Nuclear forces, combat troops prioritized in military testing

By Missy Ryan
The Washington Post

The U.S. military on Wednesday announced plans to roll out expanded testing for COVID-19 beginning with nuclear forces and troops engaged in combat, a process that would be widened to include other service members as more diagnostic materials become available.

Gen. John Hyten, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters that Defense Secretary Mark Esper had recently approved a plan to allocate coronavirus testing.

Officials said the first tier would include troops involved in “critical national capabilities,” such as nuclear forces and at least some Special Operations forces; the second would include troops assigned to combat zones and those involved in the domestic virus response; the third would be troops located overseas on priority missions and those being brought back to the U.S. following deployments; all remaining troops would make up the last tier.

Hyten said testing would be completed this month for “tier one” troops, “focusing our supplies and efforts on these critical forces like our strategic deterrent, making sure that they’re always full-up, always ready to go.”

“To get to the entire force, the 1.4 million active duty and the entire [National] Guard and Reserve, is going to take us into the summer, but I think we’ll get to the deploying, redeploying forces, the forces engaged, all of the tier one forces next month,” Hyten said.

SEE TESTING ON PAGE 5

Job crisis continues

26 million in US have sought unemployment benefits since virus hit

By Christopher Rugaber
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — More than 44 million laid-off workers applied for U.S. unemployment benefits last week as job cuts escalated across an economy that remains all but shut down, the government said Thursday.

Roughly 26 million people have now filed for jobless aid in the five weeks since the coronavirus outbreak began forcing millions of employers to close their doors. About one in six American workers have lost their jobs in the past five weeks, by far the worst string of layoffs on record. Economists have forecast that the unemployment rate for April could go as high as 20%.

The magnitude of job cuts has plunged the economy into the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Some economists say the nation’s output could shrink by twice the amount that it did during the Great Recession, which ended in 2009.

The economic consequences of the virus-related shutdowns have sparked angry protests in several state capitals from crowds insisting that businesses be allowed to reopen.

SEE UNEMPLOYMENT ON PAGE 9

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Banks: New $310B for small business likely used up

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The more than $300 billion set aside to replenish the emergency loan program for small businesses impacted by the coronavirus pandemic is likely already all spoken for, banking industry groups said Wednesday.

The initial $349 billion set aside for the Paycheck Protection Program ran out on April 16, after being available for less than two weeks. The Senate has approved an additional $310 billion for the program, which the House of Representatives is expected to vote in favor of later this week.

But banking groups say the volume of applications already sent to the Small Business Administration makes it likely that much, if not all, the new money will go to those already in the queue. Any new applicants would likely miss out on this funding round.

“The majority if not all of the funding Congress is considering right now is already exhausted,” said Nick Simpson, a spokesman with the Consumer Bankers Association.

There were more than 1.7 million loans approved in the first round of the program. But the law that created the program has been criticized because it made loans available to large, publicly traded companies like restaurant and hotel chains because the loans were based on workforce size at a company’s individual locations. Those loans sapped hundreds of millions of dollars from the available pool.

EXCHANGE RATES

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Hyten: Orders needed to execute Iran tweet

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Pentagon leaders must now develop orders that match President Donald Trump’s tweet instructing the Navy to shoot at harassing Iranian ships, Gen. John Hyten, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Wednesday.

“The president made a clear statement. I think the Americans understand that, I think the American people understand that. Now, we as the military have to apply that clear direction from the commander in chief into lawful orders that we execute,” the Air Force general said during a Pentagon news conference that he conducted with Deputy Defense Secretary David Norquist.

Trump tweeted earlier Wednesday that he had “instructed the United States Navy to shoot down and destroy any and all Iranian gunboats if they harass our ships at sea.”

On April 15, 11 boats identified as Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy vessels “repeatedly conducted dangerous and harassing approaches” of six U.S. ships in the northern Persian Gulf, according to the U.S. Navy. Images posted by the 5th Fleet of the incident show what look like speed boats conducting close passes and tight turns around the U.S. ships. The American sailors in February, February, two U.S. military to the Iranian ships through bridge-to-bridge radio, five short horn blasts and “long-range acoustic noise marker devices,” for an hour before the vessels eventually responded to radio messages and moved away, the Navy said.

“What’s been going on right now is that you can’t let a boat, a fast boat, get into a position where they can threaten your ship,” Hyten said.

Tensions between Iran and the United States have increased during the past few years, resulting in several violent and deadly incidents. Iran was accused by the United States last summer of placing limpet mines on the sides of ships in the Gulf of Oman forcing the Pentagon to send personel to try to deter Iranian activities.

In January, Trump ordered a drone strike to kill Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Iranian Quds Force, following a deadly rocket attack on an Iraqi base in Kirkuk and attempts to storm the U.S. Embassy in Bagdad by Iranian-backed militia. Iran retaliated days later by firing 11 missiles at Iraqi bases housing U.S. troops, injuring more than 100 service members.

In March, the Iranian-backed militia Kataeb Hezbollah was blamed for a rocket attack on a Camp Taj north of Baghdad, killing two American service members and a British Army reservist.

On Wednesday, Hyten said the U.S. military has a right to respond to “hostile intent” and has specific guidance on how to use lethal force.

“I go back to what the president said and said sends a great message to Iran. That’s perfect. We know how to translate that into our rules of engagement,” Hyten said. “We don’t talk about rules of engagement in public, but they’re based on the inherent right of self-defense.”

Norquist said the intent behind Trump’s words was a “very clear message” to Iran about their behavior.

“I think it was very useful thing that he put out and I think it’s an important thing for other people to understand and take very seriously,” he said about Trump’s tweet.

B-1 sortie showcases Air Force’s new model

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

A B-1B Lancer bomber flew on Wednesday from the continental United States to Minot, North Dakota, ending the Air Force’s six-month rotation at Andersen Air Force Base, meeting up with seven Japanese fighter jets near Misawa.

Air Force commanders had announced the bomber to the region: We will continue to respond to “hostile intent” and has specific guidance on how to use lethal force.

“The issue is that in military courts there are no Sixth Amendment rights,” said Matt Osborn, a former Air Force lawyer now practicing in the Washington, D.C. area.

The courts have repeatedly found that the Constitution gives Congress power to “make rules for the government and regulation of the land and naval forces,” including a military justice system dedicated to good order and discipline. As such, some protections for civilian defendants don’t apply to service members, the courts have held.

“If there’s no right to a jury, there’s no right to a unanimous jury,” said Don Christensen, a former Air Force prosecutor.

Military defendants are not judged by juries of their peers but by courts-martial “panels” composed of higher-ranking troops selected by commanders.

Civilian felony trials require 12 jurors. Until last year, the size of courts-martial panels varied and a two-thirds majority was required to convict. Now, eight members compose a general court-martial panel, with six needed to convict.

Panel members discuss the case but vote only once, after the highest-ranking officer decides to do so.

“As with many procedures in the military, the goal is speed and efficiency,” said Michael Lyons, a former Air Force lawyer now practicing in the Washington, D.C. area. “Not requiring all members to agree as to guilt or innocence eliminates the deadlock among judges and mis trials that occur in civilian courts when the jury is not unanimous.”

Military lawyers disagreed whether the Supreme Court decision would lead to a subsequent litigation that could force the military to require unanimous verdicts, or whether it was a matter only Congress could decide.

But some said the rules should change.

“There’s no longer a reason to deny service members the same protections as the civilians they defend,” Christensen said.

“We don’t need King George’s justice system.”

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High court decision on unanimous jury verdicts leaves military out

BY NANCY MONTGOMERY
Stars and Stripes

A Supreme Court opinion this week banning non-unanimous verdicts in criminal cases leaves the military as the sole American jurisdiction that allows them.

The court’s 6-3 decision on Ramos v. Louisiana said that a unanimous jury decision, long required in federal courts under the Sixth Amendment, is a right to a trial by jury, also applied to state courts. Oregon was the last state allowing non-unanimous juries.

But there was no mention in the decision of military courts, which require only a three-quarters majority for a conviction.

Stars and Stripes: page 3 Friday, April 24, 2020
Fake virus news aimed at US and NATO in Europe

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Disinformation aimed at undermining the U.S. and NATO forces has surged in Europe as adversaries seize on the coronavirus pandemic in their attempts to create instability, Lithuania’s Defense Ministry said in a new report.

There have been 807 cases of false or misleading information about the virus, much of it focused on Lithuania, since February, according to an analysis by the Lithuanian military’s strategic communication department.

“Alas, the coronavirus crisis has not only reduced security threats in Europe but created conditions for the threats to grow,” Defense Minister Raimundas Karoblis said in a statement Wednesday.

The most recent incident occurred Tuesday when Karoblis received a fake email purportedly from NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg stating that allies were pulling out of Lithuania, where NATO forces have been deployed for the last several years as a deterrent to potential Russian aggression.

Similar emails were sent to Lithuanian media and NATO headquarters in Brussels, the Lithuanian Defense Ministry said.

“It is one in a series of attempts to turn the pandemic crisis into a security crisis,” Karoblis said in the statement. “Fake news like this piece are aimed at sowing distrust in our Alliance partners and NATO unity.”

About two-thirds of the disinformation attacks, allied officials have been increasingly concerned about Moscow’s attempts to create confusion regarding the role of NATO and U.S. forces in Europe.

Last week, NATO’s supreme allied commander in Europe, Gen. Tod Wolters, said during a teleconference with reporters that it’s imperative for allies to call out disinformation.

“Number one, recognize when you have malign influencers and they’re telling falsehoods and point those out and correct that to 100%,” Wolters said. “And number two, taking the time to talk about your operations, your activities, your investments, what you’re doing from a health perspective to positively influence the good outcome of all your forces.”

The selective reenlistment bonus update allows all sailors to reenlist a full year before the end of their active-service obligation to receive the bonus instead of waiting to be within 270 days of the end of their hitch.

“By expanding the eligibility window, more sailors are now eligible to reenlist at any given time,” Cmdr. Dave Hecht, a spokesman for the chief of naval personnel, said in a statement.

Aviano offers dozens of entries in bid to win $150K innovation contest

BY NORMAN LLAMAS
Stars and Stripes

AVIANO AIR BASE, Italy — It still takes a lot of time and tape to keep an F-16 from having its electronics scrambled while running it through a wash, but less than it used to after a simple innovation that 31st Fighter Wing airmen came up within the hangar bay.

The 3D-printed reusable wash covers they developed to protect sensitive parts are among 38 Aviano innovations or improvements that would have earned $2.8 million, or about 75% more than a similar improvement process saved last year, said Brad Hebing, the 31st Fighter Wing’s process manager.

The changes also saved a lot of time, particularly for the airmen washing the fighter jets. Previously, every sensitive component had to be individually taped.

“This process placed a heavy demand on crew chief manpower along with generating a significant waste of barrier material,” said Master Sgt. Katherine S. Garneau, of the 31st Aircraft Maintenance Squadron.

The reusable covers reduced taping time from eight hours to three hours, Garneau said.

In other cases, research and smart shopping helped. The 31st Security Forces Squadron needed new vehicle barriers and rejected several options that would have meant more time spent by airmen standing at the gates.

The new barriers they’ve since acquired “were easy to set up, take down and eliminated having to station personnel at each entry control point,” said Master Sgt. Brett Rosebrook, the installation security noncommissioned officer in charge.

Aviano also replaced its obsolete parachute simulator with a more realistic model, which aids airmen learning how to survive and evade an enemy after ejecting from an aircraft. The simulator saves about 300 hours per year due to more efficient training, said Tsgt. Michael Rutland, of the 31st Operations Support Squadron.

The Innovation Madness winner will be announced later this year after participants compete in three rounds. The overall winner takes $150,000, while second place earns $50,000; third place gets $25,000 and fourth place wins $10,000. Other cash prizes will be awarded throughout the competition.

