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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Sailors cheer on ousted Navy captain

BY CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

A cheering and applauding crowd of sailors aboard the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt wished farewell to their captain, whom the Navy relieved of command after he raised concerns about the spreading coronavirus on his ship in a letter that was leaked to the media.

Hundreds were pictured in the gathering in the ship's hangar deck and many chanted Capt. Brett Crozier's name in multiple videos posted to social media.

A video posted Friday to the Facebook page of Michael Washington included the hashtags #MYCO and #WEARSTRONG.

"That's how you send out one of the greatest captains you ever had," someone says in the video, then using an acronym for greatest of all time, adds: "The GOAT, the man for the people."

Crozier was dismissed Thursday due to a loss of confidence in his ability to command and for not using his chain of command to make service leaders aware of his concerns about

the virus outbreak that had infected more than 100 sailors on the ship, acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly said at the Pentagon.

Another video shows the career naval officer walk to the bow of the ship. He waves to the crowd, salutes and waves again before turning and walking down the gangway — alone — to the pier.

Crozier's pained letter, which was leaked to the San Francisco Chronicle and published Tuesday, "created a ... little bit of panic on the ship," Modly said.

Part of the issue was the use of unclassified email and a wide distribution list, including some recipients not in the chain of command, Modly said.

The letter had warned that the outbreak could kill sailors, saying that "if we do not act now, we are failing to properly take care of our most trusted asset — our sailors."

The ship, now docked in Guam, was on a Pacific deployment before it was forced to divert to the island after several initial virus cases were reported aboard the carrier last week. Crozier's letter criticized an "inappropriate focus

on testing" for the disease and, given the close quarters of the warship, requested most of the crew be evacuated to better slow the virus's spread.

The Navy moved some 1,000 sailors off the ship by Thursday and was working to remove another 2,700 by Friday.

Capt. Daniel Keeler, the ship's executive officer, will serve as acting commander until Capt. Carlos Sardiello, from whom Crozier had assumed command of the aircraft carrier in November, arrives in Guam to take the helm again, Modly said.

Adm. Robert Burke, vice chief of naval operations, would investigate the matter and the Pacific Fleet's entire command climate, Modly said.

Crozier, for his part, had allowed the outbreak to "overwhelm his ability to act professionally," Modly said. "It creates a panic and creates the perception that the Navy is not on the job, the government's not on the job, and it's just not true."

Before the letter, the service had been directing resources to assist the ship, Modly said, which he said Crozier acknowledged in a phone call with Pen-

tagon officials the same day as the document's date. In the call, Crozier had asked to speed up the evacuation, he said.

Carrier strike group commander Rear Adm. Stuart Baker, who is embarked on the ship and "right down the passageway" from Crozier, didn't know about the letter in advance, Modly said.

But some observers questioned Crozier's dismissal, which retired rear admiral and former Navy, Pentagon and State Department spokesman John Kirby said was poorly timed.

"I understand the 'trust & confidence' argument. It's sacrosanct in the Navy," Kirby said Thursday night on Twitter. "But based on justification put forth by acting SECNAV for why he lost trust & confidence ... hard to see it as anything other than an over-reaction & unwarranted at a vital time for the ship."

In the hours since Crozier was fired, the backlash online has been swift, with more than 85,000 people signing a Change.org petition calling for his reinstatement.

Stars and Stripes reporter Joshua Karsten contributed to this report.

Memo: Some in US may not get stimulus checks until August

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The federal government expects to begin making payments to millions of Americans under the new stimulus law in mid-April, but some people without direct deposit information may not get checks until mid-August or later, according to a memo obtained by The Associated Press.

The document from the House Ways and Means Committee says the IRS will make about 60 million payments to Americans

through direct deposit in mid-April, likely the week of April 13. The IRS has direct deposit information for these individuals from their 2018 or 2019 tax returns.

Then, starting the week of May 4, the IRS will begin issuing paper checks to individuals, says the memo obtained by AP on Thursday. The paper checks will be issued at a rate of about 5 million per week, which means it could take up to 20 weeks to get all the checks out. That timeline would delay some checks until the week of Aug. 17.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said

Thursday that while he initially pledged to get payments started within three weeks of the law's adoption, "I'm now committing to two weeks. We're delivering on our commitments."

The IRS, which he oversees, will ensure that "within two weeks the first money will be in people's accounts," Mnuchin said during a White House briefing.

"The Committee remains focused on ensuring all eligible Americans receive their payment as quickly as possible," the memo says.

Military personnel to treat virus patients

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Medical support from the Defense Department to help battle the coronavirus pandemic will be expanded in three states to treat patients with the illness, a day after the captains of the Navy's hospital ships reported receiving less than two dozen patients during the past week.

The Defense Department announced Friday that it had received a request from the Federal Emergency Manage-

ment Agency to provide medical support to patients with the coronavirus at three federal medical stations: the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in New York City; the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in New Orleans, and the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center in Dallas.

