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Roosevelt outbreak becomes defining moment

The Washington Post

As a coronavirus outbreak swept through a U.S. aircraft carrier crippled off the coast of Guam, the ship's commander tapped out an email urging senior Navy leaders to evacuate most of the 4,800 sailors onboard.

Capt. Brett Crozier opened his March 30 message to three admirals by saying he would "gladly" follow them "into battle whenever needed." But he shifted to his concern that the Navy was not doing enough to stop the spread of the virus, and acknowledged being a part of the sluggish response.

"I fully realize that I bear responsibility for not demanding more decisive action the moment we pulled in, but at this point my only priority is the continued well-being of the crew and embarked staff," Crozier wrote in previously unreported comments obtained by *The Washington Post*. "... I believe if there is ever a time to ask for help it is now regardless of the impact on my career."

The email, copied to a hand-

ful of Navy captains, is at the heart of a crisis that erupted into public view after a four-page memo attached to it was published in the news media.

The note set off a chain reaction that included acting Navy secretary Thomas Modly's decision to relieve Crozier from command and Modly's resignation amid an outcry after audio emerged of him insulting the captain in an address to Theodore Roosevelt sailors.

But while the attachment circulated widely, Crozier's email did not. The email shows that Modly mischaracterized the message, accusing Crozier of sending it to 20 or 30 people, as he cited it as justification for removing him from command.

The crisis has become a defining story for the U.S. military during the coronavirus pandemic. It also has underscored thorny challenges for the Navy, including a lack of clarity about how to respond to President Donald Trump's concerns, disagreements about transparency and questions about whether officers

who flag problems should face retribution.

This account of the USS Theodore Roosevelt's crisis is based on memos, emails and text messages obtained by *The Post*, as well as interviews with about two dozen people familiar with the case, including senior defense officials, sailors and their loved ones. Many of them spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issues and concerns about retaliation.

The service is still testing sailors from the vessel. As of Thursday, 655 sailors had tested positive among 4,574 examined — more than 14%. One Theodore Roosevelt sailor with covid-19 died on Tuesday, marking the first fatality in the active-duty military during the pandemic.

Six more sailors are hospitalized, including one in intensive care, the Navy said. Thousands of others are quarantined in hotel rooms under guard, with food that is often cold delivered a couple of times per day.

Adm. Michael Gilday, the chief of naval operations,

opened an investigation of communication breakdowns after Crozier's memo emerged, and is reviewing the results. He is expected to decide Crozier's future as he responds to the investigation's findings as soon as this week.

The Theodore Roosevelt's stop in Vietnam in early March marked the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the country and the United States. It was also meant to serve as a symbolic show of U.S. strength and influence in the region, in the face of a rising China. Planning had been in the works for months.

But senior military officials had not anticipated that a virus would be spreading around the world. They monitored the threat but concluded that it was minimal. Vietnam had fewer than two dozen confirmed cases of the virus by the time the ship was approaching the waters outside Da Nang.

Adm. Philip Davidson, the U.S. military's top officer in the Pacific, ordered the ship to

SEE OUTBREAK ON PAGE 2

Pentagon: Service members can keep more leave

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars And Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon will allow its active-duty troops to keep up to 120 days of personal leave at the end of September as travel restrictions in place amid the coronavirus pandemic have largely kept service members from using vacation days.

"The department's actions to stem the spread of [the] coronavirus disease ... to include restricting travel, has significantly limited the ability of service members to take leave during this national emergency," Matthew Donovan, the undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, wrote

Thursday in a memorandum announcing the change. "Leave is vital to the continued health and welfare of our service members and civilian workforce and is key to the secretary of defense's first priority in responding to [the coronavirus] — protecting our service members, [Defense Department] civilians and their families."

Typically, service members can accrue up to 60 days of leave through the end of the fiscal year and they lose any additional leave that they had not used. The new order covers all service members who served on active duty between March 11 and Sept. 30, the last day of the fiscal year. Troops will have until Sept. 23, 2023, to use the excess leave before it expires, Donovan wrote.

Troops have been largely locked in place since Defense Secretary Mark Esper issued his first stop-movement order March 16 for the United States, which barred official travel including permanent-change-of-station moves. On March 25, the defense secretary extended those restrictions to all overseas personnel.

Esper on Tuesday said those restrictions would be extended past their initial May 11 expiration date, but he has yet to announce a new date to end the stop-movement orders aimed at curbing the spread of the virus. Several senior defense officials have indicated the outbreak could last in the United States well into the summer.

Outbreak: Crozier aware of implications of sending message

FROM FRONT PAGE

continue as planned. Gilday described it as a “risk-informed decision.”

Sailors spent five days in the coastal city, mingled with Vietnamese civilians during a reception and performed community service projects. One group stayed at the same hotel as two British tourists who were later confirmed to have the virus.

Once back onboard, commanders grew more concerned. They flew in a team from the Biological Defense Research Directorate at Fort Detrick in Frederick, Md., a group typically focused on protecting service members from biological attacks. They also ordered surfaces to be cleaned daily with bleach, isolated high-risk people and altered their plans.

