The Air Force has failed to deal with racial disparities in military justice, report says

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

The Air Force has failed to make reforms to fix racial disparities within its justice system and withheld documents to hide its “abysmal record,” a watchdog group said.

“The Air Force has concealed records and discredited its own statistics, with leadership later doubting that disparities were as severe as their own data reveals, contrary to conclusions reached by (government and independent) investigations,” Protect Our Defenders said Wednesday in a report on racial disparities in military justice.

In 2017, the group published a report that found racial inequalities across the military justice system, with the Air Force cited as having some of the most extreme discrepancies.

In the Air Force, black airmen on average were 71% more likely to face court-martial or nonjudicial punishment than their white counterparts, according to the group's investigation at the time.

“Four years after the Air Force admitted the need to examine racial disparities, no recommendations have been formally made nor have any changes been implemented,” the report said.

Protect Our Defenders is led by retired Col. Don Christensen, a former chief prosecutor for the Air Force.

In 2019, the Government Accountability Office launched its own probe, which found that in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force, black, Hispanic and male service members were more likely to be investigated than white and female service members.

They were also more likely to be tried in general and special courts-martial, the GAO found in an analysis based on data from 2013-2017. However, the GAO found no statistically significant difference by sex or ethnicity in terms of convictions.

SEE REPORT ON PAGE 5
Cyprus to cover costs for tourists hit by virus

Associated Press

NICOSIA, Cyprus — Cyprus is pledging to cover all costs for anyone testing positive for the coronavirus while on vacation on the eastern Mediterranean island nation, according to a letter obtained by The Associated Press on Wednesday.

The Cypriot government says it will cover lodging, food, drink and medication for COVID-19 patients and their families. Patients will only have to pay for the taxi ride to the airport and the flight back home. A 100-bed hospital will cater exclusively to foreign travelers who test positive. About 112 intensive care units equipped with 200 respirators will be reserved for critically-ill patients. A 500-room “quarantine facility” will be reserved for patients’ family members and other close contacts.

The pledge came in a five-page letter dated Tuesday that was sent out to governments, airlines and tour operators outlining strict health and hygiene protocols that the government is enacting to woo visitors to the tourism-reliant country.

International air travel to Cyprus begins June 9, initially from 19 countries, with passengers required to undergo a COVID-19 test three days prior to departure. That measure will be lifted June 20 for 13 countries, including Germany, Finland, Israel, Greece and Norway.

Officials say travel will be expanded to more countries depending on a constant evaluation of their infection rates.
WASHINGTON — The No. 2 official in the Pentagon's office of inspector general, Glenn Fine, resigned Tuesday, several weeks after he was effectively removed as head of a special board to oversee auditing of the $2.2 trillion coronavirus economic relief package.

His departure, effective June 1, is the latest move in a broader shakeup of government watchdog agencies that Democrats call a politically motivated campaign by President Donald Trump to weaken government oversight.

On May 15, Trump fired the State Department's inspector general, Steve Linick, whose office was critical of what it saw as political bias in the State Department's management. In April, Trump also fired Michael Atkinson, the intelligence community inspector general who forwarded to Congress a whistleblower complaint that ultimately led to the president's impeachment in the House.

A spokesman for the Pentagon's Office of Inspector General, Dwayne Allen, said Fine was not asked to resign. Fine issued a brief written statement lauding the importance of government watchdogs. "The role of inspectors general is a strength of our system of government," Fine said. "They provide independent oversight to help improve government operations in a transparent way. They are a vital component of our system of checks and balances, and I am grateful to have been part of that system."

Fine, who received his law degree from Harvard, came to the Pentagon's inspector general's office as the No. 2 official in 2015 and had previously been inspector general at the Department of Justice from 2000 to 2011. He also is a former assistant United States attorney in Washington, D.C.

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Navy says Russian fighters intercepted P-8A Poseidon over international airspace

Stars and Stripes

Russian pilots in two Sukhoi Su-35 fighters flying in an "unsafe and unprofessional manner" intercepted a U.S. Navy P-8A Poseidon reconnaissance aircraft over the eastern Mediterranean Sea on Tuesday, according to the 6th Fleet.

The Russians intercepted the Poseidon over international waters and flew nearby for 65 minutes, according to a Navy statement issued Wednesday.

"The intercept was determined to be unsafe and unprofessional due to the Russian pilots taking close station on each wing of the P-8A simultaneously, restricting the P-8A's ability to safely maneuver," the statement said.

The incident is the third since April involving Russian and American fliers in that area, the statement added. The Americans did not provoke the Russian actions, according to the Navy.

The Russian aircraft were operating in international airspace, but their "interaction was irresponsible," the statement said. "We expect them to operate within international standards set to ensure safety and to prevent incidents. Actions like these increase the potential for midair collisions."
Air Force sends bombers over South China Sea

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

Two Air Force B-1B Lancer bombers flew over the South China Sea on Tuesday, the latest in an increasing number of United States military demonstrations in the region. Bombers deployed to Guam flew the mission to demonstrate the Air Force’s ability to operate anywhere international law allows, “at the time and tempo of our choosing,” Pacific Air Forces said via Twitter on Wednesday.

On April 29, two Lancers appeared over the South China Sea during a 32-hour round trip from Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D. That flight demonstrated the new “dynamic force employment model” aimed at making its global bomber presence less predictable, the Air Force said at the time.

On April 30, two B-1B bombers flew from Dyess Air Force Base, Texas, head for the South China Sea on Tuesday.

The squadron from Dyess arrived at Guam on May 1 with four B-1B bombers and about 200 airmen to train and conduct operations with allies and partners, the Air Force said at the time. Beijing deems such overflights “provocative,” and blames the U.S. for rising tensions between the two nations. China and several other countries have overlapping claims to portions of the South China Sea.

China disputes claims to portions of the South China Sea, a Pentagon official told Fox News in a May 19 report. Reed Werner, deputy assistant secretary of defense for SouthEast Asia, said that a Chinese vessel escorting a Chinese carrier maneuvered in an “unsafe and unprofessional way” near the guided-missile destroyer USS Mustin last month.

China may be preparing for 1st dual-carrier drills in South China Sea

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

China may deploy two aircraft carriers for the first time during an exercise in the South China Sea this summer, according to numerous media reports. The Chinese carriers Liaoning and Shandong have been conducting combat readiness training in the Yellow Sea this month ahead of deployment, the South China Morning Post reported Sunday.

“The aircraft carrier strike group will pass through the Pratas Islands on its way to the exercise site to the southeast of Taiwan in the Philippine Sea,” said the report, quoting an anonymous military source.

It’s unclear whether both the Liaoning, China’s first aircraft carrier, and the Shandong, commissioned at the end of last year, will proceed to the drills, the newspaper reported.

Britain’s Daily Mail reported Tuesday that plans to deploy the carriers play into fears of a Taiwan invasion after Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told reporters Sunday that “political forces in the U.S. are taking China-U.S. relations hostage and pushing our two countries to the brink of a new Cold War.”

A dual-carrier deployment by China would be “more symbolic than substantive,” Paul Buchanan, an American security analyst based in Auckland, New Zealand, told Reuters, noting that Beijing doesn’t have a lot of experience in carrier operations.

“They are posturing quite heavily,” he said, adding that such an exercise would be an “excessive maritime claims.”

Since mid-March, Chinese fighter jets have also harassed U.S. reconnaissance aircraft at least nine times in the South China Sea, a Pentagon official told Fox News in a May 19 report.

On April 28, two B-1B bombers flew over the South China Sea to demonstrate the Air Force’s new “dynamic force employment model.”

Pacific Air Forces tweeted Wednesday that B-1B Lancers from the 9th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron at Dyess Air Force Base, Texas, flew a mission out of Guam over the South China Sea on Tuesday.

The Chinese aircraft carrier Liaoning is pictured in July 2014.

The Chinese exercise comes at a time of heightened U.S. military activity in the region. The aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan left Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, a week ago on a routine patrol of the Western Pacific, just ahead of the carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, which returned to duty after a two-month layover in Guam due to a coronavirus outbreak among its crew in late March.

In mid-May, the Navy sent two littoral combat ships and a supply ship on patrol near a Malaysian drill rig in disputed waters of the South China Sea. The rig had been shadowed by Chinese research, coast guard and militia vessels, according to the Reuters news agency.

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Pacific Air Forces tweeted Wednesday that B-1B Lancers from the 9th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron at Dyess Air Force Base, Texas, flew a mission out of Guam over the South China Sea on Tuesday.

That day, plane spotters tweeted flight information showing that two B-1Bs and a refueling aircraft flew past southern Taiwan and close to Hong Kong.

The Chinese aircraft carrier Liaoning is pictured in July 2014.
Ramstein airmen find ways to train amid restrictions

By Jennifer H. Svan
Stars and Stripes

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany — Before the coronavirus upended routines around the world, airmen with the 435th Contingency Response Squadron would use a field near the German city of Worms or a drop zone in France to stay current on parachute jump requirements.

But in the last couple of months, restrictions have meant they’ve often used Ramstein’s airfield for jumps.

“We’ve done this about four or five times since COVID-19 started,” said Air Force Master Sgt. Jim Burke, an airfield manager with the squadron and a senior-rated jumpmaster. “This is a perishable skill.”

Parachuting over Ramstein kicked off the Agile Wolf exercise Tuesday, allowing the squadron to practice with other units its core missions of opening air bases and supporting mobility aircraft across Europe and Africa.

Agile Wolf, the third exercise of its kind since December, had to be tweaked because of the pandemic.

Airmen set up generators and pitched tents near the squadron building to simulate a deployed location, but no one spent the night in the makeshift outpost, said Maj. Brad Seehawer, the 435th CRS acting operations officer.

Plans were canceled to bring in contractors from France to “pretend to shoot us so we can pretend to shoot back,” Seehawer said.

Instead, the squadrons looked to soldiers from Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 214th Aviation Regiment, who flew a CH-47 Chinook from Katterbach Army Airfield near Ansbach to Ramstein.

At Ramstein, airmen practiced loading and rigging the heavy-lift helicopter with equipment they might need at an austere or contested airfield, including an all-terrain combat vehicle and a small motorcycle for patrols, as well as rations and other essential items.

“We have the ability to deploy on a helicopter,” Seehawer said. “We just don’t get a lot of practice with it.”

The exercise, which runs through Thursday, will also allow airmen to practice hot-pit refueling, where F-16 fighter jets from Spangdahlem will land at Ramstein and get fuel without stopping their engines. A team of airmen from the 435th also will drive to Spangdahlem and direct a Ramstein C-130 to land using mobile navigation tools.

“Strenuous review needs to take place to truly measure how different demographics of Airmen are receiving punishments/corrective actions prior to legal infractions occurring,” the slide stated. “One of the most important questions that we must be able to answer in the affirmative is: Are we being equitable and consistent with, and for, all Airmen at all points through these disciplinary processes?”

The slides were undated but acknowledged a “persistent” and “systemic failure,” it said. “We recognize there is still work to do in this area,” an Air Force working group said in a talking point slide the service was court-ordered to release, according to the report.

Another slide stated more focus and action on the issue is needed during investigations that “are happening prior to Airmen entering into the Article 15 and Court of Criminal processes.”

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Documents also showed the Air Force working group only met for 90 days, kept few official records, made superficial recommendations and never formally briefed senior leaders, the report said.

“Instead, the service engaged in a multi-year effort to keep the findings and recommendations from the working group hidden,” the report said. “It remains to be asked why the Air Force fought so hard to keep the information from the public, and at what level were those efforts being directed.”

