Tour and ATP Challenger Tour competition until late April, with an announcement by the WTA on Wednesday that men’s and women’s tennis tournaments for six weeks because of the COVID-19 pandemic, while the WTA said Thursday it was calling off three events for now and would decide on any further changes to the women’s tour schedule within a week.

Six-week hiatus for men’s tennis

BY HOWARD FENDRICH AND STEVEN WINE
Associated Press

The ATP suspended all men’s professional tennis tournaments for six weeks because of the COVID-19 pandemic, while the WTA said Thursday it was calling off three events for now and would decide on any further changes to the women’s tour schedule within a week.

Trump ‘postpone’ idea for Olympics shot down

BY STEPHEN WADE
Associated Press

TOKYO — President Donald Trump’s suggestion to postpone the Tokyo Olympics for a year because of the spreading coronavirus was immediately shot down by Japan’s Olympic minister.

“Absolutely not at all,” Seiko Hashimoto, an Olympic bronze medalist, told a news conference on Friday in Tokyo.

The International Olympic Committee and Tokyo organizers have stayed on message since the virus outbreak in China three months ago spread across Asia and then the globe: The games will open as scheduled on July 24.

“I just can’t see having no people there. In other words, not allowing people,” Trump told reporters at the White House on Thursday. “Maybe, and this is just my idea, maybe they postpone it for a year.”

Television broadcasters and sponsors have billions invested in the Olympics, and the crowded international sports calendar has little space for pushing the games back a year. Holding the Olympics without fans has been floated, as has simply canceling the Olympics, which has only happened during wartime.

“As best we can — so athletes will have no confusion or uncertainty — we will put in our maximum effort,” Hashimoto said. She competed in four Winter Olympics as a speed skater, winning bronze in 1992, and three Summer Olympics as a cyclist.

A cancellation or postponement will ripple in thousands of directions, hitting sponsors, television, 11,000 Olympic and 4,400 Paralympic athletes, staffs, airlines, hotels, and $1 billion lost in ticket sales. It also hurts 80,000 unpaid volunteers who will miss a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

The IOC oversaw an Olympic flame-lighting ceremony on Thursday in Greece, another sign it hopes to go ahead in 4½ months. The flame is to arrive in Japan on March 20 and will begin a four-month relay around the country on March 26.

“The ceremony demonstrates once more our commitment to the success of the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020,” Bach said in Greece. He lauded officials who are “taking so many significant measures to contain the spread of the coronavirus.”
**March without the madness**

**NCAA Tournaments canceled over virus**

**By RALPH D. RUSSO**

Associated Press

March Madness came to a screeching halt before a bracket could even be filled out.

The NCAA canceled its men’s and women’s basketball tournaments Thursday because of the spread of coronavirus, putting an abrupt end to the season less than a month after champions were to be crowned.

The unprecedented move comes a day after the NCAA announced the games that were scheduled to start next week would go on, but played in mostly empty arenas.

That plan was scrapped as every major American sports league from the NBA to MLB put the brakes on its season due to concerns about the pandemic.

“This decision is based on the evolving COVID-19 public health threat, our ability to ensure the events do not contribute to the spread of the pandemic and the impracticality of hosting such events at any time during the academic year given the ongoing decisions by other entities,” the NCAA said.

The NCAA canceled championships in every spring sport, which include hockey, baseball and lacrosse.

The stunning end to the major college basketball season came about four hours after a frantic morning when conference tournaments around the country came to a sudden stop. Moments away from tipoff at some arenas and minutes apart, each Power Five conference — the Atlantic Coast, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac-12 and Southeastern conferences — canceled its remaining games.

At Madison Square Garden in New York, the Big East game between Creighton and St. John’s did start, but at halftime the conference called off the game and all the rest. Turns out that was the last Division I basketball to be played this season.

“This has been the most extraordinary stretch of days I’ve ever had or ever seen in my 30-plus years of being in the sports business,” Big East Commissioner Val Ackerman said.

Smaller conferences followed suit, shutting down their tournaments, and within a few hours 58 men’s games scheduled in 16 conferences had been canceled.

Then the conferences began shutting down all athletic activities, for at least a few weeks like the SEC, or indefinitely like the ACC.

A few hours later, the NCAA put an end to the tournament.

“So you telling me I transferred to not play in the tournament,” tweeted Gonzaga point guard Ryan Woolridge, a graduate transfer from North Texas. Gonzaga was expected to be a No. 1 NCAA Tournament seed and play a possible second-round game in its home city of Spokane, Wash.