“There are 39 people in quarantine who stayed in a hotel where two people tested positive,” one sailor texted his mother on March 14, five days after leaving Da Nang.

“Our port calls are getting cancelled too,” another sailor emailed her mother. “It sucks, this was set up to be the coolest deployment and now everything is getting taken away. ... Just an insane abundance of caution.”

As commanders considered where to take the USS Roosevelt, sailors began reporting flu-like symptoms. On March 24, Crozier wrote to family members with alarming news, according to a copy of the letter obtained by The Post.

“Yesterday evening, a few sailors did the right and brave thing, reporting to medical they were experiencing flu-like symptoms,” he wrote. “These sailors were tested ... and this morning the results of the tests indicated positive results for coronavirus.”

Crozier cautioned the families not to talk publicly about the situation on the ship, highlighting the Navy’s delicate balance between keeping the public informed and not revealing vulnerabilities to potential adversaries.

“Operational security regarding both ship movements and our medical readiness is sensitive information and should not be made public,” he wrote.

Crozier also imposed on the crew a communication lockdown commonly known as “River City,” eliminating access to phones and internet for much of the crew.

But some sailors managed to send messages to family members that day.

“I had exposure to the original sailor but I feel fine,” one sailor texted his mother. “Don’t panic,” he wrote, although he added that he feared the ship was “a breeding ground.”

“People here are either making a joke of it or freaking out,” another sailor wrote in an email to her mother.

As Crozier wrote to Theodore Roosevelt families, Modly announced the ship’s first cases the same day at the Pentagon. He said that three positive cases had been discovered, with the patients flown off the ship and those who had come into contact with them quarantined.

“This is an example of our ability to keep our ships deployed at sea, underway even with active COVID-19 cases,” Modly said.

But in the tight quarters of the ship, where sailors sleep in bunks stacked three high, the virus was spreading. Defense officials weighed several options, including sending some sailors to Japan, as the carrier continued to Guam. But they struggled to settle on a plan, said several people familiar with the process.

The carrier arrived at Naval Base Guam on March 26, and sailors slowly began to come ashore. Senior Navy officials said that they were working to secure hotel rooms in Guam but that doing so was a logistical challenge, considering that employees had been laid off.

Crozier spoke with at least one senior Navy admiral in Washington on March 28, and with Robert Love, Modly’s chief of staff, on March 29, said

a senior defense official who declined to identify the admiral.

Love told Crozier that Modly was interested in visiting the ship and wanted to know how he could help. Crozier responded that he could host the acting secretary, but that it would be a distraction and come with some risk of exposure to the virus. The secretary’s office decided to wait on a visit, and Love conveyed that Crozier could contact Modly’s office directly, the senior defense official said.

Love reached out to Crozier again on March 30. Modly’s office didn’t know it yet, but Crozier already had sent his email, which left off Modly’s and Gilday’s staffs.

Crozier transmitted his email in a manner that some Navy officials found inappropriate, and nearly all considered unconventional.

He addressed it to Rear Adm. Stuart Baker, his immediate commanding officer; Adm. John Aquilino, the top commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet; and Vice Adm. DeWolfe Miller, the officer overseeing all naval forces in the Pacific.

Crozier copied the message to seven Navy captains but left off Vice Adm. William Merz, who oversaw the Roosevelt as commander of the Navy’s 7th Fleet. It arrived in the continental United States late March 29 due to the international date-line, a point that has been confused in some accounts.

Crozier and each of the 10 men who received the email either declined to comment through spokespeople or did not respond to a request to speak to The Post.

Medical staff on his ship had warned that if they didn’t get the virus under control quickly, dozens of sailors could die, a detail first reported by the New York Times. A senior defense official acknowledged that Crozier wanted to remove sailors more quickly but said his effort wasn’t immediately realistic.

“The problem was there was no place to put them at that time,” the senior defense official said. “The governor of

Guam had started working with the hotel industry to get the hotels reopened. But that doesn’t happen overnight.”

The official added that if Crozier wanted to make an urgent point as a commander, the Navy has a way to do so. He could have sent a “personal for” message, known colloquially as a “P4,” to senior service leaders. That would have flagged the discussion as sensitive and important without opening it up to a relatively large group of people, the official said.

Crozier, in his email, said that military officials at Naval Base Guam were “doing the best they can” but that they did not have adequate facilities, and that the crew couldn’t wait much longer.

“While I understand that there are political concerns with requesting the use of hotels on Guam to truly isolate the remaining 4,500 Sailors 14+ days, the hotels are empty, and I believe it is the only way to quickly combat the problem,” Crozier wrote.

The memo attached to Crozier’s e-mail was leaked and published in the San Francisco Chronicle within a day after the captain sent it.

The public attention was an embarrassment to Pentagon leaders, who had taken pains to project calm and poise.

The following day, more than 1,000 sailors were moved off the ship, some of them into hotel rooms in Guam.

As the controversy grew, the Navy’s leaders announced the start of an investigation of communication breakdowns during the response to the virus. But before they got very far, Modly decided Crozier had to go.

