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Claims for jobless aid in US reach 22M

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The wave of layoffs that has engulfed the U.S. economy since the coronavirus struck forced 5.2 million more people to seek unemployment benefits last week, the government reported Thursday.

Roughly 22 million have sought jobless benefits in the past month — the worst stretch of U.S. job losses on record. It means that roughly one in seven workers have lost their jobs in that time.

The grim figures point to an economy that is tumbling into what appears to be a calamitous recession, the worst in decades. The nation's output could shrink by roughly 10.5% before it starts to rebound, according to Ryan Sweet, an economist at Moody's Analytics.

That would be more than double the contraction that occurred during the 2008-2009 recession, which was the worst downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

All businesses deemed nonessential have been closed in nearly every state. Deep job losses have been inflicted across nearly every industry. Some economists say the unemployment rate could reach as high as 20% in April, which would be the highest rate since the Depression. By comparison,

unemployment never topped 10% during the Great Recession.

Layoffs are spreading well beyond service industries like hotels, restaurants, retail stores and entertainment, which have absorbed the brunt of the job cuts, into white collar professional occupations, including software programmers, legal assistants and sales people. Workers in other occupations, like construction, are also suffering.

Up to 50 million jobs are vulnerable to coronavirus-related layoffs, economists say — about one-third of all positions in the United States. That figure is based on a calculation of jobs that are deemed non-essential by state and federal governments and that cannot be done from home.

It's unlikely that all those workers will be laid off or file for unemployment benefits. But it suggests the extraordinary magnitude of unemployment that could result from the pandemic.

"This crisis combines the scale of a national economic downturn with the pace of a natural disaster," said Daniel Zhao, senior economist at Glassdoor. "And that's really unprecedented in American economic history."

All told, nearly 12 million people are now receiving unemployment checks, essentially matching the peak reached in Janu-

ary 2010, shortly after the Great Recession officially ended. That figure is less than the number of applicants in part because it lags behind the number of first-time jobless claims figure by a week. And many people who apply for unemployment aid are turned down and don't actually receive checks.

Many of the jobless whose applications for unemployment aid haven't been accepted are likely self-employed and gig workers. The government's \$2.2 trillion economic relief package provides jobless benefits to those groups for the first time. But most states have to set up new computer systems to process those claims — a process that could take weeks in some cases.

The rescue package also established a \$350 billion loan program to small businesses, with the loans forgiven if companies retain or rehire their workers. But Michelle Meyer, chief U.S. economist at Bank of America, said that so far there's little evidence that the program has stemmed job losses. Meyer said she thought some companies may feel that laying off workers is a better option, given that the government has added \$600 to the weekly unemployment aid that states provide. The total jobless benefit could replace all or even more than a low-income worker's normal paycheck.

Navy: Iranian ships harass US ships in Persian Gulf

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Eleven Iranian military ships on Wednesday maneuvered dangerously close to several American ships conducting operations in the northern Persian Gulf, according to the Navy.

The Iranian ships "repeatedly conducted dangerous and harassing approaches" of six U.S. ships: the USS Lewis B. Puller, an expeditionary mobile base platform ship; the USS Paul Hamilton, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer; the USS Firebolt and the USS Sirocco, cyclone-class coastal patrol ships, and the USCGC Wrangell and the USCGC Maui, U.S. Coast Guard island-class cutters.

The ships were identified as Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy vessels in a statement Wednesday by U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, U.S. 5th Fleet.

"The vessels repeatedly crossed the bows and sterns of the U.S. vessels at extremely close range and high speeds, including multiple crossings of the Puller with a 50-yard closest point of approach and within 10 yards of Maui's bow," the Navy said.

The American ships were conducting joint-integration operations in international waters with Army AH-64E Apache attack helicopters, according to the Navy statement. The joint operations have been conducted in the northern Persian Gulf since late March. The Navy also conducted

operations with an Air Force special operations gunship last month as part of stepped up U.S. and allied efforts to deter what American officials have said are mounting Iranian threats in the region.

Images posted by the 5th Fleet of the incident show what look like speed boats conducting close passes and tight turns around the U.S. ships.

The American sailors gave multiple warnings to the Iranian ships through bridge-to-bridge radio, five short horn blasts and "long-range acoustic noise marker devices," the Navy said, receiving no response for an hour.

The Iranian ships eventually responded to the bridge-to-bridge radio messages and moved away from the American ships.

Navy: Russian jet maneuver risked crash

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTT GART, Germany — A Russian fighter jet risked a midair collision when it intercepted a Navy aircraft at close range over the Mediterranean Sea on Wednesday, U.S. military officials said.

A U.S. P-8A Poseidon aircraft, used for tracking submarines, was flying in international airspace when a Russian SU-35 performed a high-speed, inverted maneuver 25 feet in front of the Navy plane, U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa said in a statement.

The encounter with the Russian fighter, which caused turbulence aboard the P-8A, lasted for 42 minutes.