More sailors eligible for reenlistment bonus, performance pay

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON—About 10,000 more sailors are now eligible for a reenlistment bonus as part of the Navy’s effort to retain needed personnel.

The selective reenlistment bonus update allows all sailors to reenlist a full year before the end of their active-service obligation to receive the bonus instead of waiting to be within 270 days of the end of their hitch.

“By expanding the eligibility window, more sailors are now eligible to reenlist at any given time,” Cmdr. Dave Hecht, a spokesman for the chief of naval personnel, said in a statement.

Sailors can receive up to a $100,000 reenlistment bonus, with the amount calculated based on job, time in service, and the Navy’s retention needs.

The Navy is updating its 2020 selective reenlistment bonus program as part of its regular adjustments that are based on which sailors are leaving the service. Some jobs might need more financial incentives right now to keep those sailors, whereas other jobs are doing better with retention.

The Navy has also included an additional 27 “skillets” to the bonus eligibility list, meaning sailors with specific time in service and with certain qualifications are now able to apply.
KABUL, Afghanistan — The U.S.-led coalition in Afghanistan provided medicine and protective equipment to Afghan troops and police, including 45,000 face masks, officials said this week.

Afghan security forces, who are grappling with both the coronavirus pandemic and persistent Taliban violence, were shown opening boxes of medical supplies in photos that NATO’s Resolute Support posted on social media.

There are more than 1,092 confirmed coronavirus cases and 36 deaths in the country, a World Health Organization report said Wednesday, but experts believe that the low levels of testing are obscuring a much higher rate of infection.

Though the Taliban had pledged to aid efforts to slow the virus’s spread by offering safe passage to health workers and aid organizations, and suspending fighting in areas with confirmed infections, the militants continue to conduct attacks. Up to 30 security forces members were killed in Taliban attacks in just two days this week, military and police officials confirmed Thursday.

U.S. officials have continued to call for calm since signing a Feb. 29 deal meant to usher in an Afghan-led peace process after more than 18 years of war.

Resolute Support commander Gen. Scott Miller, and Zalmay Khalilzad, the Trump administration diplomat leading negotiations, have stressed the need for quarantine diplomat leading negotiations, have stressed the need for more than 18 years of war.

Afghan police receive medical supplies provided by U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan to help with efforts to combat the coronavirus pandemic in Panjshir and Parwan provinces.

“(Preventing the virus’s spread) is difficult under even normal circumstances, but almost impossible if we have violence.”

Gen. Scott Miller
NATO Resolute Support commander

THE PENTAGON PLANS TO EXPAND PREVENTIVE TESTING ACROSS THE FORCE IN AN ATTEMPT TO AVOID DISRUPTION OF ITS CORE SECURITY MISSION.

The Pentagon has issued department-wide guidelines on social distancing, the use of masks, increased cleaning and other precautions. Close to a million employees are teleworking.

Norquist seemed to suggest that the department would initially have a much lower target of about 50,000 per week.

The Pentagon has issued department-wide guidelines on social distancing, the use of masks, increased cleaning and other precautions. Close to a million employees are teleworking.

Norquist said that the department would take several steps for troops who cannot maintain physical distance, including restricting physical distance, including restricting travel and movement of personnel in close quarters on ships. They include quarantines for 14 to 21 days.
Virus Outbreak

Air Force preparing for long-term ‘new abnormal’

By Cory Dickstein
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Air Force’s top general said that he believes the coronavirus will impart a long-term “new abnormal” on the U.S. military, as the outbreak is unlikely to subside totally until a vaccine is widely available.

Gen. David Goldfein told reporters Wednesday that he has ordered an Air Force-wide “reset” for June 1, when he wants the service to find ways to increase operations tempo slowed by the pandemic. The Air Force chief of staff said that he would like to see plans to increase the number of recruits coming into the service by that deadline and procedures to safely ramp up some of the Air Force operations that have been curtailed in an effort to slow the spread of the virus.

“All the projections are no vac- cine for upwards of a year,” Goldfein said during the video news briefing. “So that means we’ve got to refine our ability to survive and operate, and do the missions our nation requires. And we’ve got to bring back those missions we have slowed down so that we can get back to some kind of sense of normalcy in an abnormal world.”

As an example, Goldfein said that he expected the Air Force’s air mobility mission, which is pri- marily responsible for shuttling troops and equipment around the world, to see an increase in opera- tions in the coming months.

While some such flights have continued amid the pandemic and the Pentagon’s stop-move- ment order, as they were deemed essential to combat, logistics and other missions, Goldfein noted that he’ll need more crews flying.

In addition to military personnel and airmen, Goldfein said that he has transported virus testing material around the world.

The stop-movement orders, which restrict most Defense De- partment personnel from any travel, including most changes of station and deployments, were extended this week through June 30.

So far, no airmen on crews within the service’s Air Mobil- ity Command have tested positive for the coronavirus, Goldfein said. He attributed that to drastic measures the service has taken to shield crew from potential expo- sure as they travel across the world.

“We keep them in a bubble,” he said. “They go to their rooms after landing on a mission. Whatever needs to get to them is delivered, and we keep them that way so that they can keep fly- ing all the way through coming home.”

The service has taken a similar approach with its nuclear forces, which have also not seen a con- firmed case of the virus among the airmen who fly nuclear-capapa- ble bombers or staff the service’s intercontinental ballistic missiles platforms, Goldfein said. In some cases, service members in the nuclear force are spending two weeks or more in the field oper- ating nuclear systems to ensure that they are not exposed to the disease.

“We’ve changed the battle rhythm to keep them isolated,” the general said. “That’s a no- fail mission. We always have to get it done and figure out how to operate.”

In total, the Air Force has re- ported 337 cases of the corona- virus among its active-duty and Reserve forces. Military-wide, 3,725 troops have tested posi- tive for the virus, according to the latest Pentagon data released Thursday.

Another aim of Goldfein’s reset is to find ways to increase the number of recruits participating in basic training. The Air Force has downsized its incoming classes of recruits from about 700 per week to about 460 as it has imple- mented social distancing and other guidelines issued by federal health officials in an attempt to curb the virus.

Goldfein said Wednesday that five recruits had tested positive of the about 6,000 who have entered Air Force initial entrance train- ing since the outbreak began in the United States. In addition to shipping smaller recruit classes to Joint Base San Antonio-Lack- land Air Force Base in Texas, the Air Force opened a temporary, second basic training site at Kee- sler Air Force Base in Mississippi last month. A single class of 60 recruits is collecting there, and the service will soon decide whether additional recruits are possible.

In the coming weeks, Goldfein hopes to see his training leaders find ways to increase the size of basic training classes, as long as they can do so while adhering to health officials’ safety recom- mendations. That includes the building of a tent city at Lackland to allow recruits to spread out further during training.

“One of all the protocols that we’re putting in place to see if we can get back up from 50%,” the general said. “We’re probably not going to be able to get to 100% until the protocols change, but if we can get from 50 to 60, 70, 75%, that is certainly be helpful.”

The smaller number of new airmen coming into the service has not yet created major holes in Air Force units, but Goldfein said that he is worried it could if he cannot find a way to boost basic throughput.

He also said, however, that more airmen are choosing to re- main in the Air Force amid the pandemic. That is especially true among pilots and aircraft main- tainers, who are often recruited from the Air Force by commer- cial airliners.

With those companies flying significantly less during the pan- demic, airmen are choosing to remain in their stable jobs.

“You’re not surprised with the economy being in a challeng- ing state,” Goldfein said. “Commercial aviation is not flying quite as much. So we’re actually seeing our retention numbers go up, which somewhat mitigates for the lack of throughput.”

Staffers in the Pentagon budget. Other planes could also be involved, the official said, suggesting that bombers fly- ing over their home states as one possibility.

Congressional staffs were briefed about the plan this week, an effort in part to manage any polit- ical backlash, another de- fense official said. Offices of Democratic and Republican senators on the Armed Services Committee had been notified, ac- cording to Hill officials.

Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla., whose state is home to the Blue Angels, acknowledged Wednesday that he is aware of the plan.

“I’m thrilled to see our military honoring the front-line health care workers who have been fighting every day against this si- lent killer,” he said. “They are all heroes deserving of our gratitude and honor.”

The memo said that the Blue Angels and the Thunderbirds will fly jointly over Washington, Bal- timore, New York, Newark, Tren- ton, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Dallas, Houston and Austin. It was not clear whether that list could change, but defense officials said that it is not comprehensive.

By Dan Lamotte
The Washington Post

The Pentagon is planning a multicity tour of the U.S. mili- tary’s top demonstration teams to “champion national unity” amid the coronavirus pan- demic, according to senior U.S. officials and a memo obtained by The Washington Post.

The Blue Angels and the Thunder- birds, along with the Thunderbirds’ squadrons for the Navy and Air Force, will fly over some cities together and others separately, according to interviews on Tuesday and memo obtained by The Washington Post.

The Blue Angels and the Thunder- birds, in their blue F-16 Fighting Falcons over Phoenix, San Diego, Los Angeles, Detroit, Chicago, Indianapolis, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Dallas, Houston and Austin.

Elite flight teams to thank health care workers with flyovers

By Dan Lamotte
The Washington Post

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WIESBADEN, Germany — Volunteers in Wiesbaden have made more than 500 face masks that they’ve been giving away since one of them saw commissary workers using scarves and bags as protective coverings against the coronavirus.

“I just thought that we could do better,” said Angelin Nicholson, one of the volunteers from the Wiesbaden Arts and Crafts Center, located on Clay Kaserne, who have been sewing face masks since April 1. “Now, whenever I go to the commissary, I hand out 10 or 20 masks to whoever needs one.”

Most of the masks that the volunteers are making go to base workers who come into close contact with others as part of their jobs, such as those who work in Child Youth Services and military lodging. Others are donated to the Red Cross, said Erik Kraemer, the manager of the Arts and Crafts Center.

The center has also filled a paid order for 200 face masks for the 522nd Military Intelligence Battalion, and a smaller order for a business on base, although those masks were not made by volunteers.

The masks allow the Wiesbaden military community to meet Defense Department guidance that calls on people on military property to wear “cloth face coverings when they cannot maintain six feet of social distance in public areas or work centers.”

Wearing masks like the ones being made from household materials by the Wiesbaden volunteers can help by preventing asymptomatic people from spreading the coronavirus when they cough or sneeze, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said.

The masks Nicholson and other volunteers are sewing and giving away to base workers are made from cotton, with a slot where filters — made from a fabric similar to dryer sheets — can be inserted. The filters can be removed and replaced, allowing the masks to be washed and reused.

With no let up in demand for masks, the volunteers are facing a supply crunch for the raw materials needed to make them, Kraemer said.

“What we need is tightly woven, 100% cotton fabric and nonwoven interweaving,” the fabric from which the filters are made, he said. “Some of the volunteers are using their own supplies, but we are very quickly running out of supplies to make the masks.”

To volunteer Nicole Sewell, having to delve into her own material to make masks is not an issue.

“I knew that I had the means and the know-how to help, so it became very important to me to make masks for the local community,” she said.

All of Germany’s states in recent days have passed legislation that makes wearing masks while shopping or taking public transportation mandatory. In Hesse, where Wiesbaden is located, the law will take effect Monday.

Stars and Stripes reporter Marcus Kloeckner contributed to this report.

dge.david@stripes.com

Angelin Nicholson, a volunteer at the Wiesbaden Arts and Crafts Center at Clay Kaserne in Germany, sews a face mask in her home Tuesday.

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26 ships have infected sailors

By Caitlin M. Kenney
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON—Sailors on 26 Navy ships have the coronavirus now and 14 other ships have had confirmed cases of illness, though crew members have recovered, a Navy official said Wednesday.

All the ships are in port and none of the 90 ships at sea have cases of the virus, according to the official who spoke on the condition of anonymity. The Navy has 297 warships.

The Navy official would not say which ships had cases of the virus or how many sailors were infected, only that it was small number.

The Navy has been the hardest hit of the military services by the coronavirus with 997 cases now.