Crozier is in isolation with the virus, as the number of confirmed cases continues to rise.

The senior defense official said leaders are still considering Crozier’s fate. They could uphold his removal, reinstate him as captain, or bring him back and give him another command.

China admits underreporting death toll

Associated Press

BEIJING — China acknowledged Friday that the coronavirus death toll in the one-time epicenter city of Wuhan was nearly 50% higher than reported, underscoring just how seriously the official numbers of infections and deaths around the world may be understating the dimensions of the disaster.

Such figures can have a huge influence on governments' actions, as medical staffs struggle to figure out how to cope with surges of sick people and officials make crucial decisions about where to devote resources and how to begin easing lockdowns to resuscitate their economies.

As virus deaths mounted — with the U.S. reporting its highest one-day death toll yet at nearly 4,600 — the economic devastation from the restrictions is becoming even more shocking.

The number of people applying for unemployment benefits in the U.S. rose by 5.2 million, bringing the four-week total to a staggering 22 million. China's economy shrank 6.8% in the quarter ending in March compared with the same period a year ago, its worst contraction since market-style economic reforms began in 1979.

Authorities say infections and deaths have been underreported almost everywhere. Thousands have died with COVID-19 symptoms — many in nursing homes, which have been ravaged by a disease that hits the elderly the hardest — without being tested. Four months into the outbreak, nations are still struggling to increase their testing capacity.

Spain on Friday ordered the country's 17 autonomous regions to adopt uniform criteria on counting the dead. The country has recorded more than 19,000 deaths, but the system leaves out patients who had symptoms but were not tested before they died.

Italian officials have acknowledged that the country's official COVID-19 death toll of more than 22,000 — second only to that of the United States — understates the true number, primarily because it doesn't include the hundreds of dead in nursing homes who were not tested.

Britain's official death toll, which is approaching 14,000, has come under increasing scrutiny because it does not include any deaths at home or in nursing homes either.

The country's statistics agency has indicated the ac-

tual number of dead could be around 15% higher. Other experts think it will end up being a lot more than that.

In Russia, authorities reported relatively low numbers of cases until late March. That raised suspicions, given the country's history of concealing embarrassing truths. Doctors treating coronavirus patients in Moscow said last week that the vast majority of all pneumonia cases in Russia are probably caused by the new virus.

The official death toll soared by more than half in New York City earlier this week when health authorities began including people who probably had COVID-19 but died without being tested. Nearly 3,800 deaths were added to the city's count.

Worldwide, the outbreak has infected more than 2.1 million people and killed over 145,000, according to a Johns Hopkins University tally based on figures supplied by government health authorities around the globe. The death toll in the U.S. topped 33,000, with more than 670,000 confirmed infections.

China raised its overall death toll to over 4,600 after Wuhan, where the outbreak first took hold, added nearly 1,300 deaths. Questions have long

swirled around the accuracy of China's case reporting, with critics saying officials sought to minimize the outbreak that began in December.

Africa could see 300,000 deaths even under the best-case scenario, according to a report that cites modeling by Imperial College London. The continent has more than 18,000 confirmed virus cases, but experts says Africa is weeks behind Europe in the pandemic.

On the economic front, U.S. unemployment could reach 20% in April, the highest since the Depression of the 1930s.

President Donald Trump told the nation's governors that restrictions could be eased to allow businesses to reopen over the next several weeks in places that have extensive testing and a marked decrease in COVID-19 cases.

New York, the deadliest hot spot in the U.S., reported more encouraging signs, with a drop in the daily number of deaths statewide and the overall count of people in the hospital.

"We've controlled the beast," Gov. Andrew Cuomo said.

Still, New York state has over 40% of all U.S. deaths, and Cuomo extended the state's lockdown through at least May 15.

Roosevelt victim an Arkansas chief petty officer

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A chief petty officer from Arkansas was the USS Theodore Roosevelt sailor who died earlier this week from coronavirus complications, the Navy announced Thursday.

Charles Robert Thacker Jr., 41, was found unresponsive April 9 while in quarantine on Guam after testing positive March 30 aboard the aircraft carrier for the coronavirus. The Roosevelt had diverted to Guam at the end of March due to an outbreak of the virus

aboard the ship.

Thacker was an aviation ordnanceman from Fort Smith, Ark., and had been assigned to the Roosevelt since December. His wife, Symantha L. Thacker, is also a sailor and is stationed in San Diego. She arrived in Guam on Saturday and was by his side when he died Monday, the Navy said in a statement.

Thacker enlisted in the Navy in December 1997 and had previously served on the Roosevelt from January to July of 2016, according to career details provided by the Pacific Fleet.

He also had served on the

USS George Washington, the USS Ronald Reagan, and the USS Constellation.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with the family during this difficult time," Capt. Carlos Sardiello, the Roosevelt's commanding officer, said in the Navy's statement. "Our number one priority continues to be the health and well-being of all members of the Theodore Roosevelt Strike Group and we remain steadfast in our resolve against the spread of this virus."