The NCAA men’s basketball tournament has been played every year since 1939 when Oregon won the championship in Evanston, Ill. It has grown through the years, both in size and stature. The three-week tournament generates almost a billion dollars in revenue each year for the NCAA and its hundreds of member schools. Most of the money comes from a television contract with CBS and Turner that pays the NCAA almost $800 million annually.

Earlier this week, NCAA President Mark Emmert told The Associated Press that the NCAA had insurance to cover a business stoppage but gave no details.

The men’s tournament is now one of the biggest events in American sports, a basketball marathon of buzzer-beaters, upsets and thrills involving 68 teams from schools big and small.

“While we are obviously disappointed that our season has ended abruptly, we also recognize that this decision was made for a greater good,” said coach Casey Alexander, who led Belmont, a private university with 6,000 students in Nashville, Tenn., to the Ohio Valley Conference championship and a spot in the NCAA Tournament earlier this week.

The field for the men’s tournament was scheduled to be announced Sunday, creating the famous bracket sports fans obsess over in office pools and at sportsbooks.

“I respect the NCAA’s decision to put everyone’s safety first,” Arizona State coach Bobby Hurley tweeted. “That said, every team deserves recognition for their season’s success. Brackets should still be announced on Selection Sunday.”

The 64-team women’s field was to be revealed Monday. The NCAA women’s tournament began in 1982 and it, too, has become a big event, raising the profile of the sport.

“I’m disappointed, but I totally understand. I really feel for the senior student-athletes; every student-athlete, but particularly the seniors because this is their last chance for the fans,” said Oregon women’s coach Kelly Graves, whose team would have entered the tournament as one of the favorites to reach the Final Four in New Orleans. “There’s something more important than the games going on. I’ve kind of come to grips with that a little more than a few hours ago.”

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**VIRUS OUTBREAK**

A sign is posted at an elevator on the event level at American Airlines Arena, home of the Dallas Mavericks, after the NBA announced it is suspending the season indefinitely on Wednesday in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

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**NBA commish: Hiatus likely at least a month**

**By TIM REYNOLDS**

Associated Press

MIAMI — NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said Thursday night that the league’s season shutdown due to the coronavirus pandemic will likely last at least a month, or roughly what would have been the remainder of an uninterrupted regular season.

“What we determined today is that this hiatus will be most likely, at least 30 days,” Silver said on TNT’s “Inside the NBA” while making his first public comments since the league suspended play Wednesday night after Utah Jazz center Rudy Gobert tested positive for COVID-19. A second Jazz player, Donovan Mitchell, said Thursday he tested positive for the coronavirus, or COVID-19.

Silver was also asked on TNT if the season may be over. “Of course it’s possible,” Silver said. “I just don’t know more at this point.”

Meanwhile, NBA great and longtime commentator Charles Barkley was not on the “Inside The NBA” broadcast Thursday night and revealed that he is self-quarantining for 48 hours because he has not felt well since a recent trip to New York.

Barkley said he has been tested for COVID-19 and has not yet received the results. “This thing is more scary,” Barkley said.

For now, NBA players have been told to remain in their home market through at least Monday — some teams such as the Toronto Raptors that are self-quarantining would, in theory, need to remain in place for longer — and speak to a team physician or team athletic trainer once daily. Group workouts and practices are not being permitted yet.

“This remains part of a complicating and rapidly evolving situation that reminds us that we are all part of a broader society with a responsibility to look out for one another,” Silver wrote. “That is what the NBA will continue to do, and we are grateful for your understanding and for being the fans in sports.”

There are 259 games left unplayed on this season’s schedule. If the regular season is not resumed, that would be the second-largest number of games missed in league history.

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**ASHLEY LANDIS, THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS**

Above: Mike Lemke, from Richmond, Va., sits in an empty Greensboro Coliseum in Greensboro, N.C., on Thursday after the ACC tournament was canceled. The NCAA announced the complete cancellation of March Madness shortly thereafter.

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**STARS AND STRIPES**

The unprecedented move comes as the coronavirus, or COVID-19. A second Jazz player, Donovan Mitchell, said Thursday he tested positive for the coronavirus, or COVID-19. A second Jazz player, Donovan Mitchell, said Thursday he tested positive for the coronavirus, or COVID-19.
World of sports craters over coronavirus

March Madness leads list of scrubbed events

By Eddie Pells
Associated Press

The world’s sports schedule cratered at warp speed Thursday, with one of the biggest events on any calendar, the rollicking, fun-filled and colorful college basketball tournament known as March Madness, becoming the first mega-event to be scrubbed due to fear of the spread of the coronavirus.