The report recommended that Congress hold annual hearings on racial disparity in the military justice system as a means for holding the service branches accountable.

“‘The military should not be able to keep information from the public simply because it is embarrassing or exposes systemic failures,’” it said.


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Report: Annual hearings on racial disparity in military justice system recommended

FROM FRONT PAGE

The investigations prompted Congress in December to order that services track race and ethnicity within the justice system in an effort to root out unfairness.

The latest Protect our Defenders report said the Air Force has failed to take significant action and that a “racial disparity team established to deal with the issue was window dressing.”

“A three-year effort by POD found that the creation of the disparity team appeared to be an attempt to deflect from the Air Force’s abysmal record,” the group stated.

The Air Force didn’t respond to requests for comment Wednesday.

Documents obtained earlier this year after a series of court fights showed that the Air Force acknowledged a “persistent” and “consistent” racial disparity in military justice, but did nothing about it, the report said.

“We recognize there is still work to do in this area,” an Air Force working group said in a talking point slide the service was court-ordered to release, according to the report.

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By Matthew M. Burke
Stars and Stripes

FBI: Only 1 attacker involved in Texas naval base shooting

HOUSTON — The FBI said Tuesday that its investigation points to only one attacker in the shooting at a Texas naval air base, days after the agency suggested another person involved might be on the loose.

FBI Supervisory Senior Resident Agent Leah Greeves said last week that investigators were working to determine whether a second person of interest was at large following the shooting at Naval Air Station Corpus Christi. The Thursday attack left a sailor wounded and the gunman dead.

But the agency's Houston office said Tuesday on Twitter that "while there was initial concern about a potential second person of interest, intense investigation leads us now to believe there was not." The FBI also repeated that the shooter made "terror-related incident," without elaborating on what that means. Two officials familiar with the investigation previously told The Associated Press that agents were examining social media posts they believe the shooter made expressing support for extremist groups, including al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula.

Officials have identified the gunman as Adam Salim Alsahli, 20, a Corpus Christi resident who had been a student at a local community college.

Security officers shot and killed him after he opened fire while trying to drive a truck through a base entry gate.

The FBI said Tuesday that Alsahli was a Syria-born American citizen.

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By Kim Gamel
Stars and Stripes

Police refer charges against soldier, civilian in robbery

Pair accused of theft from Okinawa currency exchange shop

Okinawa police say this currency exchange shop near Camp Foster was robbed by two English-speaking masked men on May 12.

USFK worker helps stop apparent suicide attempts

By Aya Ichihashi
Stars and Stripes

SEOUl, South Korea — Andres Torres was out for an early morning bike ride when he spotted two South Korean men perched dangerously on the tall barriers lining the Mapo Bridge in Seoul.

Torres, who works for the Defense Intelligence Agency on Yongsan Garrison, couldn't remember the local emergency number (119) and doesn't speak much Korean but felt he had to do something to keep them from jumping.

"I was just telling them, 'This is not a good idea. You don't want to do this. It's a beautiful day outside,'" he said, describing the May 21 incident. "I just grabbed, but at least I got their attention for a little bit."

The city installed 8.5-foot-high, curved barriers along the bridge in 2016 to keep people from trying to jump as it had become a popular spot for suicide attempts.

The episode took about 15 minutes, Torres said.

But the men had managed to climb on top. Torres, 34, of Mount Pleasant, S.C., said he also showed them a photo of his daughter that he has on his phone as a way of showing them "there's a lot more to live for."

One of the men took notice and climbed down, stumbling and hitting his head, but the second man remained on the fence, he said.

Torres tried to flag down an emergency vehicle that drove by and waved at the closed-circuit TV cameras on the bridge to try to get somebody's attention.

A rescue dive boat eventually appeared on the Han River below.

"Then finally I noticed that the traffic stopped on the bridge coming my direction, then the fire trucks came out and stopped. They rushed to him and grabbed him. They got him off the top," Torres said.

Torres said one of the firefighters thanked him in English. He snapped a photo of the scene before riding away.

An officer at the Youngdeungpo fire station said rescue crews that responded to a call at 5:48 a.m. May 21 found two South Korean men on the bridge barrier, then turned them over to police. He couldn't provide more details.

Stars and Stripes reporter Yoo Kyong Chang contributed to this report.

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Associated Press

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VIRUS OUTBREAK

Pentagon easing stop-movement restrictions

By Caitlin M. Kenney
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Some military bases will be able to begin bringing some workers and take the first major step toward a return to normal operations this week, the Pentagon said Tuesday.

The announcement came as the Pentagon laid out detailed plans that will govern how the department and its forces around the world will gradually and systematically begin to lift restrictions put in place by the global coronavirus pandemic. Defense officials did not say how many bases or where they were, but said the locations would be made public.

Speaking to Pentagon reporters, Matthew Donovan, the department’s under secretary for personnel, said that some locations will be able to “go green immediately” based on the conditions in their region and a downward trend in virus cases or positive COVID-19 tests that has lasted for two weeks. He said the locations would be on a list that will be released, and would conform with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention assessments of regions where the virus was declining.

Until now, all Defense Department installations have been at “phase zero” which requires that at least 80% of the workforce be remotely teleworking, and mandates social distancing, masks and other health precautions.

Under the plans released Tuesday, there are four more phases. Each one calls for a two-week decline in virus cases and other conditions at the base and the surrounding community in order to move to the next phase.

According to Donovan, the bases which could “go green” and move from phase zero to phase one as of Tuesday night will have met a number of conditions for both the installation and its surrounding region. Those conditions include the two-week downward trend of virus cases, adequate availability of health care, testing, day care, personal protective equipment and accessible transit.

Those facilities could begin to decrease the number of people teleworking to 60% and start having gatherings of up to 10 people, as long as that is consistent with the social distancing. At phase two, gyms and some expanded food court choices could open, with social distancing, and as little as 20% of the workforce could be teleworking. And if all goes well for another two weeks, bases would move to phase three, which allows workers to return to their offices, with exceptions allowed for individuals.

The Pentagon, for example, has currently seen a downward trend in virus cases for eight days. But any move to the next phase would be contingent on a similar decline in the region, along with removal of local and state stay-at-home orders currently in place and the availability of day care, transit and other health services.

The decisions are made by the military service secretaries and combatant commanders around the world.

Some US bases take first steps to return to normal

Associated Press

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Ill. reservist is third US service member to die of coronavirus

By Corey Dickstein
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A 34-year-old Army reservist from Illinois died Friday from coronavirus complications, becoming the third service member to succumb to the illness that has sickened more than 6,000 U.S. troops, service officials said Wednesday.

Sgt. Simon Zamudio died at a suburban Chicago hospital after contracting the virus, according to Army officials and an obituary announced Monday. He had served in the Army Reserve since October 2015 and he had been promoted to sergeant in April, said Lt. Col. Simon Flake, a spokesman for the Army Reserve.

Zamudio was assigned to the 477th Theater Sustainment Control Element at Fort Sheridan, Ill. Flake said. Defense officials on Tuesday incorrectly said he had been assigned to a unit based in Wisconsin.

Zamudio was born in Phoe-

nix and lived in Carpentersville, Ill. He is survived by his wife and a daughter, according to his obituary.

His death is the second among Army soldiers and the first U.S. service member death from the virus since April 13, when Navy Chief Petty Officer Robert Thacker Jr. died of complications of the virus at U.S. Naval Hospital Guam. The 41-year-old sailor was among more than 1,000 crew members ordered to contract the disease aboard the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, by far the military’s worst coronavirus outbreak.

Army Capt. Douglas Linn Hickock, a member of the New Jersey National Guard, died March 28. Hickock, 57, a physician’s assistant, was preparing to activate as part of the pandemic response just before he was hospital-

ized with the virus and died one week later.

The Pentagon said Wednes-

day that 6,168 service members had tested positive for the virus. Among them, 168 had spent some time in the hospital and 3,474 had recovered.

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Basic training to continue at Keesler AFB

By Rose L. Thayer
Stars and Stripes

AUSTIN, Texas — The Air Force will begin sending 60 recruits each week to basic training at Keesler Air Force Base in Mississippi starting next week to allow more physical distance between recruits and prepare other training infrastructure to operate under the threat of the coronavirus for the next year.

The decision to use the base in Biloxi followed a trial run, which began April 7, and exposed some of the challenges to hosting basic training outside of Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio. Recruits will arrive weekly through the fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30, said Maj. Gen. Andrea Tullos, commander of the 2nd Air Force, which is in charge of all service training.

Basic training at Keesler includes using facilities located at nearby Camp Shelby, a Mississippi National Guard base in Hattiesburg.

The Air Force reduced the weekly number of recruits going to Lackland from up to 800 to 460 in March after a weeklong pause to clean facilities and implement physical distancing protocols. As Keesler begins to take recruits in June, Lackland will increase its level of recruits to about 640, with a goal of bringing in 9,400 new airmen by the end of September.

Tullos was not concerned with the training recruits receive, but rather the strain of providing the supplemental support — such as administrative, medical and logistics personnel — required to host basic training for recruits. At its capacity, Keesler can take on 360 recruits at a time.

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“We are extremely proud of our Soldiers and the historic medical response they provided to a region vandalized by a global pandemic,” said Capt. Mike Hart, commander of the 501st Medical Company.

On returning, the service members began quarantining as a safety precaution. As soon as their quarantine is complete, the post plans an official welcome home ceremony.

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Iran’s newly elected parliament convenes despite pandemic

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran’s newly elected parliament convened on Wednesday, dominated by conservative lawmakers and under strict social distancing regulations, as the country struggles to curb the spread of the coronavirus that has hit the nation hard.

Iranian state TV said all 268 lawmakers who were in attendance had tested negative for the virus. The lawmakers were sworn in after many of them arrived for the opening ceremony wearing face masks and observing social distancing regulations. Temperatures were taken before they entered the parliament building.

However, images from the meeting showed that many did not wear masks and did not observe social distancing during proceedings.

Iran is grappling with the deadliest outbreak in the Middle East, with more than 7,500 fatalities out of over 141,500 confirmed cases. Turkey has the region’s largest outbreak, with 158,700 confirmed cases and more than 4,390 deaths.

At Wednesday’s opening session, Iranian lawmakers chose a temporary speaker, based on age seniority, and listened to a message from Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, read by an aid. President Hassan Rouhani addressed the lawmakers, urging them to cooperate with his administration so that the Iranians can better “confront sanctions and the disease” in this “very difficult year.”

The lawmakers were to elect a permanent parliament speaker on Thursday, for a one-year term.
WASHINGTON — Deadlocked over the next big coronavirus relief bill, Congress is shifting the attention to a more modest overhaul of small-business aid in hopes of helping employers reopen shops and survive the pandemic.

Bipartisan legislation that would give small employers more time to tap on federal subsidies for payroll and other costs is expected to pass the House this week, as lawmakers return from a coronavirus-shortened abbreviated two-day session.

Yet absent from the agenda is formal talks between congressional leaders on the next phase of the federal coronavirus response. Democrats have already pushed a $3 trillion-plus measure through the House, but negotiations with the GOP-controlled Senate and White House have yet to begin.

“We can’t keep propping up the economy forever,” Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said Tuesday. “We have to begin to make business decisions.” It was one of his first public appearances in his home state since mid-March.

“The ultimate solution is to begin to get back to normal,” he said. “There are three things that are essential to have full normalcy — testing, treatment and vaccine.”