The couple appear to have a young son and daughter in pho-

tos posted on their Facebook pages.

Thacker was an off-roading enthusiast, according to his Facebook page. He was also a shooting buff.

Thacker is the second American service member to die from the coronavirus. Army Capt. Douglas Linn Hickok, 57, a physician assistant with the New Jersey National Guard, died March 28 as he was preparing to activate in response to the pandemic.

Stars and Stripes reporter Wyatt Olson contributed to this report.

Muslims grapple with limits amid Ramadan

Associated Press

WINTER PARK, Fla. — Seattle resident Maggie Mohamed was looking forward to spending the Islamic holy month of Ramadan in her native Egypt.

Now, with the spread of coronavirus, flying is off the table. So is having friends and relatives over for a potluck iftar, the breaking of the fast. Mohamed is older than 65 and says she cannot risk it.

Mohamed is contemplating workarounds. She always looks forward to the special Ramadan prayers, known as “taraweeh,” at the mosque. She will now pray at home with her daughter. But what about the dua, or supplication? Mohamed wonders: Can she make dua over Zoom video conferencing?

Many Muslims have been praying for the coronavirus cloud to lift before Ramadan. Mosque closures and modified calls for prayers urging the devout to pray at home have left many feeling emotional. They are relying on worship at home and online religious classes.

California

SACRAMENTO — Farm workers, grocery store and fast-food employees and delivery drivers will receive two weeks of paid sick leave so they won't feel pressured to keep working while infected with the coronavirus, California Gov. Gavin Newsom announced.

The executive order signed Thursday covers those who work for large employers, filling a gap left by a federal act this month that required employers to provide emergency paid sick leave but exempted those with more than 500 workers.

Newsom called the financial help critical and said that at least 51 workers at a Safeway distribution warehouse in the Central Valley had tested positive for COVID-19. One died.

Georgia

ATLANTA — With Georgia officials still believing the state's hospitalization peak from COVID-19 is in the fu-

ture, they're close to opening a 200-bed facility in an Atlanta convention center, the Georgia World Congress Center. The bare rooms — most only have a hospital bed — are meant to host patients sick with coronavirus but who don't need intensive care.

The state is spending \$21.5 million on the project, including more than \$6 million just to build the facility, which could be scaled up to 400 beds. It's meant to provide a margin of safety for Georgia's hospitals as a predicted peak approaches at the start of May amid the global virus outbreak.

Hawaii

HONOLULU — More than one-third of Hawaii's labor force has filed unemployment claims, according to the latest state data as the islands effectively shut down large sectors of the economy to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

The state Department of Labor and Industrial Relations said Thursday that 244,330 claims have been filed since March 1. Hawaii's labor force numbered about 660,000 for most of the past year.

Iowa

JOHNSTON — Gov. Kim Reynolds ordered residents in northeastern Iowa to practice stricter social distancing Thursday as she confirmed that workers at a second Tyson Foods plant are infected with the coronavirus.

Reynolds said she was banning nearly all gatherings in the region that includes Cedar Rapids, Waterloo and Dubuque.

She said the state was responding to reports of infections at a Tyson Foods pork processing plant in Waterloo. The state was sending supplies to test hundreds of workers at the facility, which remained open Thursday.

Kansas

TOPEKA — Two Kansas churches and their pastors

filed a federal lawsuit Thursday against Gov. Laura Kelly over an order banning religious gatherings with more than 10 people to help slow the spread of the new coronavirus, arguing that the directive violates their religious, assembly and free-speech rights.

The lawsuit comes eight days after top Republican legislative leaders attempted to revoke Kelly's order themselves, only to see the Democratic governor thwart their efforts by contesting their action before the Kansas Supreme Court. The state's highest court let her order stand on technical grounds, without deciding whether it violated freedoms guaranteed by the U.S. or Kansas constitutions.

Maryland

BALTIMORE — The NAACP in Baltimore has started circulating a sound truck blasting requests to “stay-at-home” during the coronavirus pandemic.

The truck, which features messages from local celebrities, politicians and athletes, has started driving around areas where residents have continued to gather despite Gov. Larry Hogan's stay-at-home order, The Baltimore Sun reported.

Spokesman Joshua Harris said the 40-foot sound truck made its first rounds on Wednesday and will target low-income and “hard to reach” areas of the city for six to eight hours a day in the upcoming weeks.

They're focused on giving information about the virus outbreak to people who aren't tuning in for public health updates on the news or social media.

Montana

HELENA — The chairwoman of Montana's Legislative Audit Committee said Thursday she doubts the state can justify spending all of the \$1.25 billion it expects to receive under the federal coronavirus relief bill.

The amount is nearly half of

the state's general fund spending for the financial year that ends June 30.

“There's big bucks coming down with COVID-19, but it is not going to be a free-for-all,” Republican Sen. Dee Brown of Hungry Horse told the Legislative Council.