“Unsafe actions increase the

risk of miscalculation and potential for midair collisions,” NAVEUR said. “The U.S. aircraft was operating consistent with international law and did not provoke this Russian activity.”

In Europe, risky encounters with Russian military aircraft have occurred on occasion in recent years, most notably in the Black Sea. But the latest action also comes as the U.S. military contends with the coronavirus.

The U.S. has been forced to cancel numerous military exercises and training plans because of the virus, raising concerns that adversaries could use the crisis as an opportunity to test American military readiness.

The latest incident with the Russians comes one week after U.S. Air Force F-22 fighter jets intercepted a pair of Russian maritime patrol planes 50 miles off the western coast of the Aleutian Islands, in what military officials said at the time was a test of U.S. capabilities amid the coronavirus pandemic.

And on Wednesday, 11 Iranian military vessels moved dangerously close to several American ships conducting operations in the northern Persian Gulf, the Navy said.

Last week, as virus cases surged in the ranks, Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Mark Milley issued a warning to rivals.

“I wouldn’t want any mixed messages going out there to

any adversaries that they can take advantage of an opportunity, if you will, at a time of crisis,” Milley said. “That would be a terrible and tragic mistake if they thought that.”

Navy crews operating in Europe are taking precautionary measures to guard against the coronavirus, the service said.

This week, destroyers based in Rota, Spain, maneuvered in the Black and Baltic seas, while the P-8A Poseidon flew its Mediterranean mission.

“U.S. 6th Fleet remains at sea, ensuring maritime security and demonstrating our continued ability to operate in concert with allies and partners across the European theater,” Vice Adm. Lisa Franchetti said in a statement Tuesday.

LA hospital ship might scale back its mission

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The USNS Mercy hospital ship docked in Los Angeles may be able to scale back its medical operation a bit over the next week as the coronavirus workload at area hospitals stabilizes, according to the ship’s captain and military documents.

The Mercy will also send about 40 medical staff to a regional skilled nursing facility Monday, Navy Capt. John Rotruck, the ship’s commander, said Wednesday in an interview with The Associated Press. He said that elderly patients will not be brought to the ship, despite earlier suggestions that could happen.

Rotruck said that a plan under discussion would reduce the number of available hospital beds on the Navy ship from 1,000 to 250. Documents reviewed by the AP said the plan could free up medical staff that could then go on to other missions.

Two weeks ago, California officials were planning for a potential crush of coronavirus cases that could require adding up to 66,000 additional hospital beds by mid-May. The Mercy was part of the ramp-up effort, but since then, hospitalizations have leveled off and ample rooms are available.

Many of the worst outbreaks now occurring are in nursing facilities, and some are having staffing issues as workers are infected or stay home.

Rotruck said that there has been no final decision, but 250 beds would be a reasonable size to maintain. He said that “probably in the neighborhood of 100 or more people” could be made available for other missions, as a result of the reduction in beds. He said that no decisions have been made on where medical staff may go.

Reducing the Mercy’s capacity, he said, won’t hurt its ability to relieve local hospitals.

Esper suggests Roosevelt may return to sea in weeks

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Mark Esper said Wednesday that the USS Theodore Roosevelt could be back at sea in weeks as the Navy announced coronavirus cases among the crew increased to more than 600 sailors.

Esper said during an interview with Fox News that once the aircraft carrier has been cleaned as a result of the virus outbreak, the ship will return to sea in a few weeks for patrols.

The defense secretary’s comments followed a Navy announcement Wednesday that a fifth sailor assigned to the Roosevelt has been hospitalized due to the coronavirus as illnesses continue to increase among the crew.

The sailor is being treated at U.S. Naval Hospital Guam, where four other sailors were transferred Tuesday. One sailor remains in intensive care for observation due to shortness of

breath.

The hospitalizations this week follow Monday’s death of a Roosevelt sailor who had been in intensive care after being found unresponsive April 9 while in quarantine on Guam. The sailor has not yet been identified, pending notification of next of kin.

Capt. Brett Crozier, the former commander of the Roosevelt, was fired April 2 after his emailed letter about the ship’s virus outbreak was leaked to the media. Then acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly, who resigned amid the Roosevelt controversy, initiated an investigation into Crozier’s actions and the climate of Pacific Fleet “to help determine what may have contributed to this breakdown in the chain of command,” he said at the time.

Esper said Wednesday that the investigation was completed last week, and it will be reviewed by new acting Navy Secretary James McPherson this week.

Glitches prevent stimulus aid checks from reaching millions

The Washington Post

Many Americans woke up Wednesday expecting to find a payment of \$1,200 or more from the U.S. government in their bank account, but instead they realized nothing had arrived yet — or the wrong amount was deposited. Parents of young children complained they did not receive the promised \$500 check for their dependent children.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin has instructed the Internal Revenue Service to get payments out as fast as possible to help offset the pain of losing jobs and shutting down businesses, but numerous glitches — affecting filers who used tax preparers, parents of dependent children and people with 2019 tax returns still to be processed — are delaying pay-

ments and causing confusion.