Senate Republicans are divided on the next steps and wary of any other sprawling negotiation where Democrats and the White House call the shots. They are also split on a central element — how much aid to provide state and local governments and other coronavirus response after earlier relief bills totaled almost $3 trillion.

Even as they hit “pause” on a large bill, lawmakers are enthusiastic about improving the Paycheck Protection Program, which was established in March under the $2 trillion coronavirus relief bill and was replenished last month. All told, Congress has provided about $600 billion for the program.

Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., a key architect of the aid, said in an interview that the program has shifted from one that was intended to keep paychecks flowing during the shutdown to a bridge to help businesses pay workers as they reopen — in many cases, at less than full capacity.

“It’s taken on a different level of importance now,” Rubio said. “The program has evolved from simply keeping people from getting unemployed to actually helping rehire people as these businesses open up but the cash flow lags.”

The House bill would provide a 24-week window to spend PPP funds and would eliminate a requirement that 75% of the forgivable loans be used for payroll costs. The goal is to give businesses more flexibility to pay rent and other overhead costs such as installing protective equipment.

Under the current method, businesses are required to spend their loan money within the eight-week window to have their loans forgiven. That deadline is fast approaching. Without forgiveness, they would face a debt burden that, for many, would be hard to bear in a struggling economy.

But the eight-week window has created a problem, particularly for restaurants. Under the law, they were required to rehire all their laid-off workers despite being closed or limited to takeout and delivery. Many restaurant owners feared that they would use up their loan money before being allowed to reopen, or reopening with reduced revenue because of social distancing requirements.

The House’s return to Washington on Tuesday marks the first time since March that House Republicans — who are on recess after spending the past three months fighting a $1 trillion bill — have been tackling the new system of proxy voting.

Approved by House Democrats earlier this month, the new system of proxy voting was created to allow lawmakers to vote from their home states. The lower chamber’s current leader, Rep. Jeff Van Drew, D-N.J., said the system works well.

House GOP leader Kevin McCarthy’s office announced it was filing a lawsuit Tuesday against the new system of proxy voting. Approved by House Democrats earlier this month, the new system of proxy voting was created to allow lawmakers to vote from their home states.

Re-elected, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said the chamber’s new system of proxy voting will continue.

The panic buying, the over-buying, the emotional buying aren’t unique to this extraordinary world-shaking event, but it’s the kind of world-shaking event that sent the world home with plenty of anxiety and few shopping options other than the online kind.

In the U.S., retail sales tumbled by a record 16.3% from March to April as business shutdowns caused by the coronavirus kept shoppers away, threatened stores and weighed down a tattered economy. The Commerce Department reported that a long-standing migration toward online purchases accelerated, posting an 8.4% monthly gain.

Measured year over year, online sales surged 21.1%.

“It’s panic on lots of levels,” said Wendy Liebbman, CEO of WSL Strategic Retail, a global consulting firm specializing in retail strategy and shopper insights. “All of the traditional buying patterns are tossed up in the air.”

She called it “shopping chaos” with no anchors. And the chaos has come with some unique calculus.

One couple got to skip their last preschool payment due to lockdown and purchased the couch of their dreams. Christine Alonzo Carlisle, 45, was awash in refunds for Carmel, Ind., where she’s sheltering with her husband and two teenage daughters.

“My big family spring break trip, that I’d spent a year planning, was canceled and refunded. All of my kids’ summer camps were refunded. Concerts were refunded. Club sports were refunded. Random refunds were just popping up like crazy on my credit card account,” she said.

“The only good thing is that I can’t go to the gym,” said Carlisle.

Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md., said there isn’t much legislation for floor votes if Senate committees are just beginning to write must-pass legislation like the $2 trillion coronavirus relief bill, defense policy measure and a major reauthorization of water projects.

In the meantime, Democrats are focused on touting the more than $3 trillion measure that they passed earlier this month.

Some have gone shopping mad during the pandemic

By Jeanne Italie

NEW YORK — Between technical glitches and food worries, retail therapy and sheer amnesia, something has happened to shopping during the pandemic that can be summed up thusly: rubber chickens.

Melissa Jean Footlick bought some while sheltering at home in San Diego with her husband and three dogs. She’s a kidney transplant patient so she’s been taking extra care. She’s among millions who have helped online retail sales surge as consumer spending fell off rapidly when businesses shut down.

“I spent two hours trying to find a Punfetti cake mix and frosting. No reason, just I wanted it. I also got a game where you throw rubber chickens at a target. I misread the description and thought it was like badminton with rubber chickens,” she explained.

Said husband and dogs have yet to agree to a game.

For others, shopping madness has been about the essentials, only super-sized: 10-pound bags of rice; 25-pound sacks of flour; 50 pounds worth of sugar; pickles and pancake mix for a crowd.

For some, it’s impulse shoe purchases, with nowhere to go. And mistaken multiple purchases of something with a single container was the goal.

Remember the toilet paper scare? George Pav found some in an unlikely place in Berlin.

“When the mayor of Berlin announced the lockdown, I knew

that I wouldn’t have the chance to drink a cup of coffee from a cafe for quite some time. My first thought was to find a cafe and enjoy an espresso. Als, most of them were already shut,” he recalled.

He ventured into one, but a woman there said they were closed.

“No coffee. Then I looked behind her. There was a pile of toilet paper. She said she was selling them for 50 cents per cake,” Pav said.

He bought four squares.

For Beth Wilson of New York, it was a bistro table and chairs to match the ones at a Paris cafe where she and her husband “ate with no anchors. And the chaos has come with some unique calculus.

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Some have gone shopping mad during the pandemic
South Korea’s spike in cases illustrates perils of reopening

By the numbers

21.97
Coronavirus incidence rate per 100,000 people in South Korea.

5.6M
How many people worldwide have been infected with COVID-19.

People wearing face masks arrive at the domestic flight terminal of Gimpo airport in Seoul, South Korea, Wednesday, the first day authorities required all passengers to wear masks amid the pandemic.

Associated Press

**Geneva** — More than one in every six young workers have stopped working during the coronavirus pandemic, the U.N. labor agency reported Wednesday, warning of a prolonged job fallout that could lead to a “lock-down generation” if steps aren’t taken to ease the crisis.

Across the Atlantic, the pandemic claimed new victims as evidenced by the confirmed U.S. death toll: 600,000 — the highest in the world — and nations from Mexico to Chile to Brazil struggled with surging cases and overwhelmed hospitals.

In South Korea, 40 newly confirmed cases — the biggest daily jump in nearly 50 days — raised alarms as millions of children returned to school Wednesday.

All four of the new cases were in the densely populated Seoul region, where officials are scrapping to stop transmissions linked to nightclubs, karaoke rooms and a massive e-commerce warehouse. All were reopened last month when social distancing measures were relaxed.

The country’s top infectious disease expert said South Korea may need to reimpose its social distancing restrictions because it’s becoming increasingly difficult for health workers to track the spread of COVID-19 amid warmer weather and eased attitudes on distancing.

“So we will do our best to trace contacts and implement preventive measures, but there’s a limit to such efforts,” said Jeong Eun-kyeong, director of South Korea’s Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“People have a very broad range of activity, so at the point of diagnosis, there’s already a lot of exposure. ... The number of people or locations we have to trace are increasing geometrically,” he added.

Seoul and nearby cities in recent weeks have re-closed thousands of bars, karaoke rooms and other entertainment venues to slow the spread of the virus.

Britain, which has recorded more deaths than any other European country — more than 37,000 — announced the details of its own “test and trace” plans to send out 25,000 workers to find contacts of those who test positive. Germany said it would extend pandemic-related restrictions on personal contact until June 29.

As many countries in Asia and Europe make progress in containing the pandemic, reversing its devastating economic fallout becomes a top priority.

Even as the 27-nation EU unveiled its recovery plan, the bloc remained deeply divided over what strings should be attached to the funds, with frugal members such as Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden pushing for loans rather than grants.

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**By Guy Ryder, ILO Director General**

“I don’t think it is giving way to hyperbole to talk about the danger of a lock-down generation,” Ryder said.

“Of those still working, nearly one in four — or 23% — have seen their working hours reduced, the ILO said, pointing to a “triple shock” faced by young workers: Destruction of their work, disruption of their training and education, and obstacles moving in the work force or entering it in the first place.

“We run the risk of creating a situation — in this sort of snapshot of pandemic — which will have lasting effects,” Ryder told a virtual news conference from the ILO headquarters.

“A lot of young people are simply going to be left behind in big numbers,” Ryder said.

“And this is — and again, this is the lesson of past experience — that initial shock to young people will last a decade or longer than a decade,” Ryder said.

“It will affect the trajectory of working people, young working people, throughout their working lives.”

The ILO said policymakers can take steps to ease the fallout, such as by providing “guarantees” to protect employment and skills, and rolling out COVID-19 “testing and tracing” measures that can help improve workplace safety and get people back to work faster and more safely.

The report is based on a survey that the ILO and its partners conducted on youth employment. The agency says young people were already in a precarious position relative to other age categories, with work rates still below those before the 2008 economic crisis.

Of the 178 million young workers employed around the world, more than 40% were in “hard-hit sectors when the crisis began,” such as food services and hospitality industries, the ILO said.

More than three-fourths of young workers are in “informal” jobs — including 94% of young workers in Africa alone.
Los Angeles County stores, houses of worship can reopen

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — California moved to further relax its coronavirus restrictions and help the battered economy on Tuesday by allowing retail stores, hair salons to reopen, while Los Angeles County, moving more cautiously, said that stores and houses of worship can open their doors.

The state’s most populous county — and the hardest-hit by the coronavirus — moved to permit in-person shopping and religious services with restrictions, a day after California announced that counties wouldn’t need to meet certain criteria to do so if certain requirements were met.

Retail stores — including those at shopping malls — can open at 50% capacity. Churches, mosques, synagogues and temples can have no more than 25% of building capacity on 100 guests. Everyone will be urged to wear masks and practice social distancing.

The decision was a surprise because only days ago, officials were talking about July 4 as a target date for such a reopening. But since L.A. County’s fiscal year started already, officials have already reopened stores, placing L.A. County at an economic disadvantage by limiting its businesses to curbside pickups and deliveries.

Arkansas

LITTLE ROCK — Arkansas’ top health official said Tuesday that he will step down this summer, but he has no disagreement with the governor’s response to the coronavirus pandemic, even as new cases continued to rise.

Gov. Asa Hutchinson said that Dr. Nate Smith, the state’s health secretary, is leaving Aug. 28 for a job with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Hutchinson said that Dr. Jose Romero, the department’s chief medical officer, will be the health department’s interim head.

Smith’s decision comes days after Hutchinson said that the state was seeing a “second peak” of coronavirus cases. The number of active virus cases — excluding those who have recovered or died — has steadily increased over the past month.

Washington, D.C.

The White House said Tuesday that President Donald Trump remains committed to holding a Fourth of July celebration in the nation’s capital even as Democratic lawmakers from the region — one of the hardest hit by the coronavirus — warn that the area will not be ready to host a major event.

White House spokesman Judd Deere reiterated that Trump wants to hold an Independence Day celebration after members of Congress wrote on Tuesday to Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Interior Secretary David Bernhardt to raise their concerns about the safety of such an event.

In their letter, the D.C.-area members wrote that “such an event would needlessly risk the health and safety of thousands of Americans.” The letter was organized by Rep. Don Beyer, D-Va., and signed by 10 other congressional Democrats with constituencies in the District of Columbia, Virginia and Maryland.