In total, 1,298 sailors have been infected by the virus.

Most of the Navy’s cases are among the crew of the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, which docked in Guam on March 27 due to an outbreak among its sailors, which number about 4,800. As of Wednesday, 777 sail- ors have tested positive, of which 63 have recovered. Six Roosevelt sailors are hospitalized now at a Navy hospital in Guam. One Roosevelt sailor, Chief Petty Offi- cer Charles Robert Thacker Jr., 41, died April 13 from the virus.

“A week or two from now, it’s possible we’ll have more sailors infected, but it’s not something we can predict,” said Capt. Brett Crozier, the ship’s skipper, in an internal memo he posted on the ship’s Facebook page Wednesday evening.

The Navy’s response to the virus is drawing criticism from Modly’s resignation when audio- clips of him calling sailors “cowards” were released.

Modly’s order to move the aircraft carrier ashore in Guam last week was not well-received by the ship’s crew and other military officials.

“People should minimize their movements and show concern for their own health as well as those of their loved ones,” said Capt. James H. Kirk, the ship’s carrier strike force commander.

“Alcohol sales across the retail supply chain, shipbuilding and small space launch,” Lord said.

The Pentagon also wants ad- ditional defense data from Congress to help companies pay salaries and keep their specialized workforces intact even where the pandemic has forced production lines to shut down and other disruptions. Lord did not specify how much.

By and large, the defense sec- tor has kept working during the COVID-19 crisis, thanks in large part to its workforce being de- served and vetted by Homeland Security Department.

The cheers and applause from the hotel balconies gave Huerta goosebumps, he said.

“Okay, this is a different type of deployment,” he said.

Earlier this month, videos showing hundreds of crew mem- bers cheering and applauding the ship’s skipper, Capt. Brett E. Croz- er, captured after the Navy fired him over the leak of a memo, in which he urged more rapid evacuation of personnel.

Days later, acting Navy Secre- tary Thomas Modly traveled to Guam where he briefly visited the ship and criticized Crozier in remarks to the crew, leading to Modly’s resignation when audio of the address also leaked.

As of Thursday, some 4,200 of the ship’s crew members had been moved ashore, and 840 had tested positive for the disease, with 100% of the crew having been tested and only “a small number of results still pending.”

Of the infected sailors, 88 had re- covered and one, Chief Petty Offi- cer Charles Robert Thacker Jr., 41, has died.

Six were still being treated at Naval Hospital Guam, though none were in intensive care, the Navy said.

The ship has undergone thor-ough cleaning, but sailors may not be getting out of isolation at the end of the prescribed 14 days, Politco reported Tuesday, citing an internal memo in which Navy officials indicated that the virus may remain active in asympto- matic individuals longer than previously thought.

The memo called a halt to “out- testing” for those in quarantine and holding their release until further evaluation could be com- pleted, Politico reported.

A second video posted on the Task Force 75 Facebook page this week showed service members writing and reading whiteboard messages to the crew to remain “TR strong” and “hold fast.”

For Huerta, the show of grati- tude from the isolated crew “has been probably the most gratify- ing thing I’ve done in the Marine Corps.”

AAFES: Alcohol sales at exchange stores surged by 50% in March

By Seth Robson
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — With many clubs and restaur- ants on military bases closed and civilian establishments off limits thanks to the coronavirus, retail alcohol sales on U.S. bases worldwide soared by 50% the third week of March, an exchange spokesman said.

“Alcohol sales across the retail industry have understandably seen increases as bars and res- taurants have closed and demand has shifted to at-home consump- tion,” Army and Air Force Ex- change Service spokesman Chris Ward said in an email Sunday.

According to Nielsen data, U.S. alco- holic beverage sales in retail formats jumped 55% in the third week of March compared to the same time a year ago, Ward said.

“AAFES worldwide alcohol sales during this same timeframe were slightly below with the broader industry trend, reflecting an increase of 50% vs. prior year,” he said.

During the first half of April, however, AAFES worldwide alco- hol sales are only up 10% on the same period last year, Ward said.

The Navy Exchange Service Command did not respond to emailed questions about sales at its stores.

A mask-wearing Air Force Staff Sgt. Sean McDonald, 28, of Seattle, pulled a six-pack of lager from a convenience store fridge- erator Wednesday evening at Yo- kota, home to U.S. Forces Japan in western Tokyo.

“It’s my daughter’s birthday and we’re going to celebrate,” he said but added that he doesn’t think he’s drinking more than usual despite restrictions in place at Yokota since March 26.

“I’m a competitive bodybuild- er,” McDonald said. “We don’t go out drinking very frequently.”

To curb the spread of the coro- navirus, 374th Airlift Wing com- mander Col. Otis Jones requires those living and working on Yoko- ta to restrict their movements to the base and its immediate vicin- ity. Of-base residents are limited to a 1-mile radius to and from Yokota or essential services in their neigh- borhoods. No one affiliated with the base may patronize bars and restaurants other than take-out and drive-thru restaurants.

Another customer buying alco- hol at the base convenience store, Marie Wolf, 40 of Dayton, Ohio, stocked up on a couple of bottles of pinot grigio and a carton of beer but said she’s not drinking more than usual.

“I’ve got three kids at home,” she said.

The World Health Organization warned in a statement April 14 that alcohol use, responsible for 3 million deaths a year worldwide, compromises the body’s immune system.

“People should minimize their alcohol consumption at any time, and particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic,” the orga- nization said in its statement, re- ferreing to the disease caused by the coronavirus.

Ward said exchange stores also saw a spike in cigarette carton sales when shoppers were uncertain whether stores would remain open.

“Once this initial increased demand subsided, cigarette sales quickly returned to historic norms,” he said.

“Demand for tobacco products at Exchange Fa- cilities has declined significantly as unit sales have decreased 30% year-to-date as compared to prior year.”

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This screen shot from a video shows a message from a USS Theodore Roosevelt sailor to the Marines on Guam, showing appreciation for the support the sailors have received.

Roosevelt sailors show gratitude for Marines aiding them on Guam

By Chad Garland
Stars and Stripes

USS Theodore Roosevelt sail- ors on Guam went to their bal- conies and cheered the Marines supporting them at civilian hotels, where they are in 14-day med- ical isolation after an outbreak of the coronavirus on the aircraft carrier.

The sailors have also expressed their gratitude in letters and notes for the Marines, said Capt. Vi- cente Huerta of the 3rd Law En- forcement Battalion, III Marine Expeditionary Force Informa- tion Group, in a video posted on the Commander Navy Task Force 75 Facebook page.

“My Marines just started mak- ing sure that all of the sailors here receive everything that they need,” Huerta said. “As the sail- ors started seeing that, we just started getting flooded with a bunch of letters and them show- ing their appreciation.”

The cheers and applause from the hotel balconies gave Huerta goosebumps, he said.

“Okay, this is a different type of deployment,” he said.

Earlier this month, videos showing hundreds of crew mem- bers cheering and applauding the ship’s skipper, Capt. Brett E. Croz- er, captured after the Navy fired him over the leak of a memo, in which he urged more rapid evacuation of personnel.

For Huerta, the show of grati- tude from the isolated crew “has been probably the most gratify- ing thing I’ve done in the Marine Corps.”

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Legislators adding to lockdown backlash

By Griff Witte
The Washington Post

With hundreds arrayed before him, standing shoulder to shoulder, the retired Army colonel vented his fury from the steps of Pennsylvania’s capitol building. The governor’s orders to shut down businesses in the face of a pandemic, he railed to a crowd of protesters this week, amounted to “tyranny.” He had battled overseas to defend freedom. Now, with the governor telling healthy people like him to stay home — “What the heck is going on here? I’m not sick!” — the fight had come to America’s shores.

“It’s time to rise up!” he exhorted as the crowd roared.

Then Doug Mastriano walked inside the soaring, green-domed home of the Pennsyl­vania legislature and began his day job: as a Republican state senator.

With a backlash against coronavirus restrictions generating demonstrations at state capitol buildings nationwide, organ­izers have framed the protests as organic and grassroots.

The push among legislators is adding to the pressure on governors who have re­sisted Trump’s wish to see states open up again as soon as May. Some Democratic leaders have eagerly announced an easing of restric­tions, most have not, citing guidance from medical experts that a premature opening could cost many lives.

But governors who stay the course with closures are increasingly facing demands from state lawmakers that they pivot faster.

In Ohio, business groups are aggressively lobbying the state legislature to force Repub­lican-dominated Gov. Mike DeWine to open up the economy. Wisconsin’s Repub­lican-dominated legislature on Tuesday went so far as to sue health officials advis­ing Democratic Gov. Tony Evers to block an extension of his stay-at-home order.

And in Pennsylvania, the Republican majority has pushed a bill to emasculate the governor’s authority to make any health-related changes.

The Democratic governor, Tom Wolf, vetoed that legislation last week, reiterating the opinion of medical experts who insist the state is not yet ready to safely relax restrictions. But Republicans have vowed to try again — and to peel off enough Democratic sup­port to override any veto.

With unemployment and frustration both rising fast, that point may come, said Chris­topher Borick, director of the Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion.

“When it comes really depends on the nature of the virus, and on the governor’s ability to make his case that his actions are called for,” Borick said.

The showdown in Pennsylvania — per­haps the nation’s ultimate swing state — reflects the clash of visions playing out across the country as state governments weigh how and when to allow their popula­tions to resume some semblance of nor­mal life. As in most states, it’s largely been absent in Pennsylvania, where schools, businesses deemed nonessential and gather­ings of any size have all been shut down or banned.

Although backing for stay-at-home measures has been relatively robust — in Pennsylvania, and nationwide — there is a stark political divide, with Republicans significantly less likely to be supportive.

A Kaiser Family Foundation poll re­leased Thursday found that 80% of respon­dents said strict shelter-in-place measures are worth it to protect people and limit the spread of the coronavirus, including 61% of Republicans asked. A Yahoo News/YoutGov­ernational poll released Sunday found that 60% of respondents opposed protesters calling to immediately end stay-at-home and social distancing measures vs. 22% who supported them.

In Pennsylvania, attitudes about wheth­er to stay closed or open have been driven both by partisanship and geography.

Most of the state’s approximately 36,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases have been con­centrated in Pennsylvania’s largest city, Philadelphia, and the surrounding sub­urbs — almost all Democratic strongholds.

In more rural central and western parts of the state, where Republicans dominate, cases have been relatively few — and the backlash against stay-at-home orders has been building.

When protesters gathered at the state capitol building Monday in Harrisburg, the parade of state legislators who spoke out against the governor’s restrictions re­flected that divide.

The protest was called by several groups that did not exist only weeks ago. One of them, Pennsylvanians Against Excessive Quarantine, was created by a trio of broth­ers — Ben, Christopher and Aaron Dorr — who are long-time gun-rights activists. Links from Facebook pages promoting the rally redirected users to a Dorr-run group, the Pennsylvania Firearms Association.

Many governors have taken action with a hatchet rather than a scalpel, he said. “Big-box stores are able to stay open while mom-and-pop businesses are left out in the cold.

Rather than judge whether businesses can remain open based on what’s essen­tial or nonessential, Bernstein said, the standard should be whether the business can be run safely. And individuals, he said, should be given more authority to make that determination — a theme repeated by many who spoke Monday.

“We don’t need our lives microman­aged,” Russ Diamond, a fellow Repub­lican state representative, told the crowd. “I trust you!”

Public health experts, however, said the rally was not necessarily confidence-in­spiring.

Rather than judge whether businesses — and even from other states — into close contact with one another for a prolonged period. Many were not wearing masks or gloves.

“That,” she said, “is how covid-19 spreads.”

Unemployment: April jobs report expected to show staggering losses

FROM FRONT PAGE

Thursday’s report, showing that the pace of layoffs remains immense, could height­en demands for re-openings.