Several million people who filed their taxes via H&R Block, TurboTax and other popular services were unable to get their payments because the IRS did not have their direct deposit information on file, according to the Treasury, companies and experts.

The IRS launched a “Get My Payment” tool Wednesday for people to track the status of their payment and enter direct deposit information, but many who used it said they received a message saying “Payment Status Not Available,” a frustration that left them without answers.

Some parents told *The Washington Post* that they received a \$1,200 payment for a single head of household or a \$2,400 check for a married couple but that the IRS left out the \$500-per-child-under-17 payments.

IRS and Treasury officials acknowledged they are aware of these issues and are working to fix them. A Treasury spokeswoman noted that the IRS processed nearly 80 million payments in less than three weeks. That’s just over half the 150 million payments expected to go out under the Economic Impact Payment program.

Social Security recipients will automatically receive the payments later this month. Paper checks will have President Donald Trump’s name on them and are expected to start going out in the coming days. Low-income Americans who do not normally file a tax return, including the homeless, are also eligible to receive the \$1,200 check, but only if they enter their information in a new non-filers tool on IRS.gov.

Japanese PM expands stay-at-home order for all

Associated Press

TOKYO — Japan’s state of emergency has been expanded to the whole country from seven prefectures, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said on Thursday, as the novel coronavirus crisis deepens.

Everyone in Japan needs to reduce their social contacts by 80% in order to stem new infections, Abe urged, as the number of cases climbed to nearly 10,000, including 712 on a cruise ship quarantined near Tokyo in February.

About 180 people in Japan have died of COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the virus.

The government “needs to take measures to keep the flow of people to minimum” before this year’s Golden Week holidays that start in late April, Yasutoshi Nishimura, the country’s economic minister, told a government meeting.

Abe’s government has been criticized for hiding the true number of coronavirus cases by limiting tests.

The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare had focused on clusters of coronavirus cases instead of testing as many people as possible.

The declaration requests — not orders — residents to stay at home, meaning there will be no punishment for those who do not comply with the measures aimed at containing the spread of the coronavirus.

So, even after the declaration, many people still went to work in major cities in the seven prefectures.

The government and local leaders urged people to work from home, but many Japanese companies still do not allow telework.

On Thursday, Abe also said the government will provide cash handouts of 925 dollars to all citizens.

2 American sailors assigned to French navy strike group test positive for virus

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

Two U.S. sailors are among the 668 crewmembers assigned to a French navy strike group who have tested positive for coronavirus, the French and U.S. navies announced Wednesday.

The two were part of a team of four U.S. sailors embedded on the French aircraft carrier FS Charles de Gaulle as part of the Navy’s personnel exchange program, according to the Navy’s most recent daily coronavirus update.

The de Gaulle leads the strike group, which includes multiple frigates, a command and refueling vessel and a nuclear-powered attack submarine, according to a Jan. 23 USNI News report.

“As part of the [personnel exchange program], sailors are integrated into the French crew in all daily operations, which include medical care, if needed,” according to the U.S. Navy update.

The ill U.S. sailors are being treated with “excellent host nation medical care at French facilities,” according to the update.

“We are confident that our Sailors are in good hands,” it added.

The French navy said, “the great majority” of the 668 positive tests for the virus were among sailors aboard the de Gaulle, according to a statement Thursday. Of the sailors who tested positive, 31 are hospitalized. The statement did not specify the other French ships affected by the virus.

The 668 number is a stark jump from last week, when France’s Armed Forces Ministry in a tweet April 10 announced 50 de Gaulle sailors had tested positive for the coronavirus. Three of those sailors were evacuated “as a precaution, by plane, and transferred to a hospital in France,” according to a translation of the message.

The outbreak prompted the de Gaulle and its strike group to return early to their Toulon, France, homeport April 13, the ministry said in a tweet Thursday. The ship had been deployed since January and “had already achieved its operation objectives” when the decision was made to return to port, according to a translation of the message.

Teams are working to disinfect the ships and aircraft, and the remaining sailors are being tested, the ministry said in the Thursday tweet.

Thousands protest restrictions in Michigan

Associated Press

LANSING — Thousands of flag-waving, honking protesters drove past the Michigan Capitol on Wednesday to show their displeasure with Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's orders to keep people at home and businesses locked during the coronavirus outbreak.

As snow fell, others got out of their vehicles and raised signs, one of which read, "Gov. Whitmer We Are Not Prisoners." Another said, "Michigander Against Gretchen's Abuses."

Hours later, Whitmer shot back, telling reporters that the rally put health at risk.

Whitmer, a Democrat, extended a stay-home order through April 30 and has shut down schools and businesses deemed nonessential. The governor acknowledged the pain but said that the restrictions were necessary to stop the spread of the coronavirus, which has killed more than 1,900 Michigan residents and overwhelmed hospitals in the Detroit area.