Gov. Steve Bullock appointed a 26-member Coronavirus Relief Fund Task Force Wednesday to advise him on how to spend the \$1.25 billion responsibly and quickly to help those financially impacted by the effort to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

North Carolina

RALEIGH — Sales of chicken products by a North Carolina-based processor directly to the public as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak led to a traffic jam at the State Farmers Market, authorities said.

Buyers driving up to the House of Raeford sale on Thursday backed up Raleigh's Centennial Parkway and Lake Wheeler Road, which is the access to the farmers market from Interstate 40, about a mile away, news sources reported.

State Department of Transportation personnel closed the Lake Wheeler Road exit off the interstate and detoured traffic around the area.

Texas

FORT WORTH — More than 100 Texas mayors are urging the state's Congressional delegation to give all cities the same access to federal coronavirus relief funds, regardless of size.

President Donald Trump signed a coronavirus aid bill into law last month that allocates \$150 billion to states and local governments as part of a \$2.2 trillion package.

But the package limits how cities with populations fewer than 500,000 people receive their funds. While larger cities are eligible to apply for money directly from the federal government, the smaller ones must request money from the governor.

6 Afghan workers killed outside of Bagram

BY PHILLIP WALTER
WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Six Afghans who worked at Bagram Airfield were shot dead Thursday just outside the base, an Afghan official said.

The workers were driving home in a motorized rickshaw and were about 500 yards from the base when an unidentified gunman began shooting at about 10 p.m., said Wahida Shahkar, a spokeswoman for the governor of Parwan prov-

ince, where Bagram is located.

“These people were ordinary workers at Bagram, like cleaners and others,” Shahkar said, adding that three others were injured in the attack.

The gunman fled the scene by motorcycle, Shahkar said.

The Taliban denied responsibility for the shooting in a statement Friday, though they have long considered Afghan workers on foreign bases and embassies legitimate targets. No other group immediately claimed responsibility.

The killings follow a spate of

unsuccessful attacks in recent weeks at Bagram, the largest U.S. base in Afghanistan.

Last week, ISIS claimed responsibility for firing several rockets out of a car nearby at the base. Foreign forces intercepted two of the rockets, while the others landed outside the base and injured no one, local officials said.

The attacks have come as the U.S. works toward a full withdrawal of foreign forces by mid-2021, if the Taliban abides by conditions outlined in a Feb. 29 agreement. The Taliban

must help keep terrorists from operating in Afghanistan and hold talks with the Kabul government, among other terms of the agreement made public.

However, Taliban attacks on Afghan forces, disagreements over prisoner exchanges and political infighting have hampered the peace process.

Earlier this week, the U.S.’s top commander in Afghanistan, Gen. Scott Miller, and U.S. Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad visited Pakistan to discuss peace efforts with the country’s officials.

Governors given direction on how to reopen economy

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump has given governors a road map for recovering from the economic pain of the coronavirus pandemic, laying out “a phased and deliberate approach” to restoring normal activity in places that have strong testing and are seeing a decrease in COVID-19 cases.

“We’re starting our life again,” Trump said during his daily press briefing. “We’re starting rejuvenation of our economy again.”

He added, “This is a gradual process.”

The new guidelines are aimed at easing restrictions in areas with low transmission of the coronavirus while holding the line in harder-hit locations. They make clear that the return to normalcy will be a far longer process than Trump initially envisioned, with federal officials warning that some social distancing measures may need to remain in place through the end of the year to prevent a new outbreak. And they largely reinforce plans already in the works by governors, who have primary responsibility for public health in their states.

“You’re going to call your own shots,” Trump told the governors Thursday afternoon in a conference call, according to an audio recording obtained by The Associated Press. “We’re going to be standing alongside of you.”

Places with declining infections and strong testing would begin a three-phase gradual reopening of businesses and schools.

In phase one, for instance, the plan recommends strict social distancing for all people in public. Gatherings larger than 10 people are to be avoid-

ed, and nonessential travel is discouraged.

In phase two, people are encouraged to maximize social distancing and limit gatherings to no more than 50 people unless precautionary measures are taken. Travel could resume.

Phase three envisions a return to normalcy for most Americans, with a focus on identification and isolation of any new infections.

Trump said recent trends in some states were so positive that they could almost immediately begin taking the steps laid out in phase one.

Trump, aides float outlier theory on origins of virus

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump and some of his officials are flirting with an outlier theory that the new coronavirus was set loose on the world by a Chinese lab that let it escape. Without the weight of evidence, they’re trying to blame China for sickness and death from COVID-19 in the United States.

“More and more, we’re hearing the story,” Trump says. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo adds, “The mere fact that we don’t know the answers — that China hasn’t shared the answers — I think is very, very telling.”

A scientific consensus is still evolving.

But experts overwhelmingly say analysis of the new coronavirus’ genome rules out the possibility that it was engineered by humans, as some conspiracy theories have suggested.

Nor is it likely that the virus emerged from a negligent laboratory in China, they say. “I would put it on a list of 1,000 different scenarios,” said Nathan Grubaugh of Yale University, who studies the epidemiology of microbial disease.