The Javits center has soldiers from Fort Campbell's 531st Hospital Center and Fort Hood's 9th Hospital Center providing support, while the Texas and Louisiana locations are

expecting medical personnel from the Navy who are based out of Jacksonville, Fla.

Previously, the Pentagon said they would not provide care to coronavirus patients, but only treat non-coronavirus patients in order to free up beds at local hospitals for people with the virus.

Now, military medical staff will treat coronavirus patients who are recovering from the virus and "low-acuity" patients such as people experiencing non-traumatic injuries and mild pain.

The increase in patient care comes a day after the captains of the USNS Mercy, in port in Los Angeles, and the USNS Comfort, in port in New York City, said in a Pentagon briefing that they had only received less than 20 patients between them since they started accepting patients. The Comfort had only started to take patients Wednesday, and the Mercy has been accepting patients for almost a week. Each ship has the capacity to accept 1,000 adult patients.

White House set to advise use of masks to slow spread

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration is formalizing new guidance to recommend that many Americans wear face coverings in an effort to slow the spread of the new coronavirus as the president defends his response to the crisis.

"Because of some recent information that the virus can actually be spread even when people just speak as opposed to coughing and sneezing — the better part of valor is that when you're out, when you can't maintain that 6-foot distance, to wear

some sort of facial covering," the top U.S. infectious disease official said Friday on "Fox & Friends."

But Dr. Anthony Fauci also made clear that the aim is not to "take away from the availability of masks that are needed for the health care providers who are in real and present danger of getting infected from the people that they're taking care of."

The recommendations were expected to apply to those who live in areas hard hit by community transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19. A person familiar with

the White House coronavirus task force's discussion said officials would suggest that nonmedical masks, T-shirts or bandannas be used to cover the nose and mouth when people go outside. Medical-grade masks, particularly short-in-supply N95 masks, would be reserved for those dealing directly with the sick. The person spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the proposed guidance before its public release.

Officials were expected to limit the geographic scope to just those areas where the virus was spreading rapidly, the official said.

701,000 US jobs cut, ending record decade-long streak

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A record-long streak of U.S. job growth ended suddenly in March after nearly a decade as employers cut 701,000 jobs because of the viral outbreak that's all but shut down the U.S. economy. The unemployment rate jumped to 4.4% from a 50-year low of 3.5%.

The monthly job loss reported Friday by the government, the worst since the depths of the Great Recession in 2009, is still just a small indication of what's to come. Last month's actual losses were likely even larger because the government

surveyed employers before the heaviest layoffs hit in the past two weeks. Nearly 10 million Americans applied for unemployment benefits in the final two weeks of March, far exceeding the figure for any corresponding period on record.

Virus-induced shutdowns have forced widespread layoffs throughout the economy, from hotels, restaurants and movie theaters to auto factories, department stores and administrative offices. The nearly full point increase in the unemployment rate from February to March was the sharpest monthly rise since 1975.

One sign of how painfully deep the job losses will likely prove to be: During its nearly decade-long hiring streak, the U.S. economy added 22.8 million jobs. Economists expect the April jobs report being released in early May to show that nearly all those jobs will have been lost.

As recently as February, U.S. employers had added 273,000 jobs. Some economists have now forecast that the unemployment rate could go as high as 15% within the next month. That rate would be the worst since the 1930s. During the Great Recession, unemploy-

ment peaked at 10%.

With business activity tightly restricted, analysts expect a stomach-churning recession. Economists at Goldman Sachs have forecast that the economy will shrink at an annual rate of 34% in the April-June quarter — the worse fall on records dating to World War II.

A key determinant of the economy's future will be whether businesses can survive the shutdown and rehire many of the workers they laid off. If so, that would help the economy snap back and avoid the type of weak recovery that followed the past three downturns.

View still grim in Europe but hope emerging

Associated Press

NEW YORK — U.S. and European medical workers struggling to save ailing patients Friday watched supplies of medicine, protective equipment and breathing machines dwindle by the hour.

Worldwide, confirmed coronavirus infections surged past 1 million and deaths topped 54,000, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University.

Experts say both numbers are seriously undercounted because of the lack of testing, mild cases that were missed and governments that are underplaying the extent of the crisis.

Europe's three worst-hit countries — Italy, Spain and France — surpassed 30,000 dead, or over half of the global toll. From those countries, the view remained almost unrelentingly grim, a frightening portent for places like New York, the epicenter of the U.S. outbreak, where bodies are being loaded by forklift into refrigerated trucks outside overwhelmed hospitals.

Shortages of critical equipment led to fierce competition among buyers from Europe, the U.S. and elsewhere. A regional leader in Paris described the scramble to find masks a "worldwide treasure hunt." Gov. Andrew Cuomo warned that New York could run out of ventilators in six days.

With more than 245,000 people infected in the U.S. and the death toll topping 6,000, sober-

ing preparations were underway. The Federal Emergency Management Agency asked the Pentagon for 100,000 more body bags.

One Spanish hospital turned its library into an intensive care unit. In France, space was set aside for bodies in a vast food market. The French prime minister said he is "fighting hour by hour" to ward off shortages of essential drugs used to keep COVID-19 patients alive.