Arizona

PHOENIX — Public health officials in Arizona's largest county said that they're seeing improvements in the number of people hospitalized for the coronavirus.

The Maricopa County Department of Public Health said Wednesday that the rate of growth in hospitalizations is slowing. Officials said that's likely due to the social distancing measures which have closed businesses and left people avoiding large gatherings.

The county also released data showing that people with high blood pressure, diabetes or heart, kidney, lung or liver disease are more likely to be hospitalized. People with high blood pressure, for example, make up 35% of hospitalizations but only 17% of the total group of people with cases of COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus.

Meanwhile, state health officials said that 11 more people in Arizona have died from

complications of the coronavirus, bringing the total number of deaths since the start of the outbreak to 142.

California

SACRAMENTO — California will be the first state to give cash to immigrants living in the country illegally who are hurt by the coronavirus, offering \$500 apiece to 150,000 adults who were left out of the \$2.2 trillion stimulus package approved by Congress.

People living in the country illegally are not eligible for any of that money, and advocates have been pushing for states to fill in the gap. On Wednesday, Gov. Gavin Newsom announced that he would spend \$75 million to create a Disaster Relief Fund for immigrants living in the country illegally.

Senate Republican Leader Shannon Grove said that Newsom should spend the money instead on food banks, equipment for students to continue their education online and local governments struggling with revenue losses.

State officials won't decide who gets the money. Instead, the state will give it to a network of regional nonprofits to find and vet potential recipients.

Hawaii

HONOLULU — Hawaii state worker unions on Wednesday pushed back at what they said was a proposal from Gov. David Ige to cut employee pay by 20% to cope with a sharp drop in tax revenue brought on by the coronavirus pandemic.

Ige said at a news conference that he was in discussions with unions and lawmakers about potential cuts, but no decision has been made. He said that the tax shortfalls meant the state needed to cut \$1.5 billion from the state budget over the next 15 months.

He noted that the state has essentially shut down the tourism industry to slow the spread of the virus, which has hammered two major sources of state income: the hotel tax and

the general excise tax.

Mississippi

JACKSON — Facing two freedom-of-religion lawsuits and pushback from the U.S. attorney general, a Mississippi mayor said Wednesday that people may attend drive-in church services during the coronavirus pandemic, but they must keep their windows up.

Greenville Mayor Errick D. Simmons also said that local churches may allow up to 10 people at a time in a building for worship services that are shown online or carried on TV or radio, as long as those inside the church follow public health guidelines to maintain a safe distance from one another.

A conservative legal group called Alliance Defending Freedom filed a federal lawsuit Friday challenging the Greenville order as unconstitutional. On Tuesday, U.S. Attorney General William Barr took the rare step of filing papers to side with those suing the city. Gov. Tate Reeves tweeted thanks to Barr "for this strong stand in support of religious liberty."

North Carolina

RALEIGH — The North Carolina Department of Revenue granted permission to over 3,400 businesses to be recognized as essential entities, and denied more than 500 other companies who filed a similar appeal during the coronavirus outbreak.

North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper's stay-at-home order on March 27 had set a broad definition of essential businesses, and the ones that were granted appeal Wednesday were mostly listed in the original executive order, WRAL-TV reported. The permission granted by the state's revenue department was a confirmation for most businesses, including landscapers, dog groomers, carpet cleaners and many more.

Others were not so lucky. Barber shops, salons and a bounce house party rental company make up part of the 50 businesses that were fully denied

their appeal. Debi Creech, who owns a fitness company called "Zumba with Debi," has started hosting online classes to keep her business afloat under the closure.

North Dakota

BISMARCK — Bismarck city commissioners have rejected a request by local restaurant owners to temporarily allow the businesses to sell alcohol with takeout orders.

Several North Dakota cities have made such adjustments to help restaurants deal with a reduction in business because of the stay-at-home order.

Mandan is one city allowing restaurants to sell sealed cans or bottles of alcohol with takeout meals.

The Bismarck Tribune reported that Mayor Steve Bakken said restaurants have typically told the city that alcohol is an add-on and that food is their primary source of revenue.

New York

New York residents will be required to wear face coverings anytime they come into close contact with other people outside their homes, Gov. Andrew Cuomo said Wednesday.

The mandate will require a mask or face covering, like a bandanna, on busy streets, public transit or any situation where people cannot maintain 6 feet of social distancing, even if it is passing a person briefly on a wooded trail. The order takes effect Friday.

The governor, who has himself eschewed masks during his daily news briefings, though he comes within six feet of his staff, said that there will initially be no civil penalties for noncompliance, but he's urging merchants to enforce it among customers.

Though hospitalizations from the outbreak have leveled off, New York officials are still trying to reduce the rising death toll. New York recorded 752 deaths Tuesday for a total of nearly 11,600 since the outbreak began.

SIGAR: Recommendations going unheeded by DOD

BY J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

The Pentagon has followed less than half of recent recommendations made by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, a report by the watchdog group released Thursday said.