Scientists say the virus arose naturally in bats. They say the leading theory is that infection among humans began at an animal market in Wuhan, China, probably from an animal that got the virus from a bat.

Even so, Pompeo and others are point-

ing fingers at an institute that is run by the Chinese Academy of Sciences and has done groundbreaking research tracing the likely origins of the SARS virus, finding new bat viruses and discovering how they could jump to people.

“We know that there is the Wuhan Institute of Virology just a handful of miles away from where the wet market was,” Pompeo said Wednesday on Fox News. The institute has an address 8 miles from the market.

U.S. officials say the American Embassy in Beijing did flag concerns about potential safety issues at the lab in Wuhan in 2018 but stressed there is no evidence that the virus originated there two years later.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man accused of setting person ablaze arrested

FL HASTINGS — A man accused of setting a person on fire during a dispute over money has been arrested, sheriff's officials in Florida said.

Brian Terrance Connor, 35, was arrested Wednesday and charged with attempted first-degree murder, arson and burglary for the incident, according to the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office. Bond was set at \$250,000.

The victim was taken to a hospital burn unit in Gainesville, and remains in critical condition, The Florida Times-Union reported. Sheriff's officials have not released the person's name, age or gender.

The incident happened at an apartment complex, where Connor is accused of entering a residence and starting an argument, investigators said. Investigators said Connor doused the victim with a flammable liquid, which he then set on fire before fleeing in a vehicle. The victim went to another apartment, still on fire, and someone there helped extinguish the flames.

Police: Worker attacks 2, cuts his own throat

AZ KINGMAN — Three employees of a Kingman restaurant were seriously injured when one allegedly attacked the other two, one with hot oil and the other with a knife, before cutting his own throat, police said Tuesday.

Deputy Police Chief Rusty Cooper said they didn't immediately know what led to the attacks Monday.

No identities were released but Cooper said all three employees were hospitalized and expected to survive their injuries.

Police: Tow truck drivers have gun battle

MO KANSAS CITY — Two tow truck drivers carried out a rolling gun battle in a western Kansas City neighborhood, seriously wounding one of them, police said.

The shooting happened near the Glen Lake neighborhood, the Kansas City Star reported. Police said the altercation began in Raytown, when one tow truck driver tried to run over the other, and continued into Kansas City.

At some point, one driver opened fire on the other as they drove north on Norfleet Road, police said. The chase and shooting continued as the tow trucks traveled west and ended a short time later.

Police said one of the drivers was shot twice and was taken by an ambulance to a hospital in serious condition. He is expected to survive, police said.

Girl kidnapped by woman with no pants

KY VINE GROVE — Deputies in Kentucky said a 14-year-old teenage girl escaped after she was kidnapped by a woman who was not wearing any pants.

The girl told deputies she was on her way to visit her friend's house last week when a woman jumped out of the woods and grabbed her, news outlets reported Tuesday. Kimberly Phelps, 50, has since been charged with attempted kidnapping of a minor.

According to the Meade County Sheriff's Office, Phelps told the girl she had been watching her "for a while" when she kidnapped her. The teen told deputies Phelps tried to take her toward a driveway before she freed herself and fled. Deputies said Phelps gave the

girl drinking glasses and other items that she had with her when they found her. She told deputies she only approached the girl to give her a hug and a book.

Aide, inmates arrested in jail contraband probe

CA BAKERSFIELD — A Kern County jail aide and 13 inmates were arrested after deputies found contraband in a San Joaquin Valley detention facility, the Sheriff's Office said.

The investigation began March 9 at the Lerdo Pre-Trial Facility north of Bakersfield and numerous searches turned up narcotics, jail-made weapons and cellphones, the department said in a statement Tuesday.

The aide was arrested April 9 and booked on a half-dozen charges including conspiracy and participation in a criminal street gang.

Two inmates, described as participants in a gang, were arrested on the same charges and 11 other inmates were arrested for investigation of violations involving possession of the contraband items.

14-year-old in stolen minivan arrested

KS WICHITA — Authorities say a 14-year-old Wichita boy in a stolen minivan was arrested after officers used a tire-flattening spike strip to disable the vehicle.

Sedgwick County Sheriff's Office Lt. Tim Myers said the chase started at 3:53 a.m. Monday. The Wichita Eagle reported that the driver was speeding and crossing into other lanes.

Two passengers ran on foot after the Dodge Caravan was stopped. The vehicle had been reported stolen out of Wichita.

Judge: Get dressed for Zoom hearings

FL FORT LAUDERDALE — A Florida judge has one request for attorneys showing up for court hearings via Zoom: Get out of bed and put on some clothes!

Broward Circuit Judge Dennis Bailey made the plea in a letter published by the Weston Bar Association, news outlets reported.

"It is remarkable how many ATTORNEYS appear inappropriately on camera," Bailey said in the letter. "One male lawyer appeared shirtless and one female attorney appeared still in bed, still under the covers."

Since courthouses shut down on March 16 to help slow the coronavirus pandemic, Broward County's judicial system has held about 1,200 Zoom meetings, WPLG-TV reported.