Leaders at all levels of sports, including the NCAA, NBA, NHL, La Liga, American baseball, golf, tennis and soccer, decided the risk of playing games with the threat of the virus hanging over them was too great despite the billions of dollars — to say nothing of the trophies, pride and once-in-a-lifetime experiences — hanging in the balance.

By late in the afternoon of an extraordinary, headline-a-minute day across a pandemic-rattled globe, the NCAA, which regulates March Madness, canceled virtually all major U.S. college sports, basically had no choice.

With conferences and individual teams calling off their basketball seasons at breakneck pace, the NCAA followed suit. They scrapped all college winter and spring championships, the highlight of which is the men’s basketball tournament — a three-week spectacle that by far ranks as the biggest event this side of the Super Bowl on the U.S. sports calendar.

The cancelation leaves a massive hole in American sports — from campuses across the country, to a growing passel of sports-betting businesses that rely on college hoops money, to say nothing of the hearts and wallets of players who were poised to get their first, or last, or only chance to shine on the big stage.

All of it was to be covered by CBS and its partners; about 80 percent of the NCAA’s $1.05 billion annual budget is bankrolled by television fees. If the networks pay to present the 68-team tournament over the air, on cable and online.

“This is bigger than a sport or championship,” said Kansas University coach Bill Self, whose team would’ve been the likely favorite to win it all.

Workers dismantle seating after the men’s and women’s college basketball games at the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference tournament were canceled on Thursday due to coronavirus concerns.

Hours earlier, Kansas and Duke had each taken matters into their own hands, announcing they wouldn’t be sending any of their teams to games, no matter the stakes.

It wasn’t even the most jaw-dropping moment of the morning. That came, fittingly, at one of the world’s most renowned sports venues — Madison Square Garden — where at halftime of a Big East Conference tournament game, the PA announcer came on and said the tournament had been canceled.

By then, every major conference, and virtually all of the minor ones, had done the same thing. They were prompted in part by the NCAA’s decision a day earlier to hold all its tournament games — which had been scheduled to start next week in nine cities and close April 6 at a 71,000-seat stadium in Atlanta — in front of friends and family and limited “essential” personnel.

Only 24 hours later, with the stock market tanking, mixed messages coming out of Washington and no promise of quick relief being offered by world health experts, it became clear that gathering thousands of people were hard to justify. Also clear: The NCAA would have trouble assembling an equitable bracket for its tournament, given that most games designed to suss out the most-deserving teams and automatic qualifiers had already been scrubbed.

“I’m not a researcher in immunology or infectious disease, but those who are engaged at the NCAA level provided some stark information yesterday,” said Greg Sankey, the commissioner of the Southeastern Conference.

The March Madness news meant it will be a world free of basketball for the foreseeable future.

A day after the NBA put its season on hiatus, a second member of the Utah Jazz — Donovan Mitchell — tested positive for the coronavirus. The league said its suspension would last for at least 30 days — possibly a conservative guess, as teams undertake the task of identifying any player or referee who has had recent contact with the Jazz. That means putting them into isolation for the required two weeks.

“What would kill the NBA season is if more players catch it,” Mavericks owner Mark Cuban said in an interview on CNBC. “He called the hiatus a matter of ‘us being vigilant, as all businesses should. Businesses are going to have to be incredibly vigilant, and that’s hard.’”

For once, there were no major announcements coming out of Tokyo, where conflicting messages about the status of this summer’s Olympics have come out of the country, and the IOC, for weeks.

Instead, the IOC went ahead with its ceremonial lighting of the Olympic flame, an event held in front of the ruined Temple of Hera in Ancient Olympia.

“We are strengthened ... by the many authorities and sports organizations around the world which are taking so many significant measures to contain the spread of the coronavirus,” IOC president Thomas Bach said.

Without: Fans might find they’ve taken sports small talk for granted

From Back Page

“Bizarre. We shouldn’t have been here today,” said St. John’s TV analyst Brandon Tierney.

“Thank God we’re not another way to put it. We had enough information last night when we went to bed.”

Now picture the person who crawled off the couch just before intermission to make a quick lunch, then returned to find a blank screen. The rest of us will be wearing that same expression soon enough.

The idea of self-quarantine held any allure for sports fans, it was the chance to binge-watch March Madness and Opening Day in baseball. Good luck with that. Televised games are about to become as scarce as toilet paper at Costco.

Nonetheless, at least for the moment, this summer’s Tokyo Olympics are still on.

The simple fact is TV deals provide so much of the money fueling big-time sports that it makes economic sense to put the games on people’s screens whether there are actual fans in the seats or not. How much longer it passes the safety common-sense test remains to be seen. Athletes from leagues and sports everywhere have already tested positive for COVID-19, and that list is only going to get longer.