SIGAR has issued more than 200 recommendations since 2014 on how to improve oversight and prevent fraud, waste and abuse in Afghanistan, with the Pentagon implementing 84 of them, the report said.

Some have languished for 20 months or more without being addressed and others are so overdue that SIGAR has determined the Pentagon will never respond, the report said.

In one case, after finding that the Pentagon funded, trained and equipped Afghan military units linked to human rights violations and child sexual assault, SIGAR issued seven recommendations for how the military could avoid running afoul of the “Leahy Law,” which bars assisting groups if credible evidence exists of gross human rights violations.

The Pentagon did take action but as of January hadn’t fully addressed the recommendations, including one requiring contractors to report human

rights violations, the SIGAR report said.

The Defense Department thoroughly reviews SIGAR recommendations, officials said.

“In some cases, the Department does not concur or only partially concurs in SIGAR’s prescribed solutions,” said an April 7 DOD memo in response to the report. “In other cases, the Department takes action, but does not always receive a response from SIGAR about whether the action taken was sufficient to close the recommendation.”

Congress established SIGAR in 2008 to audit government projects, such as the Pentagon’s efforts to develop the Afghan military. Federal law gives agencies one year after an audit to either submit a plan on how they’re making fixes identified by an IG, or state that they don’t plan to do so.

From 2009 to 2014, the Pentagon implemented more than 75% of SIGAR’s recommendations, an earlier report said.

Less than 40% have been adopted since 2014, the latest SIGAR report said.

The Pentagon recently addressed 10 of its pending recommendations since SIGAR highlighted the disconnect, defense officials said in their response to the report.

Trump threatens to bypass rules to get nominees

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Citing the coronavirus, Donald Trump is threatening unprecedented action — adjourning both houses of Congress — to entice the Senate to approve more of his nominees.

In recent years, Congress has refused to fully adjourn during most breaks precisely to prevent the president from making recess appointments. Little or no business is conducted in such “pro-forma sessions,” but they give members of both chambers of Congress the chance to go back home without going into recess.

It’s a process lawmakers also employed to thwart President Barack Obama’s nominees.

Trump says he’s had enough and warns that he will seek to adjourn both chambers of Congress if lawmakers don’t formally declare a proper recess. That way, he could appoint

some nominees without the Senate’s approval. Trump said, “Perhaps it’s never been done before, nobody’s even sure if it has, but we’re going to do it.”

The Constitution does not spell out a unilateral power for the president to adjourn Congress. It states only that he can decide on adjournment if there is a dispute over it between the House and Senate. Such a disagreement does not now exist, nor is it likely to arise.

Constitutional scholar Jonathan Turley said the Constitution gives a president authority in “extraordinary occasions” to convene or adjourn Congress. However, he said, “This power has never been used and should not be used now.”

It would be an extraordinary showdown between the two branches of government that have engaged in repeated tests of constitutional powers in the Trump era.

Progressives weigh backing Biden to be rid of Trump

Associated Press

CHICAGO — When Bernie Sanders didn’t win the Democratic presidential nomination in 2016, Silvia Machado and Patrick Gibbons voted for Green Party candidate Jill Stein in protest.

Four years later, the couple is still passionate about the Vermont senator’s progressive agenda. But they’re open to voting for the relatively centrist Joe Biden if that’s what it takes to defeat President Donald Trump.

“It’s like hold your nose and vote,” said Gibbons, 59.

A week after Sanders’ exit

left Biden as the presumptive Democratic nominee, the former vice president is working to win over voters such as Machado and Gibbons. The party is desperate to avoid a repeat of 2016 when ideological divides helped Trump win the White House.

Biden has made a series of proposals intended to appeal to progressives and won endorsements this week from Sanders and Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren, another liberal rival during the Democratic primary. But the tensions that have weighed on Democrats for years aren’t suddenly evaporating. While some voters are

making a practical calculation to beat Trump by supporting Biden, other leaders of the movement are urging caution until Biden embraces priorities such as the universal health care plan known as “Medicare for All.”

“The Biden that exists now will not get a lot of votes from progressives currently inclined to not vote at all or to vote third party,” said Norman Solomon, co-founder of the activist organization Roots Action. “The only tool now to defeat Trump is Joe Biden, and the only way to sharpen that tool is to move him in a more progressive direction.”

AP VoteCast surveys of the electorate conducted before Sanders dropped out of the race show skepticism among his supporters about Biden. Across 17 states where the survey was conducted, 54% of Sanders backers said they would be dissatisfied if Biden were the nominee. Just 28% of all Democratic primary voters said the same. In the three states that voted on March 17 — Florida, Arizona and Illinois — some Sanders supporters went further, vowing not to support Biden; 13% said they would definitely not vote for Biden, and an additional 10% said they probably would not.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Arrest made in theft of Arboretum bronze gates

WA SEATTLE — Seattle police on Monday arrested a 47-year-old man who is allegedly behind the theft of two ornamental bronze gates that stood since the 1970s at the entrance to the Washington State Arboretum.