Bailey, for one, said he won't hold a complicated trial over the video conferencing site, given the technology's shortcomings.

Multitudes of seashells uncollected amid ban

NC HARKERS ISLAND — The ban on tourists in North Carolina's Outer Banks has created large piles of uncollected seashells during the coronavirus pandemic.

A Facebook video posted Monday by the Cape Lookout National Seashore showed multitudes of colorful shells spread out across the beach as waves splash over them. While park facilities are closed due to the virus outbreak, the Charlotte Observer reported both Cape Lookout and Cape Hatteras national seashores in the Outer Banks are open to residents. The shells remain uncollected since visitors are the ones that tend to gather them.

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Broncos' star Miller tests positive for virus

Associated Press

AURORA, Colo. — Von Miller has the coronavirus and the NFL star wanted to come forward with his diagnosis to show people how serious the disease is.

"I'm going to do whatever I have to do to get thru this!" Miller wrote in an Instagram post Thursday night. "Take this seriously. It's definitely FOR REAL."

The Super Bowl MVP is the highest-profile American athlete to announce he's contracted COVID-19. Last month, NBA star Kevin Durant was among several members of the Brooklyn Nets to test positive.

"Von wants to let everyone out there know it's serious; it doesn't just happen to old people in nursing homes," agent Joby Branion told The Associated Press on Thursday.

Miller told KUSA-TV in Denver that he developed a cough a couple of days ago and when his nebulizer for his asthma didn't

clear things up, he decided to get tested for the coronavirus and the test came back positive Thursday.

"I'm in good spirits," Miller told the TV station. "I'm not feeling sick or hurting or anything like that."

The Broncos released a statement, saying Miller "elected to share his diagnosis publicly to emphasize that anyone can be afflicted with coronavirus."

"Von is doing well and recovering at home in self-isolation. He remains under the care of team doctors, who are following all coronavirus treatment procedures to ensure a safe environment for Von and our community," the team added.

Branion said that aside from his allergy to grass, the 31-year-old Miller is the picture of health.

"Von lives to take care of his health and his body and it hit him, too," Branion said. "Hopefully, he's like the 85 percent who kick this disease in the

teeth in two weeks. But the bottom line is he got it, too."

Branion said Miller is in good spirits while quarantined at his home in the Denver area and that the Broncos linebacker plans to speak publicly about his diagnosis on Friday.

Branion said Miller went for a test after he began coughing a couple of days ago and consulted with the Broncos medical team.

"I've seen him a lot sicker after games. He's allergic to grass and after he's been inundated with pollen, he's sounded worse," Branion said.

Miller, who was recently a unanimous pick to the NFL's All-Decade team of the 2010s, said on a conference call last week he trained in San Francisco before returning home to Colorado when the stay-at-home measures went into effect to contain the virus.

Branion said Miller isn't sure how he became infected.

"What happened? We don't

know," Branion said. "But it can get you. It got him, and he's Superman!"

Miller is the second active NFL player to acknowledge testing positive during the coronavirus pandemic that has sickened more than 2 million people worldwide, resulting in tens of thousands of deaths and sending millions into unemployment.

On Wednesday, Los Angeles Rams center Brian Allen said he tested positive for COVID-19 three weeks ago. New Orleans Saints coach Sean Payton revealed last month that he tested positive for the virus.

The Los Angeles Chargers last week revealed a positive test and symptoms for unidentified members of their organization.

And in Denver, three unidentified Colorado Avalanche players have tested positive for the coronavirus.

2021 Games won't provide much stimulus for Japan

Associated Press

TOKYO — IOC member John Coates, who oversees planing for next year's Tokyo Olympics, has claimed the postponed games could help "kick start" Japan's economy.

Japan has been devastated like many countries by the coronavirus pandemic and could be in a recession when the Olympics are to open on July 23, 2021.

"These games are a very positive opportunity for an economic stimulus," Coates said in a teleconference on Thursday with the Tokyo organizing committee. "These games can help kick start the economy again. These games could be the rebirth of the tourism industry."

Coates also praised Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, calling him a "very, very smart man." He said Abe also viewed the games next year as providing an economic stimulus.

But economists and Olympic researchers contacted by The Associated Press on Friday said any economic boost will be negligible given the size of Japan's \$5 trillion economy and the limited tourism and economic benefits from the 17-day games.

In some previous Olympics, soaring pric-

es and crowding have discouraged tourists instead of attracting them.

"His predictions fly in the face of all the research on the financial impacts of hosting the games 'on a good day' — and the current global crisis does not qualify as 'a good day,'" Helen Lenskyj, a professor emerita at the University of Toronto, said in an email.

Lenskyj has written eight books on the Olympics, including the most recent — "The Olympic Games: A Critical Approach." She suggested Japan would be better off if it did not have to finance next year's games.

"At this moment in history, 'a very smart man' would be wishing his country did not have the added burden of hosting the Olympics," Lenskyj said.

Japan is officially spending \$12.6 billion to organize the Olympics, although a government audit report in December said it was twice that much. All but \$5.6 billion is taxpayer money.