Some governors have been easing re­strictions despite warnings from health authorities that it may be too soon to do so without causing new infections. In Geor­gia, for instance, a pair of bills to allow al­leys to reopen Friday. Texas has reopened its state parks.

Yet many scattered re-openings won’t lead to much rehiring, especially if Amer­i­cans are too wary to leave their homes. Most people say they favor stay-at-home orders, according to a survey by The As­sociated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs, and believe it won’t be safe to lift social distancing guidelines anytime soon. And there are likely more layoffs to come from many small businesses that have tried but failed to receive loans from a fed­eral aid program.

The number of people who are receiving unemployment benefits has reached a re­cord 16 million, surpassing a previous high of 12 million set in 2010, just after the 2008-09 recession ended. This figure reflects people who have managed to navigate the online or telephone application systems in their states, have been approved for ben­efits and are actually receiving checks.

In some states, many laid-off workers have run into obstacles in trying to file ap­plications for benefits. Among them are thousands of freelancers, contractors, gig workers and self-employed people — a cat­egory of workers who are now eligible for unemployment benefits for the first time.

“This has been a really devastating shock for a lot of families and small businesses,” said Aaron Sojourner, a labor economist at the University of Minnesota. “It is beyond their control and no fault of their own.”

In Florida, applications for unemploy­ment benefits nearly tripled last week to 505,000, the second-highest total behind much-larger California’s 534,000. Florida has had trouble processing many of its applications.

Its figure suggests that the state is final­ly clearing a backlog of filings from jobless workers.

In Michigan, 17% of the state’s work­force is now receiving unemployment aid, the largest proportion in the country. It is followed by Rhode Island at 15%, Nevada at 13.7% and Georgia at 13.6%.

Just about every major industry has ab­sorbed sudden and severe layoffs. Econo­mists at the Federal Reserve estimate that hotels and restaurants have shed the most jobs — 4 million since Feb. 15. That is nearly one-third of all the employees in that industry.

Construction has shed more than 9% of its jobs. So has a category that includes retail, shipping and utilities, the Fed esti­mated. A category that is made up of data processing and online publishing has cut 47%.

When the government issues the April jobs report on May 8, economists expect it to show breathtaking losses. Economists at JP Morgan are predicting a loss of 25 mil­lion jobs. That would be nearly triple the total lost during the entire Great Recession period.

A $2-trillion-plus federal relief package that was signed into law last month made millions of gig workers, contractors and self-employed people newly eligible for un­employment aid.

But most states have yet to approve unemployment applications from those workers because they’re still trying to ex­tend their systems to do so. As a result, many people who have lost jobs or income aren’t being counted as laid-off because their applications for unemployment aid haven’t been processed.
VIRUS OUTBREAK

Strict warnings for Ramadan as shutdowns ease

Associated Press

BANGKOK — The world inched toward a new phase in the coronavirus crisis on Thursday, as some countries like Vietnam and New Zealand with few new cases moved toward ending their pandemic shutdowns while others like Singapore and Japan were doubling down on measures to prevent a surge in infections.

Like the U.S., many countries are moving from crisis mode to figuring out how to live with the virus by modifying pre-pandemic routines with precautions, more testing and containment of flare-ups, mindful of the potential for future waves of the virus.

Authorities in the capital of Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation, extended to May 22 strict disease-fighting restrictions with the approach of the month-long Ramadan fasting season, which begins with the new moon this week.

With traditional, communal meals for the poor, large fast-breaking dinners with family and friends and cultural events after sunset canceled, the world's 1.8 billion Muslims find themselves cut off from much of what makes the month special as authorities fight the pandemic.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged Muslims to “focus on our common enemy — the virus,” and repeated an earlier appeal for an immediate cease-fire for all conflicts. In a separate message, he urged countries to provide equitable help to all, saying the pandemic was “a human crisis that is fast becoming a human rights crisis.”

Looking to control the crisis as a pretext for repressive measures, Guterres said, “The message is clear: People and their rights must be front and center,” he said. The United Nations has warned that tens of millions of people risk starvation as the coronavirus pandemic, a plague of locusts in Africa and other disruptions prevent food from reaching the world's most vulnerable populations in places like Yemen and South Sudan.

A report released Wednesday estimated that at least 135 million people are at acute risk of starvation due to conflicts and other factors. The report was compiled before shutdowns, border closures and freezes on transport activities began disrupting food supplies.

In response, the EU pledged $22 billion for helping bridge such disruptions to provide help to vulnerable communities in Africa, the Balkans, the Middle East, parts of Asia and Latin America.

While some parts of the world are just beginning to grapple with the pandemic, in China authorities reported the total cost and just 10 new cases on Thursday. The number of people hospitalized dropped to 959, with 63 considered serious cases.

As new cases drop close to zero, China has re-opened many businesses. Middle and high school seniors preparing for exams are returning to classes. But a ban on foreign arrivals and strict sanitary measures remain in place to prevent an influx of new cases from abroad or fresh infections among those thought to have recovered or who had no symptoms but could still be spreading the virus.

Neighboring Vietnam, which moved quickly to close its borders and quarantine coronavirus cases, has reported no new cases in the past three days and is preparing to lift some restrictions.

New Zealand, which announced just three new cases of the coronavirus on Thursday, remained on strict lockdown, with 1,451 confirmed cases and 16 deaths, but was preparing to ease limits next month.

But the virus continues to pop up unexpectedly.

Singapore has been reporting hundreds of new cases each day, many traced to crowded migrant worker dormitories.

Japanese officials said Thursday that 14 more crew members on an Italian-operated cruise ship docked in southern Japan tested positive for the coronavirus, raising the outbreak on board to 48.

The true numbers are believed to be far higher, and most people infected suffer from only mild or moderate symptoms and survive.

But the crushing death toll of the pandemic has left many people understandably cautious and it will likely take weeks, even months, for people to regain confidence and resume normal activities. Future waves of outbreaks could reverse any gains in the interim, Dr. Robert Blended, a Harvard professor of health policy and political analysis said.

As President Donald Trump shifts to what White House officials call a new chapter in the response, officials face a challenge in reassuring the public while ensuring enough precautions are taken as communities emerge from shutdowns to prevent fresh onslaughts of cases.

House expected to send 4th bipartisan aid bill to Trump

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House is reassembling to send President Donald Trump a fourth bipartisan bill to help businesses crippled by the coronavirus, an almost $500 billion measure that many lawmakers are already looking beyond.

Anchoring the latest bill is a request by the Trump administration to replenish a fund to help small- and medium-sized businesses with payroll, rent and other expenses.

Supporters are already warning that more money will be needed almost immediately for the business-backed Paycheck Protection Program. Battle lines are forming over the next measure amid growing demands to boost state and local governments, the Postal Service and first responders.

Thursday’s vote in the House would bring the total cost of the four bipartisan bills to respond to various impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic to about $2.5 trillion, according to the Congressional Budget Office, Washington’s impartial scorekeeper.

The bill started two weeks ago as a simple Trump-sought $250 billion replenishment of the oversubscribed payroll subsidy program and grew from there. The payroll program provides forgivable loans to businesses that can continue paying workers while forced to stay closed for social distancing and stay-at-home orders.

It also contains $100 billion demanded by Democrats for hospitals and a nationwide testing program, along with a $60 billion set-aside for small banks and an alternative network of community development banks that focus on development in urban neighborhoods and rural areas ignored by many lenders. There’s also $60 billion for small-business loans and grants delivered through the Small Business Administration’s existing disaster aid program.

Republicans say the delays likely forced some businesses waiting for the payroll subsidies to close. But they are nonetheless sure to back the measure by a wide margin.

The legislation swept through the Senate on Tuesday by voice vote barely hours after being first circulated.

The House, however, will conduct a roll-call vote in which lawmakers will vote in turns taken under social distancing rules.
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As people stay home, Earth gets cleaner

BY SETH BORENSTEIN

An unplanned grand experiment is changing Earth. As people across the globe stay home to stop the spread of the coronavirus, the air has cleaned up, albeit temporarily. Smog stopped choking New Delhi, one of the most polluted cities in the world, and India’s getting views of sights not visible in decades. Nitrogen dioxide pollution in the northeastern United States is down 30%. Rome air pollution levels from mid-March to mid-April were down 49% from a year ago. Stars seem more visible at night. People are also noticing animals in places and at times they don’t usually. Coyotes have marauded along downtown Chicago’s Michigan Avenue and near San Francisco’s Golden Gate Bridge. A puma roamed the streets of Santiago, Chile. Goats took over a town in Wales. In India, daring wildlife has already become bolder, with hungry cows rustling through homes and opening refrigerators to look for food.

“it is giving us this quite extraordinary insight into just how much of a mess we are making of our beautiful planet,” says conservation scientist Stuart Pimm of Duke University. “This is giving us an opportunity to magically see how much better it can be.”

Chris Field, director of the Stanford Woods Institute for the Environment, assembled scientists to assess the ecological changes happening with so much of humanity housebound. Scientists, stuck at home like the rest of us, have said that they are eager to get cleaner air and fewer doses of nitrogen dioxide, smog, and tiny particles. These types of pollution kill up to 7 million people a year worldwide, according to the country’s top epidemiologist. Andes Tegnell, the architect behind Sweden’s relatively relaxed response to COVID-19, told local media that the latest figures on infection rates and fatalities indicate the situation is starting to stabilize. “We’re on a sort of plateau,” Tegnell told Swedish News agency TT.

Sweden has left its schools, gyms, cafes, bars and restaurants open throughout the spread of the pandemic. Instead, the government has urged citizens to act responsibly and follow social distancing guidelines.

The spread of COVID-19 across the globe is triggering different responses across national and even state borders, as authorities struggle to contain an outbreak about which much remains unknown.

It’s unclear which strategy will ultimately prove most effective, and every country in Sweden worries that it’s too early to draw conclusions. But given the huge economic damage caused by strict lockdowns, the Swedish approach has drawn considerable interest around the world.

Part of that approach relies on having access to one of the world’s best-functioning health care systems. At no stage did Sweden see a real shortage of medical equipment or hospital capacity, and tents set up as emergency care facilities around the country have mostly remained empty.

As of Sunday, Sweden had reported 1,549 deaths tied to COVID-19, an increase of 29 from Saturday. That’s considerably more than in the rest of Scandinavia, but much less than in Italy, Spain and the U.K., both in absolute and relative terms.

Tegnell isn’t the only high-level Swedish official to claim that the country may be over the worst.

This combination of Monday, October 28, 2019, top, and Monday, April 20, 2020, photos shows India Gate in New Delhi.

BY NICLAS ROLANDER

Sweden’s COVID-19 strategy may ultimately result in a smaller — albeit historically deep — economic contraction than the rest of Europe is now facing, according to HSBC Global Research economist James Pomeroy.

Pomeroy pointed to some Swedish characteristics that may be helping the country deal with the current crisis. More than half of Swedish households are single-person, making social distancing easier to carry out. More people work from home than anywhere else in Europe, and everyone has access to fast internet, which helps large chunks of the workforce stay productive away from the office.

People enjoy ice cream Monday at an outdoor cafe in central Stockholm, Sweden. Sweden has bucked the lockdown trend embraced by other countries during the coronavirus outbreak.
A woman adjusts her child's protective mask as they wait in line Thursday to be screened for COVID-19 at Gotham Health East New York in Brooklyn.

VRENNOM: Republican Gov. Phil Scott has taken steps toward freezing restrictions on nonessential businesses. Still, many of the altered provisions remain strict, such as no work crews of more than two people.

USA: In at least one of the states, a statewide shelter-in-place order is in effect. After-Givings, Georgia began to outline plans to begin a slow reopening of the state in early May. All elective surgeries to resume, and restaurants, bars and casinos to reopen if they could offer curbside service and ensure social distancing.

COLORADO: Democratic Gov. Jared Polis outlined a plan to ease statewide stay-at-home orders beginning Monday. All nonessential retailers may soon offer curbside delivery and can fully reopen with half-staff capacity and protective measures. Office and personal services can do the same in May. Schools, universities, gyms and gyms remain closed, along with in-door restaurant and bar service. Residents will continue to stay at home as long as they can.