The gates, which were commissioned in 1971 and designed by renowned sculptor George Tsutakawa, were reported stolen March 19 after gardeners discovered the gates missing and bolt cutters on the ground. Two people tried to sell the gates to a recycling center on March 20, but the business refused to buy them, according to police.

Police questioned a man who said he drove the suspect to the recycling center and later dropped him off at a homeless encampment, according to the probable cause statement. Detectives found remnants of one gate under a box truck in the encampment, the statement says. Police have also located the second gate, which was largely intact.

Woman gives stimulus check to food pantry

MS BAY ST. LOUIS — A woman donated the \$1,200 relief check she received from the federal government to a Mississippi food pantry amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Sheron Lambert gave the one-time stimulus payment to the Hancock County Food Pantry, WLOX-TV reported Tuesday. The checks are part of the \$2.2 trillion economic recovery bill that will give \$1,200 to individuals and \$2,400 to married couples. Parents are also set to receive an additional \$500 per child.

Lambert said she doesn't need the money and gifted it to

the pantry to help feed hungry people in the county. "That's what we all need to do," she said. "Open our hearts first."

Suit: Overturned bounce house trapped kids

NM SANTA FE — A Santa Fe woman is suing Meow Wolf after she says her children were injured when wind overturned the arts and entertainment company's rented bounce house.

The Santa Fe New Mexican reported that attorneys for Anita Vargas didn't say in court documents how the children were hurt at the 2018 block party but alleged that the children were trapped underneath the bounce house.

The case was filed in state district court this week.

Amazing Jumps LLC, the Albuquerque business that owned the bounce house, also is named as a defendant in the lawsuit. The company declined to comment on the pending litigation Monday. A spokesperson for Meow Wolf also didn't respond to emails.

Ice on expressway leads to 50-vehicle pileup

IL CHICAGO — Portions of a Chicago expressway left icy by a wintry blast that brought overnight snowfall led to a pileup involving dozens of vehicles early Wednesday, sending 14 people to hospitals, officials said.

About 50 vehicles were involved in the 5 a.m. pileup along the Kennedy Expressway, the Chicago Fire Department said. The crash prompted Illinois State Police to temporarily close all of the expressway's southbound lanes near Chicago's North Avenue, and multiple northbound lanes were also closed.

Police: Highway closed after cows fell off truck

FL DADE CITY — Interstate 75 in Florida was shut down for about two hours after six cows, three dead and three injured, were found along the highway, authorities said.

Troopers responded just before 11 a.m. Tuesday to a call of several cows near the north and southbound lanes of I-75, just north of Tampa, according to a Florida Highway Patrol news release. The Pasco County Sheriff's Office and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission also responded.

The cows appear to have fallen from an unknown passing truck, investigators said. Officials didn't immediately say what would happen to the injured cows.

Man charged in theft of dump truck, standoff

AZ FLAGSTAFF — A Flagstaff man is facing multiple charges after stealing a dump truck and then barricading himself inside the vehicle, authorities said.

Coconino County Sheriff's officials said Tyler Littlefield, 27, has been booked into jail on suspicion of theft, criminal damage and resisting arrest. Littlefield is accused of stealing the dump truck from a Flagstaff landscape company last Saturday.

Authorities say he then drove it to Grey Mountain, where he stole items from a convenience store.

Littlefield then drove the vehicle back to Flagstaff and was seen driving erratically and causing damage to property, authorities said.

Sheriff's deputies were called when the dump truck got stuck in the mud. Littlefield barricaded inside for about an hour and then was taken into custody.

Supervisor accused of hitting officer with car

GA ATLANTA — An Atlanta police supervisor hit a fellow officer with her car while he was directing traffic, authorities said.

Lt. Sharonne Annette Steed was charged Friday with obstruction, aggravated assault, battery and violation of oath by a public officer, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported. She turned herself in Tuesday.

Atlanta police spokesman Carlos Campos said Steed was trying to go to the bank when she ignored orders from Officer Joel Paul Curtis Richardson, who was working an off-duty job assisting with traffic. Richardson tried to remove Steed from the car after she hit him, but she bit him on the hand, Campos said.

Authorities help replace girl's alpaca on Easter

OH PATRIOT — A young girl who lost her pet alpaca after the animal was killed during a drive-by shooting in Ohio was gifted another one from local authorities.

Josie Blazer, 5, of Patriot, was surprised to find a 6-month-old alpaca Easter morning, the Gallipolis Daily Tribune reported Monday. The alpaca that died had been given to Josie following her battle with cancer.

Four Season Veterinary Clinic found a replacement alpaca for Josie, and the Gallia County Sheriff's Office delivered the pet. The sheriff's office had responded to a call on April 7. A pickup truck had reportedly stopped along a road, and someone fatally shot an alpaca belonging to the Blazer family. The sheriff's office said the shooter or shooters have been identified and will be charged.