Philippe Montravers, an anesthesiologist in Paris, said medics are preparing to fall back on older drugs such as the opiates fentanyl and morphine that had fallen out of favor, because newer painkillers are in short supply.

"The work is extremely tough and heavy," he said. "We've had doctors, nurses, caregivers who got sick, infected ... but who have come back after recovering."

France canceled its high-school exit exam known as the Baccalaureat, a first in the 212-year history of the test.

Some glimmers of hope emerged that Italy, with nearly 14,000 dead, as well as Spain and France might be flattening their infection curves and nearing or even passing their peaks in daily deaths.

Spain on Friday reported 932 new deaths, down slightly from the record it hit a day earlier. The carnage most certainly included large numbers of elderly who authorities admit are not getting access to the country's

limited breathing machines, which are being used first on healthier, younger patients. More than half of Spain's nearly 11,000 deaths have come in the last seven days alone.

In a vast exhibition center in Madrid that was hastily converted into a 1,300-bed field hospital, bed No. 01.30 held patient Esteban Pinaredo, age 87.

"I'm good, I love you," Pinaredo told his family via Skype. "I will run away as soon as I can."

The facility's organizer, Antonio Zapatero, said Spain's nationwide lockdown must be maintained.

"Otherwise, this is what you are facing," he said, pointing at the rows of beds.

Elsewhere in Europe, officials began talking tentatively about how to lift lockdowns that have staved off the total collapse of strained health systems but also battered economies. The pandemic will cost the world economy as much as \$4.1 trillion, or nearly 5% of all economic activity, the Asian Development Bank said.

Austria said it will set out a timetable next week for what could be "a slow startup" of closed parts of the economy. The head of Germany's national disease control center said he expects that any easing of the country's lockdown, which this week was extended to April 19, will be staggered.

Even in Spain, still in the thick of a fight so intense that authorities have suggested that

medics can withhold life-support from elderly patients, talk turned toward possibly relaxing the lockdown in place since March 13.

Other countries went in the opposite direction. Singapore said it will close schools and most workplaces for a month. Thailand banned public gatherings and imposed a curfew.

French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe said European neighbors must coordinate when the time comes to ease lockdowns and that restrictions must be lifted "progressively" to prevent waves of fresh infections.

With spring weather likely to tempt stir-crazy families out of lockdown this weekend, the firm message across the continent remained: "Stay home." Paris police set up roadblocks out of the city to stop those trying to escape for Easter vacation.

In Britain, which locked down later than its European neighbors, the infection peak is still ahead, threatening the National Health Service with the biggest test in its 72-year history after austerity cuts that have strained the institution and its promise of quality care for all.

Meanwhile, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who tested positive last week, said in a video message on Twitter that he is feeling better but still has a fever and will remain in isolation.

Mosques stay open in Pakistan even as death toll climbs

Associated Press

ISLAMABAD — Mosques were allowed to remain open in Pakistan on Friday, when Muslims gather for weekly prayers, even as the coronavirus pandemic spread and much of the country had shut down.

Prime Minister Imran Khan is relying on restricting the size of congregations attending mosques and advice to stay at home from religious groups like the country's Islamic Ide-

ology Council.

However, some provinces have issued their own lockdown orders to prevent Muslims from gathering for Friday prayers. In southern Sindh province, a complete lockdown is being enforced from noon until 3 p.m., the time when the faithful gather for prayers. Anyone found on the streets will be arrested, according to the provincial local government minister in a statement.

In eastern Punjab province,

where 60% of Pakistan's 220 million people live, checkpoints have been set up in major cities stopping people from congregating.

Still, mosques remain open in Pakistan, even as they have been shut down across much of the Middle East and elsewhere. The Middle East has confirmed over 85,000 cases of the virus and over 3,700 deaths, most of them in Iran.

Pakistan, with 2,450 confirmed cases and 35 deaths,

has been sharply criticized for moving too slow to curb large gatherings, including a gathering of tens of thousands of Muslims from several Islamic countries in March. The gathering of Tableeghi Jamaat missionaries is blamed for several outbreaks of the new virus elsewhere in the world. The first confirmed cases that emerged in Gaza were traced to the gathering.

Kansas' use of GPS data raises concerns

Associated Press

TOPEKA, Kan. — Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly faced questions Thursday over the state's monitoring of GPS data gleaned from people's cellphones about how residents have cut down on travel during the coronavirus pandemic.

But Kelly defended the state Department of Health and Environment's use of the data. She said its compilation was "harmless" to individuals and that it helped Kansas focus efforts to promote social distancing where they're needed.

"Right now, the only thing that we are thinking about, really, is how to protect the health and safety of Kansans," Kelly said during a daily COVID-19 briefing. "We know that the less people are moving around, the flatter that curve will be and — not trying to be histrionic here — we will save lives."

Dr. Lee Norman, the health department's head, has cited the data in at least two briefings and has used it to publicly scold Kansas residents for not taking social distancing seriously enough. The information is provided by data-analysis firm Unacast on a publicly accessible website that grades states and counties on social distancing based on how much they've reduced their travel.