ARIZONA: Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey said Wednesday that he's not yet ready to announce plans for reopening the state, offering providing details. Ducey said that the reopening must be done in stages. He also said that it will take longer to resume mass gatherings like concerts but also that reopening must be done safely.

KENTUCKY: Gov. Andy Beshear announced plans Thursday to lift coronavirus restrictions in May, with a new testing program in place. The governor said that his administration is compiling criteria for relaxing restrictions and will take a gradual approach, with decisions based on markers the state's mandatory safer-at-home order expires May 4, but Sununu said that he does not want to lose any gains he has made and has indicated that state officials will develop a plan next week for a phased reopening.

WASHINGTON: Republican Gov. Jay Inslee said that the state's stay-at-home order expires May 4, but Sununu said that he will announce a plan for reopening the state. Inslee said that the state's stay-at-home order expires May 4, but Sununu said that he will announce a plan for reopening the state.
Severe weather sweeps through the South

Associated Press

MADILL, Okla. — Severe weather was moving through the South on Thursday after at least six people died in Oklahoma, Texas and Louisiana, including a factory worker whose body was found a quarter-mile away after an apparent tornado struck his workplace and severely damaged the town nearby.

More than 100,000 customers from Texas to Mississippi were without power Thursday as the severe weather moved through, according to powerroutage.us, which tracks utility reports.

Tornado warnings sent residents taking cover in southern Mississippi and Alabama. Trees and power lines were toppled in parts of west Alabama. No injuries or major damage were reported immediately.

The factory worker was killed when a suspected twister hit just as the workforce was leaving for the day from J&K Manufacturing in southern Oklahoma, Marshall County EERgency Management Director Robert Chaney said. The worker's body was found about a fourth of a mile from the factory. Chaney said.

That apparent tornado also caused widespread damage in Mississippi near the Red River, said Donny Raley, the city's emergency manager.

A Louisiana man was found dead after a witness saw him try to retrieve a trash can from water near a drainage ditch. He lost his footing and was swept away by floodwaters, DeSoto Parish Sheriff Jayson Richardson told The Shreveport Times.

"There was some pretty extreme flooding here in Mansfield. Water like I've not seen in many, many years, if ever," the sheriff told the newspaper. "Basically the water rose really fast and we had to rescue some people out of homes. I think we had about 20 or so homes that people were flooded in."

A woman was killed on a bridge in Woodworth, La., 15 miles south of Alexandria, due to the severe weather, Rapides Parish Sheriff's Office told KALB-TV. The sheriff's office did not provide any details on how she died.

At least three people were killed when an apparent tornado touched down in southeast Texas about 6 p.m. Wednesday near Onalaska, about 75 miles north of Houston, the Polk County Emergency Management System said in a statement. The storm also caused severe damage to homes and other structures in Seven Oaks, said Carrie Miller, a spokeswoman for Polk County Judge Sydney Murphy.

Charles Stephens of Onalaska told the Houston Chronicle that he and his wife were holed up in their bathroom when a large pine tree fell through their roof during the storms Wednesday night.

"It took me 45 minutes to climb through the roof to get out," Stephens said, adding that he had to use a hatchet to get his wife out of the debris.

The Alexandria campus of Louisiana State University also saw some damage from the storm. The university tweeted, "All resident students safe. There is damage to DeWitt Livestock building and a camper flipped over." The campus was also left without power.

A National Weather Service team will be dispatched to survey damage and to confirm whether the storms were tornadoes.

US adds cameras at Mexico border despite drop in crossings

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The Trump administration has been quietly adding surveillance cameras at the U.S.-Mexico border in response to the coronavirus pandemic, though few people appear to be crossing illegally.

It’s the latest move as operations at the U.S.-Mexico border have become increasingly militarized and secretive.

Documents obtained by The Associated Press show the Department of Homeland Security, at the request of the Department of Homeland Security, sent 60 mobile surveillance cameras and 549 additional troops to the southwest border this month. The documents are unclassified but for official use only and were part of PowerPoint slides created last week to brief Lt. Gen. Laura J. Richardson, commander of U.S. Army North, the primary unit overseeing military operations at the border.

The cameras are manned by the military and will be removed after the pandemic has ended, said Matthew Dyman, a spokesman for Customs and Border Protection, which is under the Department of Homeland Security.

The request for cameras was not “based on border flow numbers,” but on rising coronavirus cases in Mexico, he said.

“Each person that avoids arrest and turns back entry into the United States has the potential to be carrying the COVID-19 virus and puts American lives at risk,” Dyman said in an email.

Preparations of people crossing illegally have declined by 77% since March, according to Customs and Border Protection. April figures have not been released yet but are expected to be even lower.

The cameras were set up days before President Donald Trump signed an executive order Wednesday placing a 60-day pause on issuing green cards in an effort to limit competition for jobs in a U.S. economy wrecked by the coronavirus.

Trump has used emergency powers during the pandemic to implement an aggressive border crackdown that has included turning away or immediately deporting asylum-seekers, including minors.

The military help means more Border Patrol agents can focus on apprehending people who cross illegally or expelling foreigners under a rarely used public health law that the Trump administration tapped amid the pandemic, Dyman said.

The addition of the mobile cameras, which are mounted in the back of trucks, brings the total to 192, according to the documents.

Southern border expert David Shirk sees no justification for adding cameras and troops. He pointed out that Mexico so far has a fraction of the number of COVID-19 cases that have been confirmed in the United States, while deportees flown back from the U.S. have introduced cases in their home countries.

“There is no evidence that suggests there are borders of COVID-19 patients lined up along the border,” said Shirk, an associate political science professor at the University of San Diego. “And there is no evidence that COVID-19 is even contributing to a surge in people trying to cross the border.”

The government’s own numbers show the opposite. Apprehensions at the U.S.-Mexico border have been declining for nine straight months.

As of Sunday, the 60 added mobile surveillance cameras planned to be manned and operational, according to the documents. That day, the six Mexican states bordering the U.S. reported a total of about 125 confirmed COVID-19 cases, according to Mexico’s health secretary. By comparison, the four U.S. states that border Mexico — California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas — recorded about 5,500 infections Sunday.

Pentagon officials as recently as August were considering a request from the Department of Homeland Security to send reconnaissance planes and military drones designed for battlefields in Afghanistan and Iraq to the border.

Administration officials have declined to say whether that plan, first reported by Newsweek on Aug. 9, is still in the works. In December, Richardson, the U.S. Army North commander, ordered historically unclassified documents and daily briefings on the U.S.-Mexico border to be moved to a classified system to prevent further leaks.

With the additional troops, about 3,000 active-duty service members are on the border along with 2,500 National Guard troops. Barred from law enforcement duties, they have kept a low profile and are largely doing on-the-ground surveillance.

The border mission — marking one of the longest deployments of active-duty troops to the border in U.S. history — has cost more than $500 million since October 2017.

Above: This image made from video provided by Thomas Marcum shows a tornado seen from State Highway 48 in Durant, Okla., Wednesday. Left: People embrace after an apparent tornado touched down Wednesday in Onalaska, Texas. The storm caused severe damage to homes and other structures, but there were no immediate reports of deaths or serious injuries, officials said.

AP photos
Search on for possible escaped exotic cat

NM RIO RANCHO — New Mexico officials are searching for a possible escaped exotic cat in an Albuquerque, N.M., suburb.

KRQE-TV reported New Mexico Department of Game and Fish said it’s investigating reports of an escaped serval from a Rio Rancho home.

Animal control reportedly captured a cat said to be a Savannah cat — a cross between a serval and another breed. But it’s unclear if it is the same feline officials sought.

Game and Fish officials say they are still investigating.

Track to adopt out dogs after ending racing

AL BIRMINGHAM — An Alabama race course will need to find homes for more than 500 dogs after discontinuing live greyhound racing at the venue, officials said.

The Jefferson County Racing Association announced that it would no longer hold live greyhound races at the Birmingham Race Course, citing declining revenue and interest in the event, WVTM-TV reported.

While some of the greyhounds could go on to race at other tracks, Kip Keefer with the racing association said officials would be initiating a “massive” adoption and placement effort in the coming months to try and find homes for about 550 dogs that would remain.

Officer, senior citizens treated for bee stings

AZ MESA — A Mesa police officer was among four people treated for multiple bee stings at a senior living facility, authorities said.

Mesa Fire Department officials said crews were called to Fellowship Square after a report of a bee attack.

They said three senior citizens were taken to a hospital for treatment while the police officer was treated at the scene.

Residents of the facility were asked to shelter in place while a pest elimination crew removed the bees.

Firm ‘devastated’ by fire at large egg farm

OH CROTON — Authorities said a fast-moving fire at a large egg farm in Ohio destroyed one large building and also killed hens in other buildings.

The blaze reported at the Trillium Farms facility in Croton sent flames shooting high into the sky.

Chief Mike Richardson of the Hartford Volunteer Fire Department told the Newark Advocate that the flames destroyed one building that was about 300 feet long and damaged another. He said all chickens were lost in one building and some chickens were lost in two other buildings due to exposure.

Earth Day display

People walk past an Earth sculpture Tuesday at Thea’s Park in Tacoma, Wash., with the WestRock Paper Mill in the background. Wednesday marked the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, an observance that helped spur activism against air and water pollution and disappearing plants and animals.

Meeting ‘Zoom-bombed’ with child abuse images

CT NEW HAVEN — A Connecticut city’s public Zoom meeting was interrupted by a person showing material depicting child abuse, throwing council members into a fit about how to secure meetings going forward.

Participants in the videoconference before the New Haven Board of Alders were stunned and disgusted by the display, the New Haven Register reported.

The Register added that anonymous users disrupting meetings with vulgar displays have been dubbed “Zoom-bombers.”

Police arrest 30 for soliciting minors

VA FAIRFAX — An online sting operation in northern Virginia resulted in the arrests of 30 men charged with trolling the internet to solicit sex from minors, authorities said.

Fairfax County Police called the sting Operation COVID Crackdown. They said school closures and stay-at-home orders to combat the coronavirus have increased children’s online presence and their vulnerability to exploitation along with it.

Police said the men who were arrested went online to initiate explicit conversations and solicit sex from police officers posing as children. Each of the suspects agreed to meet their targets in person at specified locations. Detectives arrested the men when they showed up.

The men ranged in age from 20 to 74, and are facing a combined 68 felonies.

Stellar sea lion to give birth at sea life center

AK KENAI — A female Steller sea lion at the Alaska SeaLife Center is pregnant and expected to give birth within months, officials said.

The sea lion named Mara will not be used to breed again because she is now 17 and most Steller sea lions normally live to their early 20s in captivity, SeaLife Center Husbandry Director Lisa Hartman said.

The father is a 10-year-old at the center named Pilot.

The SeaLife Center, one of three aquariums in North America housing Steller sea lions, previously hosted four other births, all from a female named Eden that now resides at the Mystic Aquarium in Connecticut.

Man charged in robbery of drive-thru

WA VANCOUVER — A Vancouver man was accused of hiring two men to beat up his estranged wife after she had him served with a no-contact order.

The plan was stymied when the men tipped her off, documents said. Edgar Gonzalez-Gomez appeared in Clark County Superior Court on suspicion of criminal solicitation, The Columbian reported.

The woman served Gonzalez-Gomez with a no-contact order April 7. One week later, she was sitting in her car when she saw an unknown man walk by several times before tapping on her window, asking her name and then telling her about the plan, saying he wouldn’t do it, a probable cause affidavit said.

He then let her hear a recording of Gonzalez-Gomez describing in Spanish what he wanted done to her, according to court records.

From wire reports
The cast of the hit series “The Sopranos,” from left, Tony Sirico, Steve Van Zandt, James Gandolfini, Michael Imperioli and Vincent Pastore. Imperioli and co-star Steve Schirripa, not shown, launched a new podcast about “The Sopranos.”