From wire reports

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Reporting
World, National
and Military News

Football depends on campuses

Associated Press

The commissioners of the nation's major college football conferences held a 30-minute conference call Wednesday with Vice President Mike Pence and stressed that college sports cannot return from the coronavirus shutdown until campuses have reopened.

The 10 commissioners, along with the athletic director of Notre Dame, comprise the College Football Playoff management committee.

"We were able to talk about the differences between us and professional sports," American Athletic Conference Commissioner Mike Aresco said. "We talked about how academics and college athletics were inseparable."

Big 12 Commissioner Bob Bowlsby said Pence asked good questions and was "hopeful and optimistic" about the

fight against the coronavirus. The pandemic has shut down all major sporting events since mid-March and forced colleges to close campuses and move classes online.

The White House has said it is important to reopen the U.S. economy, though the details on how that will happen will be complicated and likely involve local, state and federal guidelines on safety. President Donald Trump has also been engaged with professional sports leagues with the multi-billion-dollar sports industry on hold.

The college football season is scheduled to begin Labor Day weekend, but many questions remain to be answered for a sport that is the lifeblood for many athletic departments.

"(We) made the point we were concerned and wanted to get back to having kids at-

tending college and opening up our colleges and universities," Bowlsby said. "That until that happened, we weren't going to be having any sports."

The commissioners would like major college football to start at the same time all over the country, which could be difficult depending on how the pandemic fades.

"We talked a little about whether there would be a national policy because, obviously, if governors have different policies you're going to have some issues," Aresco said. "If California isn't allowing football and Ohio is that's going to be issue for what is obviously a national enterprise."

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the United States' top infectious disease expert, said in a Snapchat interview it is unlikely sporting events can happen this summer with large crowds in attendance.

PGA hopes to resume events in June, play into December

Associated Press

The PGA Tour laid out an ambitious plan Thursday to resume its season the second week of June and keep fans away for at least a month, conceding that any return to golf depends on whether it can be played safely amid the coronavirus outbreak.

The Charles Schwab Challenge at Colonial in Fort Worth, Texas, was pushed back to June 11-14. Assuming golf gets the green light from government and health officials, the tour then would have an official tournament every week through Dec. 6 except for a Thanksgiving break.

"Our hope is to play a role — responsibly — in the world's return to enjoying the things we love," PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan said. "But as we've stressed on several occasions, we will resume competition only when ... it is considered safe to do so under the guidance of the leading public health authorities."

Golf is the first sport to announce plans for a restart, although its arenas are far different from other sports because it is played over some 400 acres. Even as it announced a truncated schedule, several key details were still being contemplated, such as testing for COVID-19 at tournaments.

"We have a level of confidence that is based upon ... changes and developments being made in the world of testing, available tests," said Andy Pazder, the tour's chief officer of tournaments and competition. "We're following very closely, through the assistance of our expert medical advisers, the development of more large-scale testing capabilities. ... It gives us confidence that we will be able to develop a strong testing protocol that will mitigate risk as much as we possibly can."

The RBC Heritage at Hilton Head will be played after Colonial on June 18-21.

NFL briefs

Rams' Allen reveals positive virus test

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Los Angeles Rams center Brian Allen says he tested positive for COVID-19 three weeks ago.

Allen is the first active NFL player to acknowledge testing positive during the coronavirus pandemic.

The third-year pro is not hospitalized and is "feeling good," according to a statement issued by the Rams on Wednesday night only after Allen spoke to Fox Sports about his positive test.

The 24-year-old Allen was training and rehabilitating at the Rams' training complex when he began to feel symptoms last month. He told Fox Sports that he lost his sense of smell and taste, and they haven't returned even after his other symptoms abated.

Rams general manager Les Snead and coach Sean McVay both dodged the question last

week when asked if any members of the organization had fallen ill.

"Everybody is doing really well," McVay said at the time. "There's been a couple guys that we've had some conversations with, but they're in a good place right now."

Also:

■ At least one member of the Los Angeles Chargers organization has tested positive for the coronavirus and two others have reported symptoms.

Team spokesman Josh Rupperecht said in a statement that "everyone is doing well and is on the road to recovery."

Rupperecht added that owner Dean Spanos, general manager Tom Telesco and coach Anthony Lynn are fine.

ESPN reported that the first positive diagnosis happened two weeks after the team facility was shut down on March 12.

Packers Hall of Famer Willie Davis dies at 85

Willie Davis, a Pro Football Hall of Fame defensive lineman who helped the Green Bay Packers win each of the first two Super Bowls, has died at 85.

Davis died in a Santa Monica, Calif. hospital. His wife, Carol, told the Packers her husband had been hospitalized for about a month with kidney failure.

"The Green Bay Packers family was saddened today to learn about the passing of Willie Davis," said Packers President/CEO Mark Murphy. "One of the great defensive players of his era, Willie was a significant contributor to the Packers' five NFL championship teams during the 1960s."

A 15th-round draft pick from Grambling, Davis began his NFL career playing both offense and defense for the Cleveland Browns in 1958 and '59.