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Florida

TALLAHASSEE — The state of Florida might have lost nearly $900 million in tax revenue in April — far more than state officials anticipated — as the coronavirus pandemic shut down airports, tourist dollars and other revenue from the state’s coffers, according to estimates released Tuesday.

Lawmakers had voted to forward the $93.2 billion budget it approved in March to Gov. Ron DeSantis for his signature. Lawmakers agreed to the budget just days after the governor began shuttering some businesses and putting stay-at-home orders in place.

The budget that lawmakers approved included $300 million in extra reserves to help address the economic hardship wrought by the outbreak. The budget also includes $25.2 million requested by the governor to directly combat the virus, and $27 million in emergency funds from the federal government.

Kansas

TOPEKA — Kansas’ Democratic governor on Tuesday vetoed a sweeping Republican coronavirus measure that would have limited her power to direct the state’s pandemic response, but then signed the law into effect, giving her some limited tools to take action.

Gov. Laura Kelly not only killed a bill approved by the GOP-controlled Legislature last week, but also issued a new state-of-emergency declaration to replace one set to expire Tuesday night. Many Republicans have questioned whether she has the legal authority to do that — and retain the governor’s broad emergency powers — so her action is likely to keep the crisis hot.

Kelly also heightened the potential conflict with GOP leaders by calling the Legislature back into special session in June 3 to extend the new state of emergency past June 10. Republicans have a long list of proposals, however, including shielding businesses and health care providers from possible coronavirus-related lawsuits.

Lawmakers ended their 2020 session in a single, frenzied 24-hour stretch after reconvening Thursday from a coronavirus-mandated spring break that started March 20. Kelly called the process of pushing through the bill “messy, confusing and complicated.”

Kentucky

FRANKFORT — Vowing not to back down after armed protesters stormed his home and hung him in effigy, the governor of Kentucky on Tuesday condemned their use of “fear and terror” in a demonstration fueled by coronavirus restrictions.

Gov. Andy Beshear referred to the protesters as a mob in sharply condemning the weekend rally that spread to the Governor’s Mansion, where his children play. And the Democratic governor bluntly accused some Kentucky politicians of culpability for attending a previous rally.

Beshear said that he would not be deterred by the demonstration. He has planned to reopen the state safely, phasing in business restarts amid the health crisis. Nonessential retail stores and restaurant dining rooms have been among the reopenings, though with restrictions meant to adhere to social distancing. Beshear has also strongly urged the wearing of masks.

The ferry was hung in a tree near the State Capitol during what was billed as a protest rally in defense of constitutional rights, including the right to bear arms. The rally turned into a protest against coronavirus restrictions kept in place three months after the governor distanced according to media reports, with protesters chanting outside the governor’s Mansion for him to come outside.

North Carolina

CHARLOTTE — President Donald Trump’s demand for a full-capacity Republican convention in August is putting pressure on North Carolina health officials — and local Republicans — as coronavirus cases surge in the host county and state.

Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper’s administration has refused to give in, though, responding with a letter demanding a written safety plan from officials of the Republican National Convention, slated for August in Charlotte. Even local Republican officials have noted that Trump doesn’t have the power to unilaterally move the event scheduled to start in 90 days after two years of planning.

Asked about Trump’s tweets threatening to move the convention, Cooper said Tuesday that he’s “not surprised at anything that happens on Twitter,” without mentioning the president by name. He said that discussions with RNC organizers are continuing.

State Health and Human Services Secretary Mandy Cohen’s letter signed Monday asked Republican convention organizers for a written COVID-19 safety plan “as soon as possible,” noting that Cohen and Cooper discussed various scenarios with GOP officials by phone Friday. She wrote that it’s important to plan for multiple options because the “status of COVID-19 infections in our state and in the Charlotte area continues to rapidly evolve.”

New York

NEW YORK — After weeks of developments in hospitalizations and hospitalizations, Gov. Andrew Cuomo said that it was time to focus on launching New York City’s moribund economy.

The Democratic governor laid out a plan that included accelerating major infrastructure projects and tackling transmission of the virus in the hardest-hit neighborhoods after ringing open the Stock Exchange.

On Tuesday, the mid-Hudson Valley, including the city’s northern suburbs, became the latest region of New York state to begin slowly phasing in economic activity. Long Island was expected to follow Wednesday, which would leave New York City as the only main economic engine to wait the start of reopening.

Cuomo said that the state will direct breakout-fighting resources to 10 city ZIP codes that account for many of the new hospitalizations. Those cases are coming from mostly lower-income and predominantly minority neighborhoods, he said.
Swift firings for Minn. officers in man’s death

MINNEAPOLIS — To the general public, the video of a white police officer pressing his knee into the neck of a black man prone on the street, crying out for help until he finally stopped moving, was horrifying.

Four officers were fired a day after George Floyd’s death, a stunning and swift move by the Minneapolis chief with the mayor’s full backing. But despite their dismissal, whether the incident will be considered criminal, or even excessive force, is a more complicated question that will likely take months to investigate.

The officers were dismissed soon after a bystander’s video taken outside a south Minneapolis grocery store Monday showed an officer kneeling on the handcuffed man’s neck, even after he pleaded that he could not breathe and stopped moving. Floyd’s death prompted protests Tuesday, with thousands gathering at the intersection where he died.

Many protesters marched 2 miles to the police precinct station in that part of the city, with some damaging the building’s windows and squad cars and spraying graffiti. Police in riot gear eventually confronted them with tear gas and projectiles, with some damaging the building’s windows and squad cars.

US closes stock-trade probes into 3 senators, but not Burr

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department has closed investigations into stock trading by Sens. Dianne Feinstein, of California; Kelly Loeffler, of Georgia; and Jim Inhofe, of Oklahoma, according to people familiar with the contacts but not authorized to speak about them.

Like Loeffler, both Inhofe and Feinstein are senators in competitive reelection races, and their husbands sold large portions of their portfolios around the time Congress was receiving briefings on the seriousness of the pandemic. Loeffler’s husband, Jeffrey Sprecher, is chairman of the New York Stock Exchange, and she has said the accounts were managed by third-party advisers.

Feinstein, a Democrat, reported that her husband sold off between $1.5 million and $6 million worth of stock in Allogene Therapeutics before the market drop. The San Francisco-based biotech company researches and develops cures for cancer. Inhofe, a Republican, sold anywhere between roughly $395,000 and $850,000 worth of stock he held in late January and early February, according to a disclosure.

Burr has denied any wrongdoing.

The developments indicate that federal law enforcement officials are narrowing their focus in the stock investigation to Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., the former Senate Intelligence Committee chairman. Agents showed up at his Washington-area home last week...
Trump warns social media after Twitter fact checks

By Zeke Miller
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on Wednesday threatened social media companies with new regulation or even shuttering a day after Twitter added fact checks to two of his tweets.

The president can’t unilaterally regulate or close the companies, which would require action by Congress or the Federal Communications Commission. But that didn’t stop Trump from angrily issuing a strong warning.

Claiming tech giants “silence conservative voices,” Trump tweeted, “We will strongly regulate, or close them down, before we can ever allow this to happen.”

And he repeated his unsubstantiated claim — which sparked his latest showdown with Silicon Valley — that expanding mail-in voting “would be a free for all on cheating, forgery and the theft of Ballots.”

Trump and his campaign angrily lashed out Tuesday after Twitter added a warning phrase to two Trump tweets that called mail-in ballots “fraudulent” and predicted that “mail boxes will be robbed,” among other things. Under the tweets, there is now a link reading “Get the facts about mail-in ballots” that guides users to a Twitter “moments” page with fact checks and news stories about Trump’s unsubstantiated claims.

Trump replied on Twitter, accusing the platform of “interfering in the 2020 Presidential Election” and insisting that “as president, I will not allow this to happen.” His 2020 campaign manager, Brad Parscale, said Twitter’s “clear political bias” had led the campaign to pull “all our advertising from Twitter months ago.”

Twitter has banned all political advertising since last November.

The call to expand regulation appeared to fly in the face of long-held conservative principles on deregulation. But some Trump allies, who have alleged bias on the part of tech companies, have questioned whether platforms like Twitter and Facebook should continue to enjoy liability protections as “platforms” under federal law — or be treated more like publishers, which could face lawsuits over content.

The protections have been credited with allowing the unfiltered growth of the internet for more than two decades, but now some Trump allies are advocating that social media companies face more scrutiny.

“Big tech gets a huge handout from the federal government,” Republican Sen. Josh Hawley told Fox News. “They get this special immunity, this special immunity from suits and from liability that’s worth billions of dollars to them every year. Why are they getting subsidized by federal taxpayers to censor conservatives, to censor people critical of China.”

White House letter doesn’t explain why watchdogs were fired

Associated Press
WASHINGTON — The White House said that President Donald Trump followed the law when he fired multiple inspectors general in the last two months, but the administration offered no new details about why they were let go.

A White House letter issued Tuesday in response to concerns from a prominent Republican senator does little to explain the decision-making behind Trump’s recent upheaval of the inspector general community. It is unlikely to quell outrage from Democrats and good-government groups who fear the president is moving to dismantle a post-Watergate network of watchdogs.

Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa — a longtime, self-appointed defender of inspectors general and congressional oversight — requested that the White House explain the basis for the firings in April and May.

The response Tuesday from White House counsel Pat Cipollone does not provide those details, instead making the points that Trump has the authority to remove inspectors general, that he appropriately alerted Congress and that he selected qualified officials as replacements.

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Reading Stars and Stripes gives you a better handle on issues that affect you most.

No one covers the bases the way we do.
**By Zen Soo**

**Associated Press**

HONG KONG — Thousands of protesters shouted pro-democracy slogans and insulted at police in Hong Kong on Wednesday as lawmakers debated a bill criminalizing abuse of the Chinese national anthem in the semi-autonomous city.

Police massed outside the legislative building ahead of the session and warned protesters that if they did not disperse, they could be prosecuted.

In the central business district, police raised flags warning protesters to disperse before they shot pepper balls at the crowd and arrested several people. More than 50 people in the Causeway Bay shopping district were rounded up and made to sit outside a shopping mall, while riot police with pepper spray patrolled and warned journalists to stop filming.

Nearly 300 people were arrested across Hong Kong for unauthorized assembly, according to Facebook posts by the Hong Kong police force.

The bill would make it illegal to insult or abuse the Chinese national anthem, "March of the Volunteers" in semi-autonomous Hong Kong. Those guilty of the offense would face up to three years in prison and a fine of $6,450.

Opponents have called the bill a threat to freedom of expression in the city, while Beijing officials have said that it will foster a patriotic spirit and socialist values.

"Western democracies all have laws to protect their national flags, national anthems and emblems. Any insult to these symbols would also be criminal," pro-Beijing lawmaker Tony Tse said in the legislative debate.

Tse said that the bill would not affect human rights or force people to love the country or support any political power.

"The purpose of this is to protect the dignity of a country," he said.

Pro-democracy lawmaker Charles Mok disagreed, saying that the legislation would not help gain the respect of people and was an excuse to control freedom, speech and ideas of people.

"We oppose the second reading of the national anthem bill, not because we don't respect the national anthem," Mok said. "The national anthem is a symbol of the country's dignity. If it wants to be respected, then let this government first respect the rights and freedoms of its people first.

The bill was proposed in January 2019 after spectators from Hong Kong jeered at the anthem during high-profile international soccer matches in 2015. Last year, FIFA fined the Hong Kong Football Association after fans booed the national anthem at a World Cup qualifying game.