Pandemic can’t stop this mob

Stars of hit television series ‘The Sopranos’ start a podcast

BY JOHN CARUCCI
Associated Press

The coronavirus pandemic almost upended a new podcast about the hit TV series “The Sopranos” before it even started. But hosts and series actors Michael Imperioli and Steve Schirripa said fans pleaded with them to find a way to do it.

They did, and watchers of the award-winning HBO series will be overjoyed that the two “Sopranos” stars are providing insight into the show while listeners are stuck in their homes.

Imperioli said fans had been watching the show during shelter-in-place orders and were hungry for the podcasts. “So Steve and I had a long talk and we thought about it and we found a way to do it remotely,” Imperioli said.

Even a series regular like Schirripa is learning things about the series. “Michael tells me things that I never even knew,” he said. “So it’s pretty amazing.”

One thing listeners have discovered is that experience again, really,” Imperioli said.

And along the way, the two hosts share love and admiration for the late Gandolfini and how he led the ensemble cast by example.

“Jim was like the captain. He wasn’t the star. ‘The Sopranos’ was a team both behind the camera and in front of the camera. And I haven’t had that experience again, really,” Imperioli said.

While Gandolfini often becomes a topic of the weekly conversation, an episode focusing solely on his contributions to the series is not out of the question.

“I was the lead guy,” Imperioli said.

Hawn and Hudson

People historic anniversary cover features Hawn, Hudson

Three generations will grace the cover of People magazine’s 30th anniversary “Beauty Issue.”

Goldie Hawn, her daughter Kate Hudson and granddaughter Rani Rose Fujikawa will appear on the cover of the issue, released Friday. It’s the first time three generations will be the cover feature in the 30-year history of the “Beauty Issue.”

The cover story touches on several topics, including Hawn and Hudson’s style choices to parenting.

Hawn and Hudson talked about their family’s unbreakable bond, even during the lockdown prompted by the coronavirus pandemic.

Hawn, 74, said she has been getting through the coronavirus pandemic with her partner of 37 years, Kurt Russell with “meditation, nurturing, loving kindness for all in my heart and staying safe inside.”

Gayle King starts call-in show to hear coronavirus stories

CBS News’ Gayle King says she’s starting a temporary satellite radio program because she wants to hear how Americans are coping with lockdowns and social distancing measures.

She’s been broadcasting her “CBS This Morning” show from her Manhattan home and talked about the isolation caused by the pandemic. She wants to hear the stories of others dealing with loneliness, the stress of home schooling and managing stress.

“Maybe there are such surreal times,” she said.

“I look forward to hearing how everybody’s feeling and thinking. How do we navigate the uncertainty of this moment? As unsettling as this is, I believe we’ll make it through.”

Film chronicling Whitney Houston’s life in the works

A feature film about Whitney Houston’s life is in the works from the screenwriter of “Bohemian Rhapsody.” The biopic is being shepherded by the Whitney Houston Estate, music producer Clive Davis and Primary Wave Music, the partners said Wednesday.

“I Wanna Dance with Somebody” will follow Houston from obscurity to pop stardom and promises to be “frank about the price that superstardom exacted,” according to the announcement.

Stella Meghie is in “advanced talks” to direct. Meghie most recently directed “The Photograph” with Issa Rae and LaKeith Stanfield. The project does not have a studio or distribution yet.

A24 to auction paraphernalia to benefit NYC charities

How does an indie film shop give back to its hometown in this crisis? If you’re A24, you start by mining your prop, wardrobe and set departments.

The studio behind films like “Midsommar” and “Uncut Gems” said Wednesday that it is auctioning off some of its most famous movie paraphernalia, from the flowery May Queen dress that Florence Pugh wore in “Midsommar” to Kevin Garnett’s Boston Celtics jersey from “Uncut Gems.”

All proceeds from A24 Auctions will go to one of four charities helping frontline workers and hard-hit communities: The FDNY Foundation; The Food Bank For NYC; NYC Health + Hospitals; and the Queens Community House.

Compiled by wire services
Supporting veterans during the pandemic

BY MARK GRAHAM
Special to Stars and Stripes

The coronavirus pandemic brings an unprecedented time in our history and personal experience. Among the veteran communities, the lack of social interaction, and unreported deaths due to the virus, causing many to be experiencing a variety of emotions and concern for what the future holds, with the added stress or loneliness while maintaining social isolation.

The good news is that now, more than ever, we have the tools and resources to help connect veterans and their families to those who can provide support. The challenge is to ensure these resources are accessible and utilized by those in need.

As the weeks of mandated quarantine measures carry on, anxieties and financial worries are bubbling up among the veteran population. The Bob Woodruff Foundation published an original research paper this month which determined that those with a "large number of veterans are likely to become unemployed at rates that could exceed the highest level of veteran unemployment over the past 29 years, even if full employment was achieved." A significant portion of veterans within the workforce are employed in the industries most likely to experience economic disconnection, including hospitality, retail, and transportation.

The paper’s findings also expanded on the mental health implications of the current crisis, saying, "...the combination of initial trauma, loneliness, and isolation can lead to increased stress and other psychological effects, such as post-traumatic stress disorder.”

While the pandemic itself may be unprecedented, those that support the military veteran community are familiar with stepping up to provide immediate and long-term support plans.

Experience has trained us to confront unique challenges head on, and it is important that veterans and their families know that help is available. While this may be bumpy roads ahead for some, their challenges do not need to spiral into crises.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey in 2017, when 13 million people were affected, and nearly 135,000 homes damaged or destroyed, there was a vital need for communities to come together to support those impacted by the event. Organizations like our 24/7 peer support lines were staffed 100% by trained veterans and members of the military community, their families or caregivers.

Still today, nearly three years later, veteran service organizations like Vets4Warriors, Combard arms, and the Mission Continues are addressing the existing need to provide peer support, community resources and building initiatives to Harvey-impacted veterans whose lives were turned upside down in an instant.

Organizations like our 24/7 peer support lines have been able to respond with the belief that, through the power of connection, there is no problem that cannot be solved and no challenge that cannot be overcome.

When it comes to the military veteran community, we provide support whenever and wherever they need it. In the world we are with them all the way. And we will be with those impacted by COVID-19 all the way.

The challenges Harvey-impacted veterans are facing are not dissimilar to what we are seeing unfold amid the COVID-19 pandemic: financial burdens, mental health struggles and a need for camaraderie.

In fact, none of these are new to the military veteran community. The good news is that now, more than ever, veterans and their families know that help is available. While this may be bumpy roads ahead for some, their challenges do not need to spiral into crises.

For the long-term, our goal is to ensure that those impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic do not reach a point of crisis. We will connect veterans and their families to those who can provide support whenever and wherever they need it and stay with them all the way.
What newspapers are saying at home

Thursday, April 23, 2020

The following editorial excerpts are selected from a cross-section of newspapers throughout the United States. The editorials are provided by The Associated Press and other statewide syndicates.

Looking ahead 10 years after Deepwater Horizon explosion

The Advocate

The traumatic consequences of the explosion and massive oil spill ensuing off the coast of Louisiana 10 years ago are hardly forgotten. Not one of the families of the 11 men killed working on the Deepwater Horizon platform — another 17 were injured — was ever fully compensated or had their lives forever altered in that moment of horror.

Several massive spills damaged the coast of our state. Then-Gov. Bobby Jindal mobilized a major operation to try to protect the coastline and wildlife. Thousands of workers engaged in the clean-up.

The images of birds coated in oil made an indelible impression upon the American public and that of the rest of the world, who saw video of oil still spewing out many days later.

The economic impact on our region was substantial and a decade in the making. People were losing their jobs. We are still trying to recoup that loss.

A new bureau in the U.S. Department of the Interior was created, safety procedures changed, a moratorium on offshore production was declared by the Obama administration.

And just as inevitably, there were debates over the debate: Workers in the Gulf oil regions felt they were being penalized by BP’s mistakes, companies criticized revisions in safety procedures.

And just as necessarily, we are left wondering today, with environmentalists arguing that the Trump administration has further eroded the complex safety rules that underlie oil and gas production in the Gulf.

For those with shorter memories, the way that the oil disaster is most frequently seen in the news is in the payoff for billions of dollars to governments as well as nonprofits in civil and criminal penalties levied on BP and other responsible parties.

We’re still talking, still fighting, still in the battle. In the battle with the money to pay for the damage.

Also, there are no guarantees these battles will continue today, with environmentalists arguing that the Trump administration has further eroded the complex safety rules that underlie oil and gas production in the Gulf.

Let’s hope the U.S. government continues to help, a lot, in future years.

Listen to protesters, but don’t incite reckless behavior

The Washington Post

Public fatigue with stay-at-home orders to fight the novel coronavirus pandemic is inevitable and understandable. Not understandable, nor forgivable, is the president of the United States inciting disrespect for his own government’s guidelines, which are unquestionably essential for the public health.

Relatively small protests have broken out in the United States in recent days against the strictures designed to slow the spreading virus. People have a right to protest, if they conduct themselves without endangering others. But leaders have an obligation to point out that the behavior the protests encourage could reignite the virus and cost lives.

Tens of millions of Americans in recent weeks have willingly complied with stay-at-home guidelines put out by President Donald Trump and by governors, a commendable showing of cohesion and collective judgment. But also, one must consider the steep personal sacrifice.

Next will be hard choices about reopening.

Doing too soon risks reigniting a firestorm that has already cost more than 168,000 lives globally. Opening must be done with special protections, testing and data, as Mr. Trump’s own phased-in guidelines suggest.

The protests carried signs such as “Live Free or Die in Lockdown” and “Re-Open Now.” Some of them set a bad example, without masks or social distancing. But what was most concerning was the message that somehow all this sacrifice can be quickly abandoned in the name of liberty and rights. This is wrong.

The pursuit of liberty does not mean a license to endanger the lives of others.

Mr. Trump was exceedingly reckless to incite protests with three tweets on Friday saying “LIBERATE” Michigan, Minnesota and Virginia, all of which have Democratic governors.

He undermined his own published public health guidelines and his own reopening plan. His message threatens to destroy broader public confidence in the reasons for the social distancing and mitigation strategies. His comments could inspire additional disobedience and spark new outbreaks and another round of restrictions that would be even harder to impose.

Such a cycle must be avoided. There is no arguing with the facts: The virus jumps from person to person and can kill. A responsible leader would express empathy with the millions of Americans who have followed the rules, reinforce why they are necessary and offer reasonable expectations about what comes next. To fail at this is to fail at a central function of the presidency.

Some protests may reflect a genuine cry for help from those hungering, desperation and fear. These voices must be listened to, and their needs addressed as fast and far as possible.

That must be our end, our fate in this pandemic will be determined by what we do now, in the months or more before a vaccine. We must accept strategies that are working to keep as many people alive as possible. Shouting “liberate” invites disaster.

OSHA should force employers to protect essential workers

The New York Times

Shelter-in-place orders are an effective means to slow the spread of the coronavirus, yet even the most essential workers have no choice but to leave home to go to work every day. Deemed essential for their jobs in manufacturing, grocery stores, pharmacies, long-term care facilities, restaurants, they face daily risks by working alongside colleagues and customers who may be carriers of the coronavirus.

At grocery stores and sprawling warehouses, workers say not enough is being done to protect them from exposure. Walmart employees, for instance, say they lack sufficient sanitizing supplies and protective gear and are forced to congregate in spaces that put them well within a six-foot radius of co-workers.

At meat processing plants, where production lines often require working shoulder to shoulder, the risks are particularly acute. And mass-transit workers say they haven’t been provided masks or personal protective equipment.

When their shifts end, they go home to their families, putting more people at risk. And into the pandemic, it’s apparent that not nearly enough is being done to protect these front-line workers, even as their continued labor ensures that a semblance of normality endures for their fellow Americans.