A public-interest law firm, the Kansas Justice Institute, is demanding that the Democratic governor provide more information about how the information is collected and used, expressing concerns about privacy and other civil liberties.

The data measures how much people collectively have reduced travel from normal and gives each state and county a letter grade. The latest grade for Kansas is a C-minus, with 18 of its 105 counties receiving an F.

California

LOS ANGELES — California is ramping up testing for coronavirus even as a backlog of 59,000 pending tests is growing, delaying some people from getting results for up to 12 days

and leaving an incomplete picture of how widespread the outbreak is in the state.

Testing rolled out slowly in California but is accelerating now. More than 90,000 tests have been administered statewide, but nearly two-thirds of those results were still pending, according to state figures.

"The backlogs are not necessarily getting better, in real time, but we're hopeful," Gov. Gavin Newsom said Thursday.

The state may be able to fast-track test results as more people receive blood-based tests, Newsom said. Testing that relies on taking nasal swabs, the most prominent initial testing measure, is primarily responsible for delays.

The average wait time in Los Angeles County is five to six days, but some results have taken 10 or 12 days, said Barbara Ferrer, the county health director.

District of Columbia

WASHINGTON — U.S. nuclear plants will be allowed to keep workers on longer shifts to deal with staffing problems in the coronavirus pandemic, raising worries among watchdogs and some families living near reactors that employee exhaustion will increase the risks of accidents.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission's decision to temporarily allow longer worker shifts is one way the industry is scrambling to keep up mandatory staffing levels through what will be weeks or months more of the outbreak.

The shift extensions would allow workers to be on the job for up to 86 hours a week. Currently, they're generally allowed to work up to 72 hours in a seven-day period. As part of the waiver, workers could be assigned to 12-hour shifts for as many as 14 days in a row.

Nuclear plant workers already are having their temperatures checked on arrival for each shift.

Kentucky

FRANKFORT — Kentucky will release nearly 200 inmates

in the first phase of reducing prison populations in response to the coronavirus crisis, Gov. Andy Beshear's administration said Thursday.

The governor signed an executive order to shorten the sentences of 186 inmates determined to be more susceptible to contracting the virus, said J. Michael Brown, secretary of Beshear's executive Cabinet. The inmates were convicted of nonviolent offenses, Beshear said.

The prisoners will be screened to ensure they're not showing symptoms of the virus before their release, Brown said. Once released, they'll have to go into quarantine for 14 days, he said.

The prisoner-release order is meant to protect prison employees and inmates, Brown said.

Nearly 750 more inmates have been identified for a second phase of releases that could occur soon, Brown said. All the inmates are within six months of completing their sentences, he said.

Louisiana

BATON ROUGE — Louisiana's confirmed number of coronavirus cases spiked 42% higher Thursday as a backlog of test results poured in and confirmed Gov. John Bel Edwards' message that the virus's footprint across the state is much wider than limited testing has been able to document so far.

Nearly 9,200 people have tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19, according to the latest figures released by the Louisiana Department of Health, a jump of more than 2,700 confirmed cases from a day earlier and the largest single-day increase reported so far.

But the governor emphasized that Thursday's large increase reflects the growing level of testing statewide — and a break in the logjam of getting test results from commercial labs, hospitals and small testing sites to Louisiana authorities for confirmation. More than 5,300 new test results were reported to the state overnight, the fig-

ures showed.

Michigan

LANSING — Gov. Gretchen Whitmer said Michigan is probably a month away from reaching the peak of the coronavirus outbreak, which topped more than 10,000 cases and 417 deaths in the state Thursday.

"No one is immune from this virus," Whitmer said during a news conference at the Capitol. "Each of us responds differently to this disease, and that's why we all must act as though we could be carrying it and stay home. Just one person with this virus can infect another 40."

Michigan has been hit particularly hard by the disease, reporting about as many confirmed cases of COVID-19 as California, which has about four times as many people. The vast majority of Michigan cases are coming from in and around Detroit.

Wisconsin

MADISON — A federal judge on Thursday declined to postpone Wisconsin's presidential primary as the coronavirus spreads, but he ordered that people be given an extra six days beyond Tuesday's election for absentee voting.

U.S. District Judge William Conley blasted state leaders' decision not to delay the election to protect people's health but refused to postpone it himself, saying a federal judge shouldn't act as the state's health officer.

"As much as the court would prefer that the Wisconsin Legislature and Governor consider the public health ahead of any political considerations, that does not appear in the cards. Nor is it appropriate for a federal district court to act as the state's chief health official by taking that step for them," Conley wrote.

The deadline for voters to get absentee ballots to local clerks had been 8 p.m. on Tuesday, but Conley's order shifted that to 4 p.m. on April 13. Conley also extended the deadline for voters to request ballots by a day to 5 p.m. this Friday.

Gun background checks rise amid virus fears

Associated Press

Background checks required to buy firearms have spiked to record numbers in the past month, fueled by a run on guns from Americans worried about their safety during the coronavirus crisis.