Hong Kong was returned to China from British colonial rule in 1997 under a "one country, two systems" framework that promised freedoms not found on the mainland. Anti-China sentiment has risen as residents see Beijing moving to erode those rights.

Legislation proposed in Hong Kong last year that would have allowed residents to be sent to mainland China for trials set off months of demonstrations that at times involved clashes between protesters and police. The legislation was withdrawn.

China's ceremonial parliament, now meeting in Beijing, has moved to enact a national security law for Hong Kong aimed at curbing secessionist and subversive activity, as well as foreign influences.

China's own government has been unable to pass such legislation due to opposition in the city, and Beijing advanced the law itself after the protests last year.

Asked about possible United States retaliation over the security legislation, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Li said that China would take necessary steps to fight back against what he called "erroneous foreign interference in Hong Kong's affairs."

**By Aljaz Hussain**

**Associated Press**

SRINAGAR, India — Indian and Chinese soldiers are in a bitter standoff in the remote and picturesque Ladakh region, with the two countries amassing soldiers and machinery near the tense frontier, Indian officials said.

The standoff began in early May when large contingents of Chinese soldiers entered deep into India's Line-of-Control territory at three places in Ladakh, erecting tents and posts, the officials said.

They said that the soldiers ignored repeated verbal warnings, triggering a yelling match, stone-throwing and even fist fights in at least one place along Pangong Lake, the site of several such confrontations in the past.

The five officials, including two military, two police and one civilian administrator, spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said Wednesday that the situation on the China-India border was "generally stable and controllable."

"The sides were communicating through both their front-line military units and their respective embassies to 'properly resolve relevant issues through dialogue and consultation,'" Zhao said at a news conference in Beijing.

"China is committed to abiding by agreements signed by the sides and to 'maintaining peace and stability in the border area between China and India,'" Zhao said.

The Chinese and Indian soldiers also faced off along a frontier in India's northeastern Sikkim state in early May.

Indian media quoted Gen. Manoj Mukund Naravane, the country's military chief, as saying that the incidents in Ladakh and Sikkim had led to injuries caused by "aggressive behavior on both sides."

President Donald Trump said that the U.S. was willing to act as a mediator between the two Asian giants.

"We have informed both India and China that the United States is ready, willing and able to mediate or arbitrate their now raging border dispute," Trump tweeted Wednesday.

"Skirmishes aren't new, the standoff has escalated in recent weeks at Ladakh's Galwan Valley, where thousands of soldiers from the two countries have camped just a few hundred meters from each other, the Indian officials said.

India is building a strategic airstrip through the Galway Valley connecting the region to an airstrip.

The China-India border dispute covers nearly 2,175 miles of frontier that the two countries call the Line of Actual Control. The countries fought a bitter war in 1962 that spilled into Ladakh.

The most serious dispute is over China's claims that India's northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh is part of Tibet, which India rejects.

China claims about 35,000 square miles of territory in India's northeast, while India has said that China occupies 15,000 square miles of its territory in the Aksai Chin plateau in the Himalayas, a contiguous part of the Ladakh region.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired a high-level meeting a week ago to assess the situation along the tense frontier.

India unilaterally declared Ladakh a federal territory while separating it from disputed Kashmir in August 2019. China was surprised by the bold move and tried to strongly condemn the move, raising it at international forums including the U.N. Security Council.

In the past, most disputes between China and India have been resolved quickly through meetings between local military commanders, while some required diplomatic intervention.

India, China in tense standoff at Himalayan frontier

**By Vinayak Shukla**

**Associated Press**

ROME — Italian police have arrested 13 people while investigat- ing the alleged mobster control of a cemetery in northern Italy.

State police alleged that two clans of the Ndrangheta crime syndicate determined which firms were allowed to perform burials or construction work like erecting mausoleums at the cemetery in Modena, a town in the affluent region of Emilia-Romagna.

The Ndrangheta syndicate is based in southern Italy and awash in cocaine trafficking proceeds. But mobsters have increasingly been looking north in search of more revenue and legitimate businesses to use as fronts for laundering money.

The information leading to Tuesday's arrests came from intercepted phone conversations between Ndrangheta mobsters, Italian news reports said.

German nurse served tranquilized cookies

BERLIN — A nurse at a German hospital has been convicted of causing dangerous bodily harm after for twice serving homemade cookies laced with tranquilizers to two colleagues.

The 54-year-old woman was found guilty Tuesday of putting out the cookies in a kitchenette of the hospital in the town of Bad Nauheim in September 2017 and March 2019, the dpa news agency reported. Several colleagues had reported health problems associated with eating the baked goods.

The nurse was sentenced to three weeks in prison and to the Giesen regional court. She was initially charged with attempted murder in one case, but the court said that there was no intent to kill. She denied the allegations.

Locust swarms threaten India's summer crops

NEW DELHI — An invasion by swarms of desert locusts has devastated crops in India's heartland, threatening an already vulnerable region that is struggling with the economic cost of the coronavirus lockdown.

The situation has been particularly grim in central India's Raj-asthan, where millions of locusts have been attacking crops since April. They are now appearing in locations where they were previously sighted, nibbling their way across large swatches of farmlands in Punjab, Madhya Pradesh and other states as well.

Authorities estimated that the insects have engulfed more than 10 percent of the country's total arable land in seven of India's heartland states. The sudden outbreak has prompted them to use vehicle-mounted sprayers, pesticides and drones to stop the infestation.

KL Gurjar, from India's Loci- swarm surveillance program said that the numbers of the insects could grow immensely before drier weather curbs their spread. He said that higher temperatures and pollutants have helped locusts spread more rapidly.

From The Associated Press

**German nurse served tranquilized cookies**
Eugene Sheffer Crossword

ACROSS
1 Solidify
4 Hawaiian coast
8 Herbal brews
12 “— been had!”
13 “Sad to say ...”
14 Pond growth
15 Most skeptical
17 Prejudice
18 Tank filler
19 Lacking purpose
21 Eden, for one
24 Scot’s denial
25 Meadow
26 Squable
28 Trattoria offering
32 Grecian vessels
34 Showbiz job
36 Atop
37 “Psycho” setting
39 “— the season ...”
41 Bank acct. entry
42 Corp. boss
44 Tent anchors
46 Neil Diamond hit
50 Have bills
51 Take the bait
52 One who signed up
56 Part of Q.E.D.
57 Scrambled wd.
58 Wapiti
59 Used car sites

DOWN
1 Baseball’s Hodges
2 Prior night
3 “Shampoo”
5 World Cup cheer
6 Houston acronym
7 Sean of “Rudy”
8 Dramatic scene
9 Author Wiesel
10 Turkish officials
11 Get lippy
13 Type of roll
16 “Way cool”
20 Pirate’s chart
21 Morose
22 Plane-related (Abbr.)
23 Eggy quaff
25 Vocal quality
27 Pianist
33 Classified data
35 PX patrons
38 Luau souvenir
40 Fall guy
43 Whale’s home
45 Pheromone
46 First victim
47 Painter Joan
51 Zodiac
52 A.D.
53 Santa’s helper
54 Heart chart
55 Horse chart

Answer to Previous Puzzle

BLQOW DEVD ZVZR PUAC LB
CLXD AWXQLQJ EUP DU
EUPA, UQW ILJED BVR LD’B
OUILQJ LQDU ZVRLQJ.

Yesterday’s Cryptoquip: MAYHEM AND DESTRUCTION THAT RESULTS WHEN A WHOLE CITY STINKS TO HIGH HEAVEN: REEKING HAVOC.

Today’s Cryptoquip Clue: Z equals B
OPINION

Pompeo’s Madison Dinners aren’t scandalous

BY DAVID IGNATIUS
Washington Post Writers Group

WASHINGTON

When assessing the Trump administration, let’s make sure we’re not judging its actions by our preconceived ideas. We don’t waste time on trivial topics. A case in point is the recent uproar over the “Madison Dinners” held by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and his wife, Susan.

I have an unusual personal perspective on this latest “scandal,” because I was invited to dine with Pompeo and his wife and I was among the guests at a dinner hosted by the Pompeos on Nov. 18.

Critics have argued that the secretary was misusing public funds at this dinner and a handful of others, but it didn’t feel that way sitting in the room, as the James Madison Dining Room.

This was supposed to be a social event, as well as a business dinner. But Washington, let’s be honest, it’s all business, all the time. The other guests included an ambassador and his wife, a senator, a congressman, a former baseball commissioner, and his wife, and several prominent businesspeople.

Similar events take place nearly every night in some embassy or think tank. The idea is that people will do their jobs better if they know they have a dinner, a night out, a drink, a socialize. I think that’s probably right, including for journalists. One reason Washington is such a nifty, partisan place these days is that people don’t see each other outside work.

On the way to dinner, Susan Pompeo gathered the guests for a talk about some of the heirlooms — the fine china and porcelain that has been assembled over the years, thanks to donations that began during the Kennedy administration. She spoke without notes and with detailed knowledge of the items in the collection. She’s an active, engaged spouse, now as she was when Pompeo headed the CIA. That strikes me as a positive, not a negative.

Each guest was asked to say a few words. I said something about how, in covering the State Department since the 1980s, I’d learned that American foreign policy is more powerful when it has bipartisan support, and when the news media are able to cover it freely. Bland, maybe, that’s what I think.

The secretary nodded; so did others around the table. On to the next set of brochures. Some of the comments had a political edge, but for Trump-era Washington, it was welcome feedback. It was polite, but it felt like work: People were trying really hard — to be friendly and get to know each other.

The only surprise about the dinner for me was that I was there at all. My wife and I had received our invitations in October. Two weeks before the event, on Nov. 5, I had published a column with the headline: “Where is Mike Pompeo? He’s hiding in fear of Donald Trump.” The Ukraine investigation was unfolding then, and I wrote that while Trump was attacking former Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch, Pompeo “has essentially been in hiding, protecting himself while his subordinates took the hit.”

I didn’t mince words: “Pompeo has badly tarnished his reputation in accommodating Trump. He joins the long list of those damaged by his service to this president.”

After that column appeared, I called one of Pompeo’s top aides and said that if he preferred to work in this kind of environment, I understood. Nobody should have to socialize with someone if it’s going to be uncomfortable. But the aide, after consultation, said no problem, come ahead. Pompeo and his wife were gracious throughout the evening.

I’ve criticized Pompeo since that dinner, noting, for example, “he has a belligerent streak that even his supporters have long recognized is a severe liability.” I’ve also endorsed policies of his that I thought were sensible. That’s the way it’s supposed to work. We tell the truth, upside and down. This is journalism, not war.

To be clear: Our democracy faces some severe threats under President Trump, in my opinion. But social events at the State Department with the secretary and his wife are not among them.

Critics have argued that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo misused public funds by using his so-called “Madison Dinners” at the State Department.

By Robin Rand and Brandon Black
Special to Stars and Stripes

The new coronavirus has fundamentally altered the way of life for millions of Americans and citizens around the world.

In a career spanning four decades as an officer in the United States Air Force, the magnitude of this crisis is unlike anything I have witnessed. While I’ve dealt with a fair share of crises in times of peace and war that demanded the highest level of leadership and decision making, the coronavirus is unlike any other; it is an enemy whose rate of infections are as unbiased as its worldwide transmission.

Like many service-based nonprofits and charities that have pivoted in their business model to support our healthcare workers and efforts in quelling the coronavirus, the Gary Sinise Foundation, where I serve as CEO, is no different.