“We were fortunate in the U.S., at least up until now,” said Marc Ganis, president and founder of Chicago-based Sportscorp, a leading business consulting firm with deep ties to Chinese sports dating back more than a decade.

“But just like the rest of the world, it’s going to be a case-by-case decision for sports leagues here, at least until we know a lot more about the virus,” he added.

“A lot will depend on where they try to play, ‘Hot spots’ and really, any hard-hit area is too risky. And they’ll be hemmed in by government mandates elsewhere on top of that.

“It’s like trying to put together a jigsaw puzzle,” Ganis concluded, “without having all the pieces.”

Just don’t waste much time worrying about the owners or players. They’ll be fine. Most will welcome the opportunity to take a few weeks off. The real harm being done to sports at the moment is happening on the fringes, to folks who eke out a living selling beer in the arenas and parking cars near the stadiums.

And if you’ve got any sympathy left, well, save it for the fans.

Being able to argue about sports with your crazy relatives — as opposed to saying, politics — has kept many a family dinner from spiraling into a food fight. Fathers and sons or daughters who don’t talk all that much during the rest of the year swap text messages during March Madness or the World Series like BF’s. It’s small talk, granted, but also one of these things, as Joni Mitchell put it, “That you don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s gone.”
March Madness
Following a flurry of conferences and individual teams calling off their basketball seasons Thursday, the NCAA followed suit. They scrapped all college winter and spring championships, the highlight of which is the men’s basketball tournament — a three-week extravaganza that stands as the biggest event this side of the Super Bowl on the U.S. sports calendar. The tournament, more commonly known as March Madness, had been held every year since 1939 for men’s teams. There has been an annual women’s tournament since 1982.

NBA
The NBA put its season on indefinite hiatus Wednesday night after Utah Jazz center Rudy Gobert tested positive for COVID-19. The Jazz's Donovan Mitchell also has tested positive for the virus. The league said its suspension would last for at least 30 days — possibly a conservative guess, as teams undertake the task of identifying any player or referee who has had recent contact with the Jazz, then putting them into isolation for the required two weeks.

League commissioner Adam Silver said there is a possibility the season could end up wrapping in the summer, with the NBA Finals possibly played in July instead of mid-June.

Cancellation also is a possibility.

Baseball
Major League Baseball scrapped spring training and postponed the start of its season, currently scheduled for March 26, for at least two weeks.

MLB had not had a mass postponement of openers since 1995, when the season was shortened from 162 games to 144 games because of the Spanish flu pandemic, although the league did not report any positive tests for coronavirus. Bettman said the league is on hiatus.

Auto racing
NASCAR on Friday announced it would postpone its next two races, in Atlanta and Miami, after initially planning to hold the events without spectators.

Horse racing
Races were going on in several states, although without fans in the stands; organizers of the Kentucky Derby were moving forward with plans for the May 2 race.

Football
The NFL, never off the radar even in the depths of the offseason, announced a number of changes and cancellations on its schedule of meetings, fan fest and scouting trips — all related to coronavirus.

Soccer
MLS is shutting down for 30 days and reportedly plans to reschedule postponed matches on the back end of the season.

Tennis
The ATP called off men’s tournaments for the next six weeks; the WTA said its tournament in South Carolina, set for April 6-12, would not be held as scheduled, with decisions about the rest of the season to come in the next week.

Olympics
The IOC on Thursday went ahead with its ceremonial lighting of the Olympic flame. On Friday, though, the Greek Olympic committee suspended the rest of its torch relay because of the “unexpectedly large crowd” that gathered to watch.

Information from wire reports
Going a week without watching sports used to be a dare. It's the new reality.

A quick glance at today's TV sports listings provides all the confirmation you need. It looks like the departure screen at the airport during a blizzard:

Canceled.
Canceled.
Postponed.
Canceled.

Efforts by sports leagues to contain the spread of the virus have become one more way to track the impact of the outbreak around the globe. The closer the event was to a cluster of cases, the more likely it was to be played in front of empty seats, canceled or about to be. After several weeks watching from what seemed like a safe distance, sports fans in the United States are waking up to see those red pins scattered across their maps.

On Thursday, conference basketball tournaments stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific hung a “Sorry, We’re Closed” sign on the door: The NBA, NHL, MLB and MLS did the same. The last likely major college basketball game of any import to be played, a Big East tournament contest between St. John’s and Creighton at Madison Square Garden, was abandoned at halftime Thursday.