According to figures from the FBI, 3.7 million background checks were done in March — the most for a single month since the system began in 1998. It eclipsed the previous record, set in December 2015, when 3.3 million checks were conducted.

Background checks are the key barometer of gun sales, but the FBI's monthly figures also incorporate checks for firearm permits that are required in some states. Each background check also could be for the sale of more than one gun.

The rush has inflamed tensions between Second Amendment advocates and gun control supporters.

Pro-gun groups say the long lines seen

at gun stores affirm a widespread belief about the right to bear arms. Opponents contend that adding firearms into stressed-out households filled with people cooped up during lockdown orders will lead to increased levels of domestic violence and suicides.

"This is overwhelming evidence that Americans value their ability to take responsibility for their own safety in times of uncertainty," said Mark Oliva, spokesman for the National Shooting Sports Foundation, which represents gunmakers. "The figures are simply eye-popping."

The FBI numbers show that March had five of the top 10 days ever for background checks, including the day with the most, March 20, when more than 210,000 checks were conducted. The day before, California ordered all nonessential businesses to close.

Four of the top 10 weeks ever for checks have occurred since mid-February, includ-

ing the week with the most, March 16-22, when nearly 1.2 million checks were done.

In comparison, 2.64 million checks were conducted in March 2019, more than a million fewer than last month.

The spikes followed key moments in the U.S. trajectory of the pandemic, starting with the nation's first recorded death on Feb. 29 and ramping up as a flurry of states closed schools and businesses. Then in mid-March, President Donald Trump urged Americans to practice social distancing and warned of a potential recession.

Of the 3.7 million background checks done last month, about 2.5 million represented firearm sales, an increase of about 85% over March 2019, according to estimates from Small Arms Analytics and Forecasting, which analyzes data on the firearms industry. Handgun sales increased by about 91%, while sales of long guns were up nearly 74%, it said in a news release.

Trump campaign calls Sessions 'delusional' in letter

Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — President Donald Trump's campaign has sent a letter to Jeff Sessions, his former attorney general now running for a U.S. Senate seat, objecting to Sessions' portrayal of himself as a Trump supporter in a campaign mailer.

The March 31 letter sent by Michael S. Glassner, chief operating officer of Donald J. Trump for President, accused Sessions of attempting to "misleadingly promote your connections to and 'support' of Trump," in the campaign mailer that mentioned Trump's name 22 times.

"The letter even makes the delusional assertion that you are President 'Trump's #1 Supporter,'" Glassner wrote.

"We only assume your campaign is

doing this to confuse President Trump's loyal supporters in Alabama into believing the President supports your candidacy in the upcoming primary run-off election. Nothing could be further from the truth," Glassner wrote.

Before becoming attorney general, Sessions was the first U.S. senator to endorse Trump, donning a Make America Great Again hat at an Alabama rally. But in a political twist of irony, his public falling out with Trump has threatened to upend his hopes of recapturing his former seat.

Sessions relinquished the Senate seat from Alabama he held for 20 years when he was appointed Trump's attorney general, a position he was forced to resign after his 2017 recusal from the Russia inquiry

sparked blistering criticism from Trump. Sessions is now seeking to return to the seat.

Wounded by the fallout of that soured relationship in the Trump-loving state, Sessions was forced into a runoff with former Auburn University football coach Tommy Tuberville in the Republican primary. Tuberville led Sessions in the first round of voting. The winner will face incumbent Democratic U.S. Sen. Doug Jones in November in the once reliably red state.

The letter from the Trump campaign read: "We want to be absolutely clear about it: President Trump and the Trump Campaign unambiguously endorse Tommy Tuberville." The letter was first reported by The New York Times.

Porn warning labels required in Utah despite protest

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — Pornography will have to come with a warning label in Utah after Gov. Gary Herbert allowed the measure to become law over protest from the adult-entertainment industry.

If producers don't include a one-sentence warning label on obscene materials about potential harm to minors, they could face a \$2,500 penalty per violation. Herbert allowed the measure to become law without

his signature on Wednesday.

The measure is aimed at helping people worried about the widespread availability of porn online, Republican sponsor Rep. Brady Brammer has said.

After criticism that the measure could be unconstitutional, it was aimed at porn deemed legally obscene. Most porn doesn't qualify, but hardcore material declared obscene doesn't have constitutional protections.

The Free Speech Coalition, an adult-en-

tertainment trade group, has said the law could still unfairly force porn producers to defend themselves in court because it allows private citizens as well as the state to file complaints.

A judge would have to decide if the porn qualifies as obscene. Producers could avoid the penalty by showing that they have included the label most of the time.

Utah also declared it a public health crisis in 2016. More than a dozen states have advanced similar resolutions since then.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Officers find alligator during robbery response

OH COLUMBUS — Columbus Police discovered a live alligator while responding to an alleged robbery involving a gun and an Xbox.

Police said that a caller reported a man with a gun in a dispute over the return of a Microsoft Xbox on Monday afternoon, the Columbus Dispatch reported.

The man faces a parole violation and a felony weapons charge.