The Department of Labor’s primary worker safety enforcement arm, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, has taken a largely hands-off approach to the pandemic. Only last week did OSHA put a priority on investigating health care facilities for complaints about coronavirus safety procedures, while effectively giving a free pass to some of the nation’s largest employers.

Without a clear set of rules to follow, employers are making up as they go.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued sensible guidelines on the individual level that can protect workers, such as standards for social distancing, sanitizing stations and using masks in the workplace. But OSHA hasn’t made the guidelines mandatory for workplaces — the CDC itself doesn’t enforce them — nor has OSHA developed other new rules that could help ensure worker safety during the pandemic. It should do so now. Requiring businesses to follow the CDC’s guidelines would allow OSHA to enforce them with inspections and fines.

Instead, a patchwork of rules — led primarily by governors in New York, Washington state and California — serve as an unsatisfactory substitute by mandating minimum standards and the use of other protective measures.

But these haven’t been aimed specifically at workplaces, many of which need more guidelines.

OSHA said its prior rules for worker safety apply during the pandemic, though the agency later gave employers a new way to investigate coronavirus claims so long as they were confined to health care facilities such as nursing homes.

In a statement to The New York Times, OSHA said that “employers are, and will continue to be, responsible for providing a safe and healthy workplace.” The OSHA said it can respond to formal complaints where a worker is killed or seriously injured on the job, as well as reports of workplace “conditions.”

The agency’s COVID-19 guidance for employees, however, acknowledges up front it “is not a standard or regulation, and it creates no new legal obligations.”

In the meantime, OSHA offices are fielding thousands of coronavirus complaints but don’t have the wherewithal to investigate them. In Oregon alone, by early this month the local OSHA office had received 2,747 complaints about workplace conditions but had issued zero citations, the top local administrator told The Portland Tribune.

OSHA has received reports of the death of an Illinois Walmart worker who died after contracting the coronavirus that “OSHA does not have any jurisdiction on enforcing any OSHA standard that is not identified in the statute,” according to The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

As a cautionary advisory last week, OSHA indicated companies should conduct their own investigations and report back to the agency.

OSHA also can and should go beyond CDC guidelines to require measures such as staggered shifts and lunch breaks and construction of barriers to protect employees in jobs like manufacturing and meat-packing that require close quarters. And it should develop regulations that permit employers to bring others workers back to the job after potential virus-free work periods and immediate or midweek quarantine. Some say the new policy, meant to keep essential businesses running, risks re-exposing workers. Minnesota’s governor has already by executive order maintained a recommendation for a 14-day quarantine for workers after exposure.

Corporate leaders can and must do more to beonorous and expensive, but the cost of prolonging the coronavirus’s spread can be far more costly.

OSHA has taken steps to protect health care workers by prioritizing inspections of hospitals and other “high risk” facilities. But during the pandemic, warehouses and supermarkets, bus and grocery stores have become high-risk facilities, too. If the spread of the disease is to slow, millions of workers deserve far better protection.
Even without a No. 1 pick
Bears expect to stock up

By Andrew Seligman
Associated Press

Chicago general manager Ryan Pace is excited to have two second-rounders in ‘deep draft’

By the numbers

8-8

Bears’ record last season after going 12-4 in 2018.

7

Draft selections, including none in the first round and two in the second.

SOURCE: Associated Press

Chicago Bears general manager Ryan Pace is looking to bounce back from an 8-8 season. The Bears have seven draft selections, none in the first round.

Briefly

Mickelson, Woods plan to stage TV match with Manning, Brady

Associated Press

Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson are ready for a made-for-TV rematch at a time when fans are craving live action.

Phil Mickelson, left, and Tiger Woods will pair with quarterbacks Tom Brady and Peyton Manning for a two-on-two match sometime in May on Turner Sports.

McGraw retires, led Irish to two national titles

Associated Press

Two years removed from winning her second national championship, Muffet McGraw retired as coach of Notre Dame on Wednesday, a surprising decision to many of the countless players and coaches she has mentored and coached on and off the court as a mentor and advocate for women.

McGraw, the 64-year-old McGraw became the 13th woman inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 2017.

She won 936 games, ranking sixth among coaches in NCAA women’s basketball history.

McGraw retired as coach of Notre Dame on Wednesday, a surprising decision to many of the countless players and coaches she has mentored and coached on and off the court as a mentor and advocate for women.

The Hall of Fame coach has a resume that includes two national championships in 33 seasons at the school. McGraw sent 20 players to the WNBA during her coaching career.

Former Fighting Irish player and long-time assistant coach Niele Ivey will return to take over for McGraw. She was on the Memphis Grizzlies staff last year after 17 seasons at Notre Dame.

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Despite Trubisky struggling in his second year, the Bears have been shaken up, and scouts and coaches to maximize the draft picks we have,” Pace said Tuesday. “Fortunately we have two twos and it is a deep draft, and we’ve just got to capitalize at that point.”

The Bears went 8-8 and missed the playoffs for the eighth time in nine years, a huge letdown after going 12-4 in 2018. While a defense that has ranked among the league’s best in recent years continued to perform at a high level, the offense was one of the least productive in the NFL.

Though the Bears have been busy, bringing in pass rusher Robert Quinn to take the load off Mack and former All-Pro tight end Jimmy Graham, they still have some big question marks.

It’s not clear how much Graham has left after getting released by Green Bay. But he has a strong connection to Pace, who had a hand in drafting him while working in New Orleans’ front office.

The Bears need help on the offensive line and more playmakers to go with receiver Allen Robinson. The wish list also includes a cornerback and safety to go with Kyle Fuller and Eddie Jackson.

And there’s a different setup to the draft this year, with headquarters off limits because of the coronavirus pandemic. Instead of Halas Hall, Pace has been working at home the past month, making the most of the challenges that come with the setup.

One benefit?

Having dinner every night with his wife, Stephanie, and 10-year-old daughter Cardyn, something he couldn’t remember doing for a month straight.

Pace credits the Bears’ technology staff for a “seamless” transition to working at home. He said they boosted the bandwidth in his house about a week ago, so he no longer has to worry about a slow Wi-Fi connection when Cardyn uses her iPad. He just hopes no one trips over the cord running from the router down the stairs to the dining room, where he has seven monitors, or knocks out a wire again. Stephanie did that the other day while vacuuming, causing each screen to go blank.

“There will be a lot of fun stories to tell when this is all said and done,” Pace said. “It’s been a really unique circumstance, but they’ve been awesome through the whole process and I’m just very thankful for them.”

Pace also said the team has not decided whether to take on quarterback Mitchell Trubisky’s fifth-year option, with the deadline in May. The Bears acquired former Super Bowl MVP Nick Foles in a trade with Jacksonville to challenge for the starting job after Trubisky struggled in his third season.

“We’ll cross that bridge once we get through this weekend,” Pace said.

Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson will pair with quarterbacks Tom Brady and Peyton Manning for a two-on-two match sometime in May on Turner Sports.

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College sports will take the slow road back

By Ralph D. Russo
Associated Press

While professional sports leagues can ponder plans to isolate their athletes from the new coronavirus and have them play in unusual, even sequestered places, college sports have no such option.

Pro sports leagues can get creative with solutions to save their multibillion-dollar businesses. College sports will take a slower road back.

“The most at-risk sport of starting up again, in my opinion, is collegiate athletics,” said A.J. Mars, the founder of Navigate Research, which consults with professional sports leagues and college conferences. “There is less of an incentive and less alignment with the ultimate mission of the entity they work at, live at, that fund them.”

The commissioners of the 10 Bowl Subdivision conferences made it clear to Vice President Mike Pence last week: There cannot be college sports played if campuses are not open. If university leaders do not deem it safe for students to return to classrooms and dorms, locker rooms and practice fields will also remain closed.

As big as the business of college sports is it is dwarfed by the business of higher education, which consumes nearly a third of GDP. The entity that manages Alabama’s budget in fiscal 2018 was $1.03 billion. Its athletic budget in 2018-19 was $16.6 million.

“You think of all the stakeholders and constituents in the collegiate space and all the missions they’re meant to serve in. This sports thing is like 3% of their budget,” Maestas said.

Colleges and universities, for the most part, have been quicker than governments in enacting measures to slow the spread of the virus. They sent students home, extended spring breaks and shifted to online classes weeks before widespread bans of large gatherings and stay-at-home orders by governors and mayors.

Even before the NCAA canceled its basketball tournaments and spring sports March 12, schools were shuttering campuses.

Fast forward to the fall, when the hope is many businesses and routine parts of daily life will be operating again, even if not back to business as usual. That doesn’t mean colleges will be rushing to get students on campus. If they were first to shut down, they could also be among the last to reopen and it will be university presidents, not the NCAA, making those decisions.

Schools would take a significant financial hit by continuing to operate online only, but balance that against the legal and ethical liability they could face by being the catalyst for reigniting an outbreak.

“I think they do have to be conservative in how they approach this,” said attorney Tim Nevis, a former college baseball player and NCAA investigator who now represents and advocates for college athletes.

If, come September, the students are physically going back to school, even then there will be hurdles to clear for football to start.

“Large gatherings of people are going to be the last thing we check off the box,” Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine said last week when asked about Ohio State football games. “It isn’t appropriate for us to play college football without fans. If that were the case, it would mean there would be major reservations about group gatherings.”

Northwestern athletic director Jim Phillips said on the Paul Finebaum Show, echoing a sentiment that is also becoming popular among administrators.

Commissioners and athletic directors have stressed the importance of collaboration across conferences and starting any season at once. But the public health crisis is not playing out the same everywhere.

Within 24 hours this week the president of the University of Connecticut said he was personally pessimistic about the return of fall sports while the University of Missouri System president Mun Choi said he expects in-person classes to resume this fall.

In professional sports, players are well-paid and unionized. Essentially, they are business partners with the leagues. Players have to sign off on any return-to-play plan, and they might be motivated to take some risk to get paid.

In college sports, the relationship between the players and the schools, administrators and coaches is almost paternalistic. “In framing it that way it restricts athletes’ rights,” Nevis said. “It prevents them from being considered employees. It reduces their economic rights. It frames things so that the athletes also think that they are in this caretaker environment so they have to rely upon the coaches and the schools to advance their rights.”

“But that is not always the case with the big business of college sports,” Nevis added.

Later this week, the NCAA is scheduled to reveal some details of a plan to begin allowing college athletes to be compensated for use of their names, images and likenesses. The earliest it would go into effect is 2021-22.

Yes, college football players with professional aspirations have much to gain by playing. But not paychecks. And their scholarships are good whether they play or not.

“College sports are theoretically intended to exist to enhance that academic experience of its athletes,” Nevis said. “And the NCAA repeatedly says that publicly and in defense of lawsuits as well. We’ve seen over time decisions made that completely contradict that. This is another test with respect to that philosophy.”

Coronavirus puts crimp into injury rehab

By Cliff Brunt and Mitch Stacy
Associated Press

Under normal circumstances, you would almost have to force Indiana linebacker Thomas Allen out of his school’s athletic facilities.

Allen had season-ending surgery on his left shoulder in November, and his dedicated rehabilitation led him to recently declare himself 85% to 90% healthy even though he was restricted to individual workouts when spring practice began in March.

His recovery plan changed dramatically when the coronavirus pandemic shut down campuses and college sports. He is among many football players across the country recovering from injuries who have limited access to top-tier equipment and one-on-one help. Some experts say those issues could lengthen recovery times and put athletes at risk of re-injury.

Allen has no access to campus facilities and he is working only twice a week with team trainers who can’t physically touch him. Much of his care has been outsourced to an outside clinic. The rest of his work is done at home.

“If we didn’t have what’s going on now, you’d be with them (trainers) basically 24-7,” Allen said. “The longer you’re in there, the sooner you get back on the field. So you’re doing some things at home without blowing up your shoulder.”