The Gary Sinise Foundation has been supporting military service members, veterans, first responders, their families, and those in need since its founding in 2011. In the beginning of April, we launched Emergency COVID-19 Combat Service, which is a dedicated campaign that augments our mission by supporting medical workers serving at ground zero in the fight combatting the deadly outbreak. Utilizing donations, we have issued grant funding to 57 first responder departments in 26 states to buy personal protective equipment (PPE) and other lifesaving gear.

At military installations here in the U.S. and overseas in Germany and South Korea, we are working alongside our partners facilitating drive-thru meal pick-ups for service members and their families. In hard-hit emergency rooms in New York City and Los Angeles, and at medical centers nationwide, we continue to provide free meals to health care workers and staff. Fittingly, we call these meals Serving Heroes as they are a small token of appreciation on behalf of the American people for the courageous work and dedication these frontline heroes exhibit during this existential crisis.

But our work doesn’t stop there. Financial aid is reimbursing the households of veterans, first responders, those serving in the National Guard and Reserve forces, and families of fallen service members. Be it covering the cost of groceries and utility bills, moving costs, or rent and mortgage payments, we can offer relief to those in need.

Thanks to the generosity of countless donors, we can maintain the integrity of our mission while stepping up the cadence of support to reach an even larger population affected by COVID-19.

For our tireless efforts, the silver lining is being a bearer of hope for those we serve. It is the sigh of relief of a Gold Star spouse with children at home upon receiving a grocery gift card and rental assistance. It is the unburdened shoulders of a primary caregiver of a veteran with severe medical needs, who can afford to pay the bills and keep the lights on at home after receiving financial aid.

It is hope that emanates from the smiles and experience of moments of peace by medical workers after a long shift in the trenches of the novel coronavirus, to continue to do their job while enjoying a hearty meal. And it is the confidence of hope by firefighters, paramedics, and first responders receiving the gear they need to get the job done.

Service-based nonprofits and charities have an outsized role to play in flattening the curve. By enlisting their workforce and allocating resources to where it is needed most, no matter the size or small the effort, the difference may be life-saving.

The road to recovery may be long, but it is reassuring to know that the country begins to reopen. The fight being waged against COVID-19 is a finite crisis, not a protracted conflict. By working together in solidarity, this will be our finest hour.

Nicholas Kamm/AFP

BY ROBIN RAND AND BRANDON BLACK
Special to Stars and Stripes

The Stars and Stripes ombudsman protects the free flow of news and information, reporting any attempts by the military or other authorities to undermine the newspaper’s independence. The ombudsman also responds to concerns and questions from readers, and monitors coverage for fairness, accuracy, timeliness and balance. The ombudsman welcomes comments from readers, and can be contacted by email at ombudsman@stripes.com, or by phone at 202-886-0050.

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Pandemic affects disaster season response

By Irwin Redlener
Special to The Washington Post

I t is already clear that 2020 will be a year for the history books. The world has lurched from one mega-disaster to the next, witnessing devastating wildfires in Australia, plagues of locusts across East Africa and South Asia, and a pandemic that has crippled the global economy.

But we are now at a point that many of us have long feared and for which we are not remotely prepared: the lethal confluence of an uncontrolled pandemic and a slew of large-scale natural disasters.

The pandemic is about to be joined in the headlines by multiple catastrophic events that will cost lives, wreck communities and exact severe economic tolls on affected populations. Last week, catastrophic dam failures and massive flooding forced at least 10,000 people to evacuate their homes in Michigan, which happens to be among the states hardest hit by COVID-19. In South Asia, one of the deadliest cyclones ever in the region swept across Bangladesh and India, reaping devastation where COVID-19 cases are also surging. Both hurricane and wildfire season are quickly approaching in the United States.

And this is all happening on its own, but in the midst of COVID-19 and an exhausted disaster-response infrastructure, are we prepared for multiple disasters at once? Even without a pandemic, public health departments and hospital disaster preparedness programs across the United States have been chronically underfunded for more than a decade. Even the federally maintained strategic national stockpile of medical equipment and supplies failed to meet urgent needs for mechanical ventilators and personal protective equipment that have been in high demand throughout the pandemic.

Jeff Schlegelmilch, my colleague and deputy director at the National Center for Disaster Preparedness, warns that "our current overall emergency response systems are at a breaking point. It’s not just the (straining) health care system; virtually none of our response capabilities are strategically threatened.

Beyond the overall response capacity concerns, conflicting protocols for simultaneous disasters pose unique challenges. How do we reconcile pandemic control guidance to stay home and practice social distancing with a hurricane-related evacuation order or being housed in a congregate shelter with many people of varying degrees of COVID-19 risk?

Natural-disaster response planning under a pandemic cloud may seem overwhelming. But hurricane season starts June 1, long before we’ll see an end to the pandemic threat, so we have no choice. And with climate change fueling severe weather events and increasing vulnerabilities among coastal communities, federal officials are already predicting “above-normal” hurricane activity this year, meaning, again, more need for emergency evacuations and shelter by all antiflat to pandemic-control measures. There’s little time to waste; we’ve got to figure this out.

In Michigan, it’s already happening. Although federal regulators had long identified the two dams as high-risk and in need of structural repair, the recent evacuation steps weren’t taken until ultimately spelling disaster for 42,000 residents. Lessons from the pandemic could — and should — include a much-improved ability to coordinate and deploy the necessary personnel and resources under the auspices of the Defense Department and the Health and Human Services Department, which together lead the centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

There is a significant upside if we manage this summer’s 2020 challenge of concurrent disasters under control. Positive outcomes could — and should — include a much-improved ability to do everything in our considerable potential to prepare for and manage large-scale disasters, a new appreciation of the necessity to work closely with all nations on potential threats and a significantly more resilient nation.

We can only hope.

Irwin Redlener, a pediatrician, directs the National Center for Disaster Preparedness at the Earth Institute at Columbia University. He is also a professor and senior director of public health and president emeritus of Children’s Health Fund.

Address airborne transmission to stop COVID-19

By Joseph Allen
Special to The Washington Post

If you’ve been following advice about COVID-19 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the World Health Organization, chances are you’ve heard a lot about how the coronavirus can travel through large droplets via coughing and sneezing. You’ve probably heard about the virus being transmitted through surfaces. But you probably haven’t heard anything about airborne transmission, which many organizations have largely ignored.

That’s a mistake. Airborne transmission — caused by small particles that can linger in the air for extended periods of time, unlike droplets from coughs, which settle quickly — is likely the reason why this disease spreads so rapidly in certain circumstances. It’s also key to figuring out how best to reopen our country.

I’ve been warning about airborne transmission of COVID-19 since early February. The explosive transmission on the Diamond Princess cruise ship, as well as other coronavirus outbreaks, constituted telltale signs that airborne transmission was happening. Close contact transmission was likely happening on that cruise ship, but the disease had spread far more quickly than non-airborne diseases typically spread.

Since then, evidence has continuously pointed to airborne transmission of COVID-19, as my colleague Linsey Marr and I outline in a recent paper. Scientists have detected the virus in spaces that can be rapidly ventilated — virtually no aerosol of our response capabilities are stretched dangerously thin.

Beyond the overall response capacity concerns, conflicting protocols for simultaneous disasters pose unique challenges. How do we reconcile pandemic control guidance to stay home and practice social distancing with a hurricane-related evacuation order or being housed in a congregate shelter with many people of varying degrees of COVID-19 risk?

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K-9 officer helps in arrest of suspect

MEMPHIS — Tennessee authorities said a police dog helped in the arrest of 40-year-old Kevin D. Curry Jr. who fled his car after a scuffle, and was later arrested.

Curry Jr. was arrested at a house in Pinkie, Arkansas. Curry Jr. was found with the car in a rural area.

The U.S. Marshals Service said in a news release that Kevin D. Curry Jr. was arrested at a house in Memphis. Curry Jr. tried to escape the house by going out an upstairs window, but was caught by a K-9 officer, marshals said.

This duck’s for you

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The approximate number of active piping plover nests in Maine this year: 100 pairs and 61 active nests in the state, the Portland Press Herald reported. Last year, the group found a record 89 nesting pairs and 175 fledged chicks. The number of endangered birds has been increasing in recent years. Laura Mirich Zeise, director of the organization’s piping plovers project, said there are now over 200 nesting pairs in the state.

The female turtle came onto the beach early in the morning and had begun to lay eggs in a nest in the sand, according to a news release from the federal park. That’s when it was believed, based on evidence found at the scene, that a motor vehicle struck the turtle, the news release said.

Intact eggs thought to be viable were discovered nearby, the park said. Loggerheads are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

Three men who escaped from a west Alabama jail were recaptured. The Tuscaloosa County Sheriff’s Office said the men were found hiding under a mobile home in Northport.

Tuscaloosa County Jail along with Seth Schuyler Williams and Cameron Keith Newell. The three were believed to have escaped through a vent shaft on the roof.

A tracking dog led deputies to Lancaster, who surrendered.

Five ducklings rescued from storm drain

SOUTHAMPTON — Five ducklings were rescued from a Long Island storm drain as their mother looked on, police said.

The ducklings were first spotted in the drain on Flanders Road in Southampton, a small community about 14 miles west of Southampton. It took about an hour for police officers, firefighters and wildlife rescuers to pull the ducklings to safety using nets, Southampton police said.

The mother duck was seen flying over by a vehicle.

“IT’S DISREPECTFUL BECAUSE THIS IS A PUERTO RICAN VETERANS MEMORIAL, this is a monument for veterans who gave their lives,” Tony Molina, president of the Puerto Rican Veterans Memorial, told the Boston Herald.

City Councilor Ed Flynn, a Navy veteran, said the vandalism was disrespectful.

A barber is being credited with saving the life of an 80-year-old customer who had a heart attack after a haircut.

Archie Whitten had asked his Kokomo barber, Jeff Smith, if he could use an outdoor spigot to add water to his car radiator. Smith agreed but after a few minutes didn’t see Whitten. He went outside and found him on the ground.

“I was praying under my breath and just going by what I had learned 30-something years ago on CPR when I’d taken a class somewhere,” Smith told the Kokomo Tribune. “You know how adrenaline is. In the moment, you’re not really thinking about it. You just do what you feel like needs to be done.”

It worked. A police officer with a machine took over before Whitten was rushed to a hospital.

Flag from when Lincoln lay in repose displayed

COLUMBUS — A flag that flew over the Ohio Statehouse when the body of Abraham Lincoln lay in repose is on display for the next few months, the Capitol Square Review and Advisory Board announced.

The historic Thirty-Six Star American flag is part of an exhibit of Civil War artifacts related to the 1865 Lincoln funeral train. The exhibit is open to the public in the rotunda of the Ohio Statehouse through Veterans Day.

The flag originally was presented to David Nevin Murray of Portsmouth for his contributions to the Union war effort.

Puerto Rican Veterans Memorial damaged

BOSTON — Boston police are investigating vandalism to the Puerto Rican Veterans Memorial in the South End that happened the day before Memorial Day.

Two stone pillars at the entrance to the monument were damaged and a Puerto Rican flag was lowered.

“(It’s) disrespectful not because this is a Puerto Rican veterans memorial, this is a monument for veterans who gave their lives,” Tony Molina, president of the Puerto Rican Veterans Monument Association, told the Boston Herald.

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Curry Jr. is being credited with helping authorities: Grizzly attacked mountain biker

BILLINGS — A mountain biker was attacked by a grizzly bear near the southern Montana community of Big Sky, according to authorities.

Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks spokesperson Morgan Jacobsen told the Billings Gazette that the man was able to walk away and find help. He was airlifted to a hospital with injuries to his face and back and is stable in critical condition.

The man, in his 60s, had likely sustained the attack on the trail near his home on Monday night, Jacobsen said.

This is the first reported attack on a hiker in Yellowstone National Park this season, Jacobsen said.

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City Councilor Ed Flynn, a Navy veteran, said the vandalism was disrespectful.

A barber gives haircut, saves customer’s life

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Fallon apologizes for blackface skit on ‘SNL’ in 2000

Jimmy Fallon has apologized for an impersonation of fellow comic Chris Rock while in blackface during a 2000 episode of “Saturday Night Live.” The NBC “Tonight Show” host tweeted Tuesday that “there is no excuse for this.”

One of Fallon’s 20-year-old skit surfaced this week after a video of it was posted online. According to Variety, it was first posted on Twitter by a user named “chebyohodear,” and showed Fallon, as Rock, appearing on a talk show.

Fallon tweeted that it was a terrible decision to impersonate Rock, also a former “SNL” cast member. “I am very sorry for making this unquestionably offensive decision and thank all of you for holding me accountable,” he wrote.

The Twitter user who posted the clip mentioned Megyn Kelly, who was taken off the “Today” show and eventually left NBC News after suggesting in 2018 that it was OK for children to wear blackface in Halloween costumes. She apologized for her remark.

The history of minstrel shows and movies where white performers donned black face to mock blacks has made its use considered offensive today.

California sues CBS over sexual misconduct

The state of California filed a lawsuit Tuesday against CBS, Disney and producers of the long-running series “Criminal Minds,” alleging that the show’s cinematographer engaged in rampant sexual misconduct for years.

The suit filed in Los Angeles Superior Court by the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing says the show’s production team knew of and condoned the behavior of cinematographer Gregory St. Johns over a dozen men who complained of sexual harassment.

California Attorney General Xavier Becerra said Wednesday that Sony Pictures Television and Los Angeles producer Entertainment One, which ran on CBS from 2005 to 2015, was co-produced by CBS and the Disney-owned ABC Signature Studios.

The suit accuses Sony and Entertainment One of “failures of supervision and training” in the management of harassment at the show’s film studios in Los Angeles.

“CBS and Sony produced a major unscripted TV series that is dominated by a sexual predator,” Becerra said.

St. Johns and others named as defendants in the suit, which seeks back pay and other damages for the crew members who were fired.

New this week: ‘Space Force,’ Gaga

Here’s a collection curated by The Associated Press’ entertainment journalists of what’s arriving on TV, streaming services and music platforms this week.

Television

Steve Carell, the hapless boss of “The Office,” is back with a new comedy series. In Netflix’s 10-episode “Space Force,” he plays Mark R. Naird, a four-star general whose dream job is running the Air Force. Instead, he’s chosen to lead the newly formed military branch charged with putting Americans back on the moon and dominating space. Carell heads a cast that includes John Malkovich and Lisa Kudrow and Jimmy O. Yang. The comedy is out Friday, accompanied by “Inside Joke: Space Force,” a behind-the-scenes podcast hosted by Yang and with new episodes released on Mondays and Thursdays.

“PrideLand”: Actor Dyllon Burnside (“Pose”) hosts a six-part digital series exploring LGBTQ life in the South and the region’s changing attitudes. Burnside isn’t an outsider: In the first episode, he shares his experience as a “queer boy” who left his native Pensacola, Fla., to be what he calls his authentic self. Returning to the region, he is both heartened by what he finds and clear-eyed about remaining challenges. The series debuted Tuesday on “PBS Voices,” a new documentary-focused YouTube channel. Burnside also hosts a companion special airing June 12 on PBS and PBS.org.

AMC’s “Quiz” revisits the 2001 scandal of a couple accused of trying to cheat the British version of “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire” of $1 million. “Quiz” has unimpeachable credentials: It was written by playwright James Graham (“Ink”), directed by filmmaker Stephen Frears (“The Queen”), and stars Matthew Macfadyen (“Succession”), Sian Clifford (“ Fleabag”) and Michael Sheen (“Masters of Sex”). The three-part drama debuts Sunday night in the States, but will air on AFN-Spectrum on June 5, 12 and 19.

— TV Writer Lynn Elber

Film

Studio Ghibli Marathon: HBO Max, which launched Wednesday, has many films available, but arguably the most exciting is its Studio Ghibli library. It’s the first time the animated classics from Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata have been available on a streaming platform in the U.S. There are enough greats to keep the family occupied for weeks. But a few Miyazaki-savvy patrons recommend “My Neighbor Totoro,” “ Spirited Away,” “Porco Rosso” and “Ponyo” to get you started.

“The Vast of Night”: Friday night, head over to Prime Video to check out a debut feature that’s earned its director, Andrew Patterson, comparisons to a young Christopher Nolan. Set over the course of one night in 1950s New Mexico, the film follows two teenagers who notice an unusual audio frequency on the radio and take it upon themselves to investigate. Rolling Stone critic David Fear said, “It knows exactly how to work its retro ‘Twilight Zone’ mojo without feeling like a third-generation copy of film noir nostalgia.”

“The High Note”: Also available Friday for rental from Focus Features is a feel-good musical starring Tracee Ellis Ross as a world-famous singer (no, she’s not playing her mom) feeling confined by societal expectations around her age, and her personal assistant (Dakota Johnson) who has bigger ambitions for herself.

“Uncut Gems”: If you missed Adam Sandler’s much-praised performance as a diamond district dealer in “Uncut Gems” in theaters this year, the high-octane thriller from the Sandler Brothers began streaming Monday on Netflix.

— AP Film Writer Lindsey Bahr

Music

Lady Gaga: After taking a departure from her electro pop sound with 2016’s “Joanne” and 2018’s “A Star Is Born,” Lady Gaga is ready to just dance with her new album out Friday. “Chromatica” features the upbeat singles “Stupid Love” and “Rain on Me,” with Ariana Grande. Elton John and K-pop girl group Blackpink also make appearances on the album, which was originally supposed to be released in April but was pushed back because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Rap bars from behind bars: While serving time at San Quentin State Prison, producer David Jassy taught inmates how to write and produce music. Now an album of those songs recorded at the prison and backed by J. Cole, Common and Kim Kardashian West will be released Friday. In 2010, Jassy was convicted of murder, assault with a deadly weapon and aggravated battery. Earlier this year his sentence was commuted by California Gov. Gavin Newsom, who said in his letter that Jassy had been “extremely committed to his rehabilitation.” The new album is called “San Quentin Mixtape, Vol. 1” and features 17 young rappers telling their stories.

#OUTLOUD Raising Voices: Originally planned to debut at the South by Southwest festival, #OUTLOUD Raising Voices is coming to Facebook this week to kick off Pride month, which begins Monday. The 10-episode, five-week concert series will include performances from Kesha, Greyson Chance, Betty Who, Wrape, the Aces, Allie X, Candis Cayne, Vincint and more. The series will air on Facebook on Wednesdays and Thursdays at 8 p.m. EDT.

— Music Editor Mesfin Fekadu
Every controversial topic has two sides. We look into the ones that matter to you.

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Players say they are disappointed by MLB proposal

Some would see salaries cut by more than 77%

BY RONALD BLUM
Associated Press

NEW YORK — A rookie at the major league minimum would keep about 47% of his original salary this year while multimillionaire stars Mike Trout and Gerrit Cole would lose more than 77% under a sliding-scale proposal by big league teams that players found “extremely disappointing.”

Major League Baseball made the proposal to the players’ union on Tuesday during a digital meeting rather than the 50-50 revenue-sharing plan that owners initially approved for their negotiators on May 11, several people familiar with the plan told The Associated Press. The people spoke on condition of anonymity because details were not announced.

In addition to its reaction on the economics, the union said “the sides also remain far apart on health and safety protocols” aimed at starting the pandemic-delayed season around the Fourth of July. The sides have been grappling with how to aim for an opening day originally scheduled for March 26 but pushed back because of the new coronavirus.

“We made a proposal to the union that is completely consistent with the economic realities facing our sport,” MLB said in a statement. “We look forward to a responsive proposal from the MLBPA.”

Players agreed March 26 to a deal in which they would receive prorated shares of their salaries based on what percentage of each team’s 162-game schedule is played. In exchange, players were guaranteed that if no games are played they would receive service time for 2020 matching what they accrued in 2019.

MLB has proposed an 82-game schedule and says the March 26 but pushed back because of the new coronavirus.

The Oakland Athletics are placing their scouts and a significant number of other front office employees on furlough, suspending pay for minor leaguers and cutting the salaries of other executives.

BY JOSH DUBOW
Associated Press

The Oakland Athletics are placing their scouts and a significant number of other front office employees on furlough, suspending pay for minor leaguers and cutting the salaries of other executives.

The A’s will continue to pay the $400 weekly stipends minor leaguers will stop receiving $400 weekly stipends because it did not necessarily account for a season with no fans in ballparks.

Under the plan given the union Tuesday, a player would keep 90% of his salary up to the $563,500 big league minimum, including those with lower salaries while on optional or outright assignments in the minor leagues, according to information obtained by the AP.

The amount would decrease to 72.5% from $563,501 through $1 million, to 50% from $1,000,001 through $5 million, to 40% from $5,000,001 through $10 million, to 30% from $10,000,001 through $20 million and to 20% from $20,000,001 and up.

Each player’s figure then would be prorated by the $2,162 formula agreed to in March, causing a loss of 49.4%.

There would be an additional $200 million in postseason bonus money that would be given in a higher proportion to players with larger salaries.

As a result, a player at the minimum would earn $262,217, according to calculations MLB gave the union. A $1 million salary would be cut to $434,143, $5 million to $1,642,113, $10 million to $2,947,895, $15 million to $4,049,497, $20 million to $5,151,099, $25 million to $6,048,520, $30 million to $6,945,942 and $35 million to $7,843,363.

MLB estimates 2020 player salaries would drop from roughly $4 billion to $1.23 billion under a proposed economic plan by the owners.

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By Beth Harris
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Two horses from the barn of two-time Triple Crown-winning trainer Bob Baffert have tested positive for a banned substance, according to published reports.

The New York Times and Louisville Courier-Journal on Tuesday reported two horses had tested positive for a split-division of the Arkansas Derby.

According to the Times, one of Baffert’s horses to test positive was Char- lutan, an undefeated colt considered to be a top contender for the Belmont Stakes on June 20. That race will open this year’s Triple Crown series, which has been re-scheduled because of the coronavirus pandemic. Charlutan won a split-division of the Arkansas Derby on May 2.

The Times reported Baffert’s other horse to test positive is Ga- mine, a 3-year-old filly who won at Oaklawn Park on the same day. The newspaper said both horses tested positive for lidocaine, a regulated drug by the Association of Racing Commissioners.

Baffert told The Associated Press he didn’t want to comment be- yond his statement. Asked how premature it is to leak an initial test before a second test is con- ducted, Baffert said, “I think it’s a great question that someone be- sides me should answer.”

Baffert has requested a second round of testing on his horses’ samples, which he is allowed to do, according to the Times.

Charlutan is ranked fourth on the qualifying points leaderboard to parks, gyms and other training facili- ties, two suburban Salt Lake City police officers said.”

Baffert has won five times. It has been rescheduled for Sept. 5. Baffert’s Arkansas Racing Commission was reachable after hours Tuesday night.