Officers said they found the 3 to 4 feet alligator in an aquarium in a closet while searching the home.

The woman who lived in the apartment where the altercation took place admitted to authorities that the alligator was hers and that she did not have the proper permit or insurance.

An officer handled the reptile until Ohio Department of Agriculture officials took custody of the alligator.

There were three toddlers and several children in the apartment, police said.

Man playing with gun shoots pregnant woman

VA KING GEORGE — A Virginia man shot a pregnant woman while playing with a gun, authorities said.

William Noble Brown IV, 27, was charged with multiple felonies after he called police Monday to report a woman he lived with was shot in the arm, The Free Lance Star reported.

As of Wednesday, the 25 year-old victim was being hospitalized for her injuries.

Police said other children were in the home when Brown fired the gun he thought to be unloaded.

Coyote in pack attacks 5-year-old girl in park

CA DUBLIN — A 5-year-old girl was hospitalized after a coyote attacked her in a San Francisco Bay Area park, officials said.

The girl was walking with her family when a pack of five or six coyotes approached and one of them bit her. The girl's family quickly intervened and the animals fled, park officials said. The Dublin Hills Regional Park was closed to visitors after the child was attacked Wednesday, the East Bay Times reported.

The girl was taken to UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland for treatment of non-life-threatening injuries.

The park was closed to visitors while parks staff coordinates with California Department of Fish and Wildlife officials to locate, trap and remove the coyotes, parks spokesman Dave Mason said.

Tractor-trailer hauling toilet paper catches fire

TX HUTCHINS — A tractor-trailer hauling toilet paper crashed and caught fire near Dallas early Wednesday, spilling the hot commodity all over an interstate.

The fire shut down westbound lanes of Interstate 20 near Interstate 45 in Hutchins, the Texas Department of Transportation said.

The driver of the truck is OK, officials said.

The toilet paper appeared to be large rolls typically used in stores, restaurants and other businesses. Texas Department of Transportation officials said the load of toilet paper "burned extensively," according to Dallas TV station WFAA.

Toilet paper has been in high demand amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Investigators: Fire at church ruled arson

LA BATON ROUGE — A fire just after midnight Wednesday at a Louisiana church was deliberately set, investigators said.

The Baton Rouge Fire Department, in a news release, said it happened at Broadmoor United Methodist Church in Baton Rouge around 12:15 a.m.

When firefighters arrived, authorities said they found the church's detached meeting room, which is used as a Boy Scout and Girl Scout location, engulfed in flames, news outlets reported. The blaze was contained within 15 minutes.

The fire didn't spread to the church's main building, but the meeting room was destroyed. There were no reports of injuries.

Police: Man hit officer with shirt after stop

NM HOBBS — A New Mexico man is facing charges after police say he was arrested for drunken driving and threw his clothes at an officer.

The Hobbs News-Sun reports Alonso Martinez, of Eunice, was taken into custody following a traffic stop in Hobbs over suspicion of driving while intoxicated.

According to police, an officer found an open container of Michelob Ultra in the car's center console. When asked how many beers Martinez had, a report said he told the officer he had about "50-70" beers.

Martinez then allegedly told the officer in Spanish that if he had a weapon, he would have killed him already.

Police say Martinez was taken to Hobbs City Jail to detox when, during a clothing exchange, he threw his shirt in the face of the officer. The re-

port says Martinez then kicked one of his shoes at the officer's leg. Martinez was charged with battery upon a peace officer and aggravated DWI.

Fire officials save cold kitten stuck on a roof

GA MARIETTA — A kitten stuck on a roof in the cold was saved by firefighters in Georgia.

The 6-week-old kitten was nursed back to health Wednesday after her rescue, Cobb County Fire and Emergency Services said in a post on Facebook. The female kitten quickly recovered after she was given milk, cat food, and was warmed in towels, a fire official told the Marietta Daily Journal.

The department named the kitten "Shingles" after asking followers on social media to help name the feline, a fire official said.

Man exposes himself after hacking into class

FL ORLANDO — A man exposed himself to students after hacking into an online class being held by a public school in Florida, school officials said Thursday.

The man gained unauthorized access to the Zoom video conferencing instructional lesson on Wednesday and exposed himself to the class, Orange County Public Schools said in a letter to teachers. The letter encouraged teachers to use the "waiting room" function, which allows the host to control when a participant joins a meeting.

The letter said the case was being handled by law enforcement. Orange County Public School officials didn't provide further details, but said that Zoom wasn't a district-supported application for teachers video conferencing needs.

From wire reports

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and Military News

DE Smith to join Cowboys

Associated Press

The Dallas Cowboys are taking a chance on another suspended defensive end, signing Aldon Smith to a contract while his playing status in the NFL is uncertain.

A person with direct knowledge of the deal said Smith signed Wednesday with Dallas. The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the deal hadn't been announced. Smith posted a picture of himself signing a document on Instagram and wrote, "Life is good. I'm thankful. I'm blessed. I'm a Cowboy."