Dr. Kevin Wilk, the associate clinical director for Champion Sports Medicine in Birmingham, Ala., has helped Michael Jordan, Bo Jackson, Drew Brees, Derek Jeter and others recover from injuries. Wilk is using telehealth — basically long-distance clinical health care — for the first time in his three-decade career, and it is frustrating.

“I’m old-school,” he said “I’ve got to talk to you eye to eye, not through the phone so I can read if you’re telling me the truth or not. I want to see you do great. Let me put my hands on you. Let me see you move.”

Texas quarterback Sam Ehlinger had been shut down during winter conditioning after he aggravated a rib injury. A recent checkup was a little different.

“He had a Zoom conference with the physician last week, and she was telling him to ‘push here, push there, how does that feel? What are you feeling?’” Texas coach Tom Herman said. “So that was interesting and again unique because the injury is really kind of a pain tolerance. You know when those things heal because they stop hurting.”
**BASEBALL**

**Minor league teams, players face lost season**

Virus outbreak threatens to wipe out summer slate

BY JAY COHEN  
Associated Press

CHICAGO — Mike Nutter is surrounded by questions everywhere he goes these days. So the longtime president of the Fort Wayne TinCaps is planning for each scenario to have an answer.

What does minor league baseball look like in the COVID-19 age? What happens if his Class A team loses its season?

And the big one: What if there are no games at all?

While Major League Baseball tries to figure out a way to play this summer, the prospects for anything resembling a normal minor league season are increasingly bleak.

For minor league communities across the country from Albuquerque to Akron, looking forward to cheap hot dogs, fuzzy mascots hugs and Elvis-themed nights, it’s a small slice of a depressing picture.

Attendance at minor league games last year was more than 41.5 million, a 2.6% increase over 2018 and the 15th straight year of an increase. Watkins, who denied the use of video to identify pitch signaling the prohibition on in-game video recordings. Watkins, who was suspended through the 2020 post-season and fired by the Astros on Jan. 13. Houston was fined $5 million, the maximum under the Major League Constitution, and lost its next two first- and second-round amateur draft selections.

Unlike the Houston Astros’ 2017 conduct, in which players communicated to the batter from the dugout area in real time the precise type of pitch about to be thrown, Watkins’ conduct, by its very nature, was far more limited in scope and impact,” Manfred wrote.

A 30-year-old from Tuscaloosa, Ala., Watkins is a 2012 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy.

The uncertainty also weighs on players. The loss of a minor league season would be a tough blow for prospects, especially those just starting out in professional baseball. While major league organizations have more training possibilities than ever before, there is no substitute for live games. MLB and its players’ union are aiming to hold as many games as possible, offering a glimmer of possibility to some prospects who could be in the mix to help with a packed schedule.

“Hopefully they’ll expand rosters or something like that for somebody like myself or whoever,” said Zach Short, an infielder in the Cubs’ organization who reached Triple-A Iowa last summer. “And the uncertainty also weighs on players. The loss of a minor league season would be a tough blow for prospects, especially those just starting out in professional baseball. While major league organizations have more training possibilities than ever before, there is no substitute for live games. MLB and its players’ union are aiming to hold as many games as possible, offering a glimmer of possibility to some prospects who could be in the mix to help with a packed schedule. What do minor league baseball look like in the COVID-19 age? What happens if his Class A team loses its season? And the big one: What if there are no games at all? While Major League Baseball tries to figure out a way to play this summer, the prospects for anything resembling a normal minor league season are increasingly bleak. 

For minor league communities across the country from Albuquerque to Akron, looking forward to cheap hot dogs, fuzzy mascots hugs and Elvis-themed nights, it’s a small slice of a depressing picture. Attendance at minor league games last year was more than 41.5 million, a 2.6% increase over 2018 and the 15th straight year of an increase. Watkins, who denied the use of video to identify pitch signaling the prohibition on in-game video recordings. Watkins, who was suspended through the 2020 post-season and fired by the Astros on Jan. 13. Houston was fined $5 million, the maximum under the Major League Constitution, and lost its next two first- and second-round amateur draft selections. Unlike the Houston Astros’ 2017 conduct, in which players communicated to the batter from the dugout area in real time the precise type of pitch about to be thrown, Watkins’ conduct, by its very nature, was far more limited in scope and impact,” Manfred wrote. A 30-year-old from Tuscaloosa, Ala., Watkins is a 2012 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy. The uncertainty also weighs on players. The loss of a minor league season would be a tough blow for prospects, especially those just starting out in professional baseball. While major league organizations have more training possibilities than ever before, there is no substitute for live games. MLB and its players’ union are aiming to hold as many games as possible, offering a glimmer of possibility to some prospects who could be in the mix to help with a packed schedule. Hopefully they’ll expand rosters or something like that for somebody like myself or whoever,” said Zach Short, an infielder in the Cubs’ organization who reached Triple-A Iowa last summer. And the uncertainty also weighs on players. The loss of a minor league season would be a tough blow for prospects, especially those just starting out in professional baseball. While major league organizations have more training possibilities than ever before, there is no substitute for live games. MLB and its players’ union are aiming to hold as many games as possible, offering a glimmer of possibility to some prospects who could be in the mix to help with a packed schedule. Hopefully they’ll expand rosters or something like that for somebody like myself or whoever,” said Zach Short, an infielder in the Cubs’ organization who reached Triple-A Iowa last summer. 

**Scams:** Manfred’s report says Boston misdeeds ‘not as pervasive as Astros’

From BACK PAGE

2017 was unacceptable and I re- 
spect and accept the Commis- 
sioner’s discipline for my past actions.”

The Red Sox upgraded the sta- 
tus of Ron Roenicke, who had been their interim manager pending their interim manager pending the outcome of the investigation.

“That interim tag is removed,” 
Chief Baseball Officer Chaim 
Bloom said. “Ron is now our 
manager.”

The only member of the Red 
Sox organization who was penal- 
ized was replay system operator J.T. Watkins, who was suspended without pay for a year for violating the prohibition on in-game use of video to identify pitch sig-

nals. Watkins, who denied the 
allocations, was also prohibited from serving as the replay room operator through 2021.

Boston was also stripped of its 
second-round pick in this year’s amateur draft, No 52 overall.

“To be clear, we’re not taking 
any victory laps. A violation was 
uncovered and that was wrong and 
we’re being punished for it,” Red Sox president Sam Kennedy said on a conference call with reporters, while acknowledging relief that the monthslong inves- 
tigation is over.

“We have to earn back trust,” 
Kennedy said, adding that the team’s owners apologized to their counterparts on a conference call that afternoon. “We recognize that as an organization.”

Both Bloom and Kennedy dis- 
mis suggested that Cora could be welcomed back — es-

Special thanks to the Commis-
sioner’s thoughtful and thorough investigation report. The Red Sox were punished in MLB’s investigation, but Manfred said even if players had not been subject to discipline, none would have been punished.

Watkins denied any wrongdo-
ging, telling MLB that any infor-
mation he provided during games was obtained from advance scouting.
The Great One' hoping Ovechkin can catch him

BY STEPHEN WHYNO
Associated Press

Wayne Gretzky sees a lot of himself in Alex Ovechkin, from the smile on his face each time he steps on the ice to his passion for scoring goals.

There are also differences, like Gretzky’s sole focus on the NHL growing up in Brantford, Ontario, to Ovechkin’s upbringing in Moscow. The “Great One” believes the Washington Capitals captain has a good chance of breaking his all-time record of 894 goals that once seemed untouchable, depending on how long Ovechkin plays in the NHL.

Gretzky speculated that Ovechkin could go home to Russia and maybe it’ll be great for him to go home.

At 35, Ovechkin has already blown past the age where goal-scorers usually slow down and put up numbers not seen in decades. Even at his pace, Ovechkin would likely need to play at least four more seasons to threaten the record, which Gretzky believes would be great for the game.

Gretzky recalls his dad telling him his record would be broken one day and hoping he handles it with the same class and dignity Gordie Howe did when Gretzky surpassed him as the leading goal-scorer.

“I can’t help but cheer and root for him each and every day,” Gretzky said. “I hope I’m the first guy who’s able to shake his hand when he does break my record.”

That’s a hope for a few years down the line. With a pandemic raging, Ovechkin — whose wife is expecting the couple’s second child — said on a recent video call his focus is on the present, not the future.

“My mind right now is not about 50 goals or catch ‘The Great One’ or somebody else,” Ovechkin said. “My mind right now (is) to do the best what I can do, and what my family can do to be safe.”

The NHL is leaning against staging regular-season or playoff games in nonleague arenas when it gets clearance to resume operations following its COVID-19-related pause and its options now include bringing teams to compete in two or four NHL cities.

Those sites would be chosen not necessarily on a division-related basis but as “anywhere that isn’t a hot spot and has what we need both in terms of the arena and having practice facilities,” Commissioner Gary Bettman said Wednesday.

Speaking to Sportsnet’s Ron MacLean in a video posted on Facebook, Bettman reiterated he remains hopeful the season can be completed, perhaps by going late into the summer and with a modified playoff format, and that next season could start late but would be played in its entirety.

Asked the status of the NHL’s back-to-play plan, Bettman replied, “Which one of the plans?

“We’re modeling. We’re trying to see what our options will be under whatever scenario unfolds. There’s a debate ultimately will be made by medical people and people who run governments at all different levels, so we’re not going to try to do anything than flies in the face of what we’re being told is appropriate.”

Those scenarios include possibly playing without fans in the building or using precautions to mitigate the spread of the virus.

“I think there will be some social distancing for a while. I think there will be masks. There will be Purell,” Bettman said. “There will be lots of things but that’s something that ultimately the medical people and the government leaders will be the best able to tell us.”

He said it’s unlikely games will take place in neutral arenas in Grand Forks, N.D., or Manchester, N.H., a possibility that was floated the past few weeks. “We can’t play in a small college rink in the middle of a smaller community because if we’re going to be centralized, we need the back-of-the-house (amenities) that NHL venues provide, whether it’s multiple locker rooms, whether it’s the technology, the procedures, the boards and glass, the video replay, the broadcasting facilities,” Bettman said.

He also said the league, which paused play on March 12 after playing about 85% of its schedule, has no revenues coming in now. “And that poses an issue not just in terms of how our system works with players but the tens of thousands of people that work for clubs in all sports and how they’re impacted by the fact that sports has no revenue coming in,” he said.
Red Sox lose draft pick, Cora suspended in sign-stealing scams

BY RONALD BLUM AND JIMMY GOLEN
Associated Press

NEW YORK

The Boston Red Sox escaped severe penalties in Major League Baseball’s cheating investigation on Wednesday, with Commissioner Rob Manfred concluding that the 2018 World Series champions’ sign-stealing efforts were less egregious than the Astros’ when they won it all the previous season.

Ex-manager Alex Cora was formally suspended for the coronavirus-delayed 2020 season — but only for his role as Houston’s bench coach; Manfred had held off a penalty for Cora despite fingering him as the ringleader of the Astros’ sign-stealing operation.

In a statement, Cora said he was “relieved” the investigations were finished and that Manfred found he “did not violate any MLB rules as a member of the Red Sox organization in 2018 or 2019.”

“I also take full responsibility for the role I played, along with others, in the Astros’ violations of MLB rules in 2017,” Cora said. “The collective conduct of the Astros organization in

The Boston Red Sox were stripped of their second-round pick in this year’s draft for breaking video rules in 2018 and former manager Alex Cora, pictured, was suspended through the 2020 postseason for his conduct as bench coach with the Houston Astros the previous year. Boston replay system operator J.T. Watkins — a 10th-round draft pick by the Red Sox in 2012 after a four-year career at Army — was also suspended without pay for a year.

GREGORY BULL / AP

TO OUR READERS As the sports world pauses to join the rest of the world in fighting the coronavirus pandemic, you will see fewer sports stories in Stars and Stripes. We look forward to resuming our normal coverage when the leagues and governing bodies determine it is safe for athletes and fans to return to competition.