Report: Halladay did drugs, stunts before plane crash

Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Baseball Hall of Famer Roy Halladay had high levels of amphetamines in his system and was doing extreme acrobatics when he lost control of his small plane and nosedived into the Gulf of Mexico in 2017, killing him, a National Transportation Safety Board report issued Wednesday said.

Halladay had amphetamine levels about 10 times therapeutic levels in his blood along with a high level of morphine and an anti-depressant that can impair judgement as he performed high-pitch climbs and steep turns, sometimes within 5 feet of the water, the report says about the Nov. 7, 2017, crash off the coast of Florida.

The maneuvers put loads of nearly two-times gravity on the plane, an Icon A5 Halladay had purchased a month earlier. On the last maneuver, Halladay entered a steep climb and his speed fell to about 85 mph. The propeller-driven plane went into a nosedive and smashed into the water. The report says Halladay, 40, died of blunt force trauma and drowning.

The report does not give a final reason for the crash. That is expected to be issued soon.

About a week before the crash, the former Toronto Blue Jays and Philadelphia Phillies star had flown the plane under Tampa Bay's iconic Skyway Bridge, posting on social media, "flying the Icon A5 over the water is like flying a fighter jet!"

Halladay, an eight-time All-Star, pitched a perfect game and a playoff no-hitter in 2010. He played for the Blue Jays from 1998 to 2009 and for the Phillies from 2009-13, going 203-105 with a 3.38 ERA. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame posthumously last year.

Halladay had taken off from a lake near his home about 15 minutes before the crash and a previous report says he was flying at about 105 mph just 11 feet above the water before he started doing his maneuvers. He had about 700 hours of flight time after getting his pilot's license in 2013, the previous report said, including 51 hours in Icon A5s with 14 in the plane that crashed. The report says Halladay was treated for

substance abuse twice between 2013 and 2015.

Rolled out in 2014, the A5 is an amphibious aircraft meant to be treated like an ATV, a piece of weekend recreational gear with folding wings that can easily be towed on a trailer to a lake where it can take off from the water.

The man who led the plane's design, 55-year-old John Murray Karkow, died while flying an A5 over California's Lake Berryessa on May 8, 2017, a crash the NTSB attributed to pilot error.

Because of that crash, Icon issued guidance to its owners two weeks before Halladay's accident saying that while low-altitude flying "can be one of the most rewarding and exciting types of flying," it "comes with an inherent set of additional risks that require additional considerations."

It added that traditional pilot training focused on high-altitude flying "does little to prepare pilots for the unique challenges of low-altitude flying." Icon told the NTSB that Halladay had received and reviewed the guidance.

Manfred: 'Turn over every stone' for season

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Rob Manfred wants Major League Baseball to be in position to take the field whenever government and health officials give the go-ahead.

"I think it's incumbent upon us to turn over every stone to try to play the game in 2020 if there's any way we can in the environment," the baseball commissioner said Wednesday.

Spring training was suspended March 12 because of the new coronavirus pandemic and the season's scheduled start on March 26 delayed. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended all gatherings of 50 people or more be put off through mid-May.

Among the plans baseball is investigating is basing all 30 teams in the Phoenix area and using the 10 spring training ballparks there, the Arizona Diamondbacks' Chase Field and possibly college facilities.

Games would be played in empty stadiums; players, staff and broadcast crews and technicians would be kept in controlled environments, such as ballparks, hotels and MLB-arranged transport.

"We have tried to be cautious about trying to go too soon, based on what the public health situation is," Manfred said during a telephone interview from his home in Jupiter, Fla. "For people to be out there saying we're not going to have any sports in 2020, I think that's going the other way. I think we all need, no matter what your predilection is, to wait for the situation to unfold more, give us more information and then make realistic decisions about what's possible."

There is no deadline for a decision, and if the health situation dictates baseball could even start in the fall and take advantage of warm weather in the Phoenix area.

Stadium work mostly goes on

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Workers are still showing up in Inglewood, Calif., Las Vegas and Seattle and making progress on stadium and arena projects.

At Belmont Park on Long Island the work has mostly come to a halt.

New stadiums and arenas mean revenue for pro teams and construction often falls under suffocating timelines so the doors open on time and the buildings can start making a return on investments that run into the millions or billions of

dollars.

Work has stalled in some locations, while construction has continued in others under strict guidelines.

"Safety and health are the priority, but that's always been there," said Ken Johnson, the construction executive overseeing the NHL arena project in Seattle. "The real thing was to get to really smart people who have built a lot of big projects to say, we've got to do it differently."

Eight stadiums or arenas are under construction or about to

break ground in the five major professional sports in North America.

NHL projects are underway in Seattle and New York with expected opening dates in 2021. MLS has four stadiums in the works, three of them for expansion teams in Austin, Texas, Sacramento, Calif., and St. Louis.

The most pressing are the NFL stadiums being built in Los Angeles for the Rams and Chargers and in Las Vegas for the relocating Raiders.