Smith hasn't played in the NFL since he was suspended for violating the league's substance-abuse policy in 2015 with the Oakland Raiders.

The Cowboys now have two suspended pass rushers under contract in Smith and Randy Gregory. It wasn't immediately clear where Smith stands in the reinstatement process. Gregory is seeking reinstatement.

Smith, 30, had several legal issues as a player with San Francisco and Oakland. He was first suspended with the 49ers in 2014 before receiving a one-year ban in November 2015 with the

Raiders.

Oakland retained Smith's contractual rights before releasing him in 2018 after San Francisco police issued a warrant for his arrest in a domestic violence case.

Smith applied for reinstatement to the NFL in 2016, but that decision was initially deferred until the offseason and he never was granted reinstatement.

Cowboys owner Jerry Jones has a history of trying to resurrect the careers of troubled defensive players, with mixed results. This time, Dallas is looking for pass rushing help after losing Robert Quinn to Chicago in free agency.

Linebacker Rolando McClain had a good year in 2014 after a trade before more substance-abuse suspensions. Defensive end Greg Hardy signed with Dallas as a free agent in 2015 following a domestic violence case in North Carolina, and that tumultuous season was Hardy's final year in the league.

Smith was drafted seventh overall out of Missouri in 2011. He had 19½ sacks in his second NFL season and was an All-Pro while helping San Francisco reach the Super Bowl. He has 47½ sacks in 59 career games.

Japan's baseball, soccer seasons again delayed amid pandemic

Associated Press

TOKYO — The Japanese professional baseball and soccer seasons will be further delayed as the country grapples with the outbreak of the coronavirus.

Japanese professional baseball had aimed to open its season on April 24 after previously pushing it back from March 20.

After a meeting Friday of a joint coronavirus task force established by the NPB and soccer's J-League, Japanese baseball commissioner Atsushi Saito said there was no option but to postpone again.

"Unfortunately things are getting worse now," Saito said. "We'll have a meeting with all 12 teams, but it appears like we'll have to be prepared for an extension (to our postponement)."

After briefly starting in February, the J-League's first and second divisions suspended play later in the month.

J-League chairman Mitsuru Murai said it would be difficult to go ahead with the planned re-start of the first division on May 9.

"I think it's unrealistic to say that we can hold the games as scheduled," Murai said.

A number of NPB and J-League players have been infected with the new virus.

On Tuesday, Japan and Vissel Kobe defender Gotoku Sakai became the first player from the J-League to test positive for COVID-19. That followed last week's announcement that three players from the Hanshin Tigers, of Japan's professional baseball league, had also tested positive.

The new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms for most people. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness or death.

Tokyo confirmed 97 more cases on Thursday, the largest single-day number of infections yet in the capital.

Sharks GM: Boughner has 'upper hand'

Associated Press

San Jose Sharks general manager Doug Wilson isn't ready to remove the interim head coach tag from Bob Boughner's title just yet.

Noting the Sharks' season is not officially over with the NHL on hiatus due to the coronavirus, Wilson voiced his support by saying Boughner has the edge in taking over the job on a permanent basis.

"Does Bob know our group and have the upper hand in this process? Absolutely," Wilson said during a conference call Thursday.

"But I think you have to be thorough in this process because we have the time and the opportunity," he added. "And when you have time like this you need to utilize it."

Wilson was pleased with the improved style of play and structure he saw in the Sharks in 37 games under Boughner, who took over after Peter DeBoer was fired on Dec. 11.

Wilson, however, stressed

there is plenty he wants to evaluate regarding a team that will likely miss the playoffs for only the second time in 16 seasons, and was last in the Western Conference when play stopped on March 12.

It's unclear when play will resume, and whether the NHL will complete the final month of the regular season or go directly into the playoffs.

The Sharks (29-36-5) went 14-20-3 under Boughner. The record was mostly a reflection of a rash of injuries sidelining San Jose's top stars.

Wilson was more definitive in providing injury updates, saying forward Tomas Hertl and defenseman Erik Karlsson are on track to return next season.

Wilson said Hertl is ahead of schedule and can fully extend his left knee some two months after having surgery to repair two torn ligaments. He said Karlsson is nearly fully recovered after breaking his left thumb in February.

Wilson added forward Logan

Couture is feeling no after affects after missing San Jose's final game with a concussion caused when he was struck in the head by a puck.

Boughner spent his portion of the 40-minute session looking ahead to next season.

"Who knows what's happening with the rest of the season here, but if we're talking about training camp, that's what excites me the most," Boughner said.

"We're going to treat training camp as crucial," he added.

Wilson also addressed the status of Joe Thornton, who is playing on a one-year contract and completing his 22nd NHL season, and 15th in San Jose.

"Everybody knows how we feel about Joe," Wilson said, adding he has regular discussions with 40-year-old forward.

Wilson was non-committal when asked if there's a place in next year's lineup for Thornton, saying only: "He's a special man."

Spartans AD defends Izzo after ESPN allegations

Associated Press

EAST LANSING, Mich. — Michigan State athletic director Bill Beekman defended basketball coach Tom Izzo on Thursday after Izzo was accused in an ESPN report of contacting a witness who was part of a 2017 criminal sexual conduct investigation involving one of his players.