By Steve Reed
Associated Press

CONCORD, N.C. — Chase Elliott gained a measure of revenge against Kyle Busch on Tuesday night — and then let him know about it.

Elliott snapped Busch’s seven-race Truck Series winning streak and earned a $100,000 bounty at Charlotte Motor Speedway before imitating Busch’s victory celebra- tion by bowing to the camera.

“Hopefully nobody gets their feelings hurt over it,” Elliott said. "It’s my guess it hurt him and we did and had some fun with it.”

Harvick pledged before the race to donate $50,000 to Covid-19 relief for a full-time Truck Series driver who finished ahead of Busch. Marcus Lemonis, the CEO of Gander RV & Outdoors, which sponsors the Truck Series, agreed to match Harvick’s pledge.

The win comes six days after Busch wrecked Elliott in a Cup Series race at Darlington and two days after Elliott’s decision to pit his No. 9 car for the last time.

Elliott was up over a splitter problem that caused problems for his No. 51 Toyota all night long. Later, on a Zoom call, he was in- formed about Elliott’s bow.

“I am extremely disappointed that, in this instance, the Commission has not followed its rules on confidentiality.

“I am hoping for an expedited investigation and look forward to being able to speak soon about any written decision of the Stew- ards, if and when it becomes nec- essary and I’m allowed to race the Commission’s confidentiality rules,” he said.

Baffert has requested a second round of testing on his horses’ samples, which he is allowed to do, according to the Times.

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Qualifying round tough to predict

By Stephen Whyno
Associated Press

The NHL’s regular season is over and the chase for the Stanley Cup is hockey returns this summer.

The league settled on a 24-team postseason format that Calgary Flames captain Mark Giordano supported back in March as the coronavirus was shutting down sports.

“You can’t eliminate teams who are out on points percentage or stuff like that,” Giordano said. “I think you go 12 and 12. Most teams get in this year, maybe a couple of byes at the top and play it out.”

The top four teams in the Eastern and Western Conferences get byes into the final 16 except for a handful of round-robin games to determine seeding. That’s Boston, Tampa Bay, Washington and Philadelphia in the East and St. Louis, Colorado, Vegas and Dallas in the West.

“It rewards those teams that had a good regular season, and it’s going to serve as almost a little bit of a preseason for those top four in each conference,” said NBC Sports analyst Patrick Sharp, who won the Cup three times as a player with Chicago. “There’s standings on the line and you want to position yourself the best you can, but it’s an opportunity for those guys to kind of get the rust off and get some tough opponent however because they face in that first round is going to be coming off a pretty intense season.”

The top seeds would face the winners of these eight opening-round, best-of-five series:

**Eastern Conference**

**No. 5 Pittsburgh Penguins vs. No. 12 Montreal Canadiens**

Penguins captain and three-time champion Sidney Crosby doesn’t mind going directly into the playoffs, given the limited timing. His reward is a matchup against elite goaltender Carey Price and the Montreal Canadiens, who had 15 fewer points than Pittsburgh when the season was halted.

**Season series**: Penguins won two of three.

**What Sharp says**: “Price could be key in this series. Pittsburgh is a team that’s going to get healthy, hopefully. They had some key guys injured before the shutdown that were going to miss significant games down the stretch.”

**No. 5 Carolina Hurricanes vs. No. 11 New York Rangers**

Carolina was one of two teams (along with Tampa Bay) that went against the playoff format. The Hurricanes shouldn’t need emergency goaltender David Ayres anymore with Petr Mrazek and James Reimer healthy and Dougie Hamilton ready to return on defense.

**Season series**: Rangers won all four.

**What Sharp says**: “I like the way (the Hurricanes) compete, and they can shut games down with the best of them. Now they’ve got their goaltenders healthy, Dougie coming back. I like their chances... They were able to go with one goalie when you look, an anemic New York Rangers. (Winger Artemi) Panarin is making everybody better offensively.”

**No. 7 New York Islanders vs. No. 10 Florida Panthers**

This is a rematch of a 2016 series, but basically everything has changed for these teams since. Barry Trotz has put his stamp on the Islanders, and three-time Cup-winning coach Joel Quenneville is in his first season with high-flying Florida.

**Season series**: Islanders won all three.

**What Sharp says**: “It’s two different styles of play. The Islanders and Barry Trotz and (GM Lou Lamoriello), they’re going to be a very disciplined, defensively-oriented team... That neutral zone’s going to be clogged. And a team like the Panthers that showed this season that they would trade a few chances to get a few chances... It’s going to be a tough matchup for them.”

**No. 8 Toronto Maple Leafs vs. No. 9 Columbus Blue Jackets**

If Toronto is to bring the Cup home for the first time since 1967, Auston Matthews and Co. first have to deal with the pesky Blue Jackets, who eliminated the top-seeded Lightning in the first round last year.

**Season series**: Split two games.

**What Sharp says**: “You know what you’re facing with the Blue Jackets. It’s going to be an in-your-face game, a hard- nosed match-up. And Toronto, you finally get away from Boston now but you’ve got to face a team like Columbus as we saw how well they played against Tampa Bay last year, so it doesn’t get easier for Toronto.”

**Western Conference**

**No. 5 Edmonton Oilers vs. No. 12 Chicago Blackhawks**

Connor McDavid gets just his second taste of the playoffs in his fifth season. No. 97 had 97 points in the regular season and gets to ride alongside NHL record scorer Leon Draisaitl against an aging Blackhawk squad.

**Season series**: Blackhaws won two of three.

**What Sharp says**: “I don’t know if you can slow (McDavid) down in a playoff series any easier than you can in the regular season... That’s a tough matchup for anybody, especially Chicago, a team that gives up more prime scoring chances than anybody that’s left in the playoff group.”

**No. 6 Nashville Predators vs. No. 11 Arizona Coyotes**

Nashville and Arizona each made a major-in-season move. The Predators replaced coach Peter Laviolette with John Hynes, and the Coyotes traded for 2018 MVP Taylor Hall. Only one of them will get into the final 16.

**Season series**: Split two games.

**What Sharp says**: “It seems like the coaching change did make a little bit of difference for the Preds... Arizona is a team that has trouble scoring goals, but they can clamp things down defensively. They have great goaltending, they keep the puck out of the net at a pretty good clip. Those are teams that are going to be tough to play in these short, best-of-five series.”

**No. 7 Vancouver Canucks vs. No. 10 Minnesota Wild**

The Canucks got goalie Jacob Markstrom back from a knee injury, and he has had the benefit of skating at home during the season. Minnesota interim coach Dean Evason gets a chance to show he deserves the full-time job.

**Season series**: Wild won two of three.

**What Sharp says**: “They’ve got some core pieces there in Vancouver that are going to get a taste of the big stage, the big playoff matchups. It’s going to be great for their development. ... (The Wild) have that one last crack to show what they have as a group. This might be the last chance that this core group in Minnesota has to kind of win a few playoff rounds.”

**No. 8 Calgary Flames vs. No. 9 Winnipeg Jets**

The constantly changing Flames face the continuity of the Jets, and the winner of this series could make some real noise in the West. Some big changes are probably coming for the loser.

**Season series**: Jets won only meeting in overtime.

**What Sharp says**: “It seemed like (the Flames) were starting to find their groove. But they’re facing a team in Winnipeg that right before the shutdown, they were playing some intense hockey. They knew they were up against. They kind of dug in for the playoffs.”

**Return**

Three-week training camp will be held before season begins

Another concern is how long it might take players, including the dozens who have spent the past few months in their families overseas, to return to their home cities and whether they will have to spend two weeks self-quarantining upon their return. There might be a solution for that.

“We’ve reached an understanding with the Canadian government that players can cross the Canadian border as well both internationally from overseas but also from the United States so they can return to their home city without quarantine,” Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly said.

The next phase will feature a roughly three-week training camp starting no earlier than July 1. The league hopes all 24 teams are cleared to hold full practices based on local health regulations.

There are also outstanding questions on health and safety protocols, and determining which two cities will serve as hubs. Bettman announced the NHL has narrowed the list to 10: Chicago, Columbus, Ohio, Dallas, Las Vegas, Pittsburgh and Minnesota/St. Paul in the U.S. and Edmonton, Toronto and Vancouver in Canada.

Should all those issues be resolved, the NHL can then proceed with playing games.

On the bright side, the NHL still has time to hand the events off for a contingency plan, with Bettman saying the 2020-21 season could start as late as January.

“If it has to slide more, then it’ll slide,” Bettman said, referring to the timetable.

“There’s a reason that we’re not giving you a date now because anybody who gives you a date is guessing, and we think we’d rather take a more holistic approach to doing this.”

Hockey is benefiting from what’s been an effective and collaborative approach conducted by its Return to Play committee, which features player and league representatives. The committee not only proposed the 24-team format, but also devised a list of protocols for teams to follow once players return to their facilities.

Teams will be responsible for testing players during workouts and training camp, with the league taking over when games begin.

Daly said players would be tested for COVID-19 daily and he added that medical advisers contend, for now, “that one single positive test depending on the circumstances should not necessarily shut the whole operation down.”

“Obviously we’re not in a situation where we have an outbreak, and that will affect our ability to continue playing,” Daly said. “But a single positive test or isolated positive tests throughout a two-month tournament should not necessarily mean an end to the tournament.”

The decision to call off the 189 regular-season games that were not played ends the season for Buffalo, New Jersey, Anaheim, Los Angeles, San Jose, Ottawa and Detroit.

Those seven teams will now prepare for one of potentially two draft lotteries to determine the top 15 selections. The lottery will be held June 26, with another scheduled later depending on which of the remaining eight teams qualify for the 16-team playoff.

Sabres co-owner and president Kim Pegula said the emphasis was placed on completing the season and ensuring the Stanley Cup will be awarded, even if it came at Buffalo’s expense. The Sabres extended their playoff drought to a ninth season, finishing just behind Montreal.

“We’re all trying to find that right chord, that’s the least for the league,” Pegula told The AP. “It’s one of those times when you’ve just got to look at it that way.”

AP sports writer Dave Campbell contributed.
Return to play?

NHL unveils 24-team playoff format for rest of season

By John Wawrow and Stephen Whyno
Associated Press

Rosy as the news might sound, Gary Bettman made no promises in announcing the NHL has the framework of a plan in place to return to the ice.

“We hope,” the commissioner said, “that this is a step back toward normalcy.”

The league and its players overcame a significant hurdle Tuesday when Bettman formally unveiled a 24-team expanded playoff format in which games could start as early as late July in two yet-to-be-determined cities.

The plan — as with anything involving forming a timetable around the coronavirus pandemic — comes with no certainties.

“Obviously, there are lots of things to be done,” Bettman said, noting health and safety come first. “But this marks a very important step along the journey that we’re undertaking.”

Under the plan, the top four teams in each conference have already qualified for the round of 16, and will play a round-robin tournament to determine seeding. The remaining eight teams in each conference will be seeded and take part in best-of-five series to determine the remaining playoff teams.

The NHL might be ahead of Major League Baseball and the NBA in terms of when and how it might return to action, but numerous questions remain before a puck is dropped in a meaningful game for the first time since hockey was put on pause in March.

“You have to do these in a sequence. You have to prepare for what we hope is going to be a consensus that we can and should play,” NHL Players’ Association executive director Don Fehr told The Associated Press. “This is but a meaningful start, I think. But it’s only a start.”

Timing is an issue. The NHL projects players might be allowed to begin returning for voluntary workouts next week.

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Inside: First-round matchups for each conference, Page 23

Players unhappy with MLB’s salary proposal » Page 21