According to a police report obtained by ESPN, Michigan State student Brayden Smith — son of former Spartans player Steve Smith — was with basketball player Brock Washington on the night a female student said Washington forcibly groped her. When police interviewed Smith, he said he had already been contacted by Izzo and assistant coaches Dwayne Stephens and Mike Garland. They “asked (Smith) if he was OK and if there was anything that he had seen during the evening,” according to the report.

Earlier this week, ESPN reported that campus police told prosecutors they had probable cause that Brock Washington raped a woman Jan. 19 while she was too intoxicated to consent. County prosecutors declined to file charges because they didn’t feel they could prove their case to a jury.

Washington played a total of 19 minutes this season before he was suspended in late January.

“Tom Izzo has been a beacon of integrity in his profession for nearly four decades, including a quarter century as head coach. Michigan State’s Office of Institutional Equity has gone on record to say that no policies were violated in regards to any actions taken by the men’s basketball staff during a Title IX investigation into a student,” Beekman responded in a statement Thursday. “There’s nothing to support any claims that any member of the men’s basketball staff conducted their own investigation, or interfered with any ongoing investigation. Any insinuation to the contrary is nothing more than an attempt to smear a coach, a program, and an entire university.”

The school’s Title IX investigation determined that Washington was not responsible for having violated the university’s sexual misconduct policy, according to ESPN. The network also reported that in early 2018, Washington pleaded guilty to misdemeanor assault under a provision allowing offenders to plead guilty without a court entering a judgment of conviction.

Nets GM not ruling out Irving, Durant’s return if play resumes

Associated Press

NEW YORK — With so much uncertainty around the NBA season, Brooklyn Nets general manager Sean Marks is no longer ruling out Kevin Durant for the season.

Marks repeatedly had said he didn’t expect Durant to play this season while recovering from Achilles tendon surgery, but he acknowledged Wednesday that everything is unknown now that the season is suspended because of the new coronavirus.

Durant was injured in the 2019 NBA Finals, so he would have a year to recover if the league were to resume in June.

Even Kyrie Irving, who had shoulder surgery on March 3, might be available if play stretched into the summer.

But Marks said he couldn’t even give an answer if the superstars would be able to play this season.

“I don’t think that’s fair, one to those athletes, nor the performance team, to put a timeline on this. I think everybody is dealing with bigger items, far more pressing items,” Marks said during a conference call.

“I do know that those two players are

continuing their rehab, but again, when you’re practicing social distancing and you’re in self-isolation, I haven’t physically seen them in three or four weeks. So it’s difficult for me to gauge, let alone the performance team, as to where they are.”

Irving played 20 games during an injury-plagued first season in Brooklyn before undergoing arthroscopic surgery to relieve a right shoulder impingement. There was no timetable for his return.

Marks also said that the four Nets players who tested positive for COVID-19 have completed their two weeks of quarantine and are now symptom-free. Durant had told The Athletic he was one of the players.

Durant had been working out and his participation in the Olympics hadn’t been ruled out before they were postponed a year.

Now, it’s the NBA that might be playing in July or August.

“I think they’re turning over every rock they possibly can to play and looking at every different outcome,” Marks said. “From a team perspective, all I can say is we have to be preparing for everything.”

Coaches keeping busy over break

Associated Press

MIAMI — Orlando’s Steve Clifford figures he’s like every other NBA coach right now: Wake up, go to whatever now serves as the office, study his own team, maybe think about possible opponents, and resume planning.

Of course, nobody knows what they’re planning for — or when these plans will get used.

A stoppage in play doesn’t mean vacation time has arrived for NBA coaches, especially those like Clifford in position to take their teams to the postseason — assuming this pandemic-interrupted season is able to resume. They’re all spending more time at home, not able to run practices, but none seem to be sitting idly.

“Not knowing the restart date is the toughest challenge professionally,” Clifford said. “Obviously, we’re all limited in what we can do, and basketball takes a back seat right now to family and health. But I will say this: When I talk to our guys, the one common question that comes up is ‘When do you think we can start again?’”

And that’s a question with no answer. The waiting game is the only game in town

right now.

This is the first in-season stoppage of its kind in NBA history, but Milwaukee coach Mike Budenholzer is equating the unknown — in terms of when the next game will be — to what the league went through with lockout-shortened seasons in 1998-99 and 2011-12.

His message to his staff: Things may be slow now, but when the suspension ends the pace of everything will be frantic. So while some projects like things in the video room and breakdowns of his roster are being tackled, Budenholzer is also having staff get ready for potential playoff opponents with a first-round series against either Brooklyn or Orlando likely for the NBA-leading Bucks.

“Things happen really fast, whether it’s three games in three nights, or playoff series are shorter or the time between the end of the regular season to the first playoff game, everything can be shorter or can happen quicker,” Budenholzer said. “We can put a little bit of money in the bank now with preparation for first round but also if you go a little bit deeper, the East.”