IOC and Japanese officials say they don't know the cost of the one-year delay, but estimates have put it at \$2 billion to \$6 billion. Nearly all of the added costs fall to Japan under an agreement signed in 2013 when

Tokyo was awarded the games.

Coates confirmed the IOC would be spending "several hundred million dollars" because of the postponement. The funds will go to distressed international federations and national Olympic committees, and not to Tokyo.

Tokyo organizing committee CEO Toshiro Muto has described the added costs as "massive" and Coates acknowledged "there will be some negative impacts."

"If Tokyo is hoping that a surge of tourism is going to cover the costs of moving the games by a year, they are likely to be very disappointed," Victor Matheson, a sports economist at the College of the Holy Cross, said in an email.

Matheson and colleague Robert Baumann calculated the impact of foreign tourism on the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics. They discounted local spending since it was simply moving expenditures from one place in the country to another.

They said Rio had 60,000 added arrivals and estimated \$5,000 spending by each arrival — an impact of \$300 million.

Rio spent about \$13 billion to organize the Olympics, and some put the figure at \$20 billion.

Decision on US Open expected by June

Associated Press

A decision on whether to postpone or cancel the U.S. Open because of the coronavirus pandemic is expected by June, the U.S. Tennis Association's new CEO said Thursday, calling the prospect of holding the Grand Slam tournament without spectators "highly unlikely."

"Obviously our ambition is to run the tournament. It's the engine that drives our organization, our governing body. Having said that, that won't be the driving factor," Mike Dowse, who took over at the USTA on Jan. 1, said on a conference call with reporters. "The driving factor will be the health and well-being of the players, the fans and our staff."

He said the USTA is being

advised by a medical advisory group that includes at least five doctors.

"Time is on our side, at this point," Dowse said, because the U.S. Open is not scheduled to begin until late August.

The tournament in New York City would be the next major championship on the tennis calendar; the French Open's start was postponed from May until September, and Wimbledon was canceled altogether.

The men's and women's tennis tours are on hold entirely until at least mid-July, and one tournament in August already has been scrapped.

As for holding the U.S. Open with no fans, Dowse said the USTA is "not taking anything off the table, but right now, I'd say that's a highly unlikely

scenario."

"Things are fluid," he added. "If the medical experts come back and say, 'Here is a fool-proof way of running a very safe tournament; unfortunately, it has to be without fans,' we may reconsider and look at it."

Tennis tournaments, in general, are more dependent on ticket, merchandise and on-site food sales as a percentage of revenue than major professional sports leagues that are largely funded by TV contracts.

Dowse also discussed the USTA's plan to oversee a commitment of more than \$50 million to help tennis deal with the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak at the grassroots level.

He said a survey conducted in March found that 85% of tennis facilities around the United

States were closed because of stay-at-home orders, and he estimated that to be more like 90% now.

Dowse said the USTA is shaving more than \$15 million from its budget by reducing salaries of its management and eliminating programs in player development and marketing. That includes money saved by temporarily closing the USTA national campus outside Orlando, Fla., last month.

The total future support provided by the USTA and its industry partners — including economic assistance packages and a telephone hotline for those "emotionally impacted" by the pandemic — will be affected by the financial success of the 2020 U.S. Open, if it even is held.

PGA Tour plans to return for Charles Schwab Challenge

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. It was the second significant step to try to salvage the year, following last week's announcement of three majors — including the Masters in November — going later in the year.

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, previously canceled this week, was brought back to be played after Colonial on June

18-21. Those dates previously belonged to the U.S. Open at Winged Foot, which plans to move to September.

That would be followed by the Travelers Championship in Connecticut and the Rocket Mortgage Classic in Detroit.

The tour said its invitation-based tournaments — Colonial, Hilton Head and the Memorial — would have their fields expanded to 144 players. Memorial, with Jack Nicklaus as the host, takes the July 16-19 week that had belonged to the British Open before it was canceled. The World Golf Championship in Memphis, Tenn., now has the dates (July 30-Aug. 2) when the Olympics were to be played.

If all goes according to plan, the season would end on Sept. 7 at the Tour Championship with a FedEx Cup champion getting the \$15 million bonus. That would be a 36-tournament schedule, down from 48 tournaments on the original schedule.

Three more tournaments were canceled, one permanently. The Canadian Open, the third-oldest on the PGA Tour schedule, said it would not be played this year. Also canceled

was the Barbasol Championship in Kentucky, typically held the same week as the British Open. The Greenbrier tournament in West Virginia was canceled for good.

The tour had only 40 events in 2013, a short season to prepare for the start of its wrap-around season that now begins in the fall.

Even so, it could lead to a peculiar two seasons. The current season could have only one major championship; the PGA Championship is scheduled for Aug. 6-9 at Harding Park in San Francisco. The following season could have two Masters, two U.S. Opens, the PGA Championship and the British Open.

Other details the tour still has to sort out was who fell under the "essential" category that would be allowed at tournaments beyond players, caddies, scoring officials, rules officials and support staff.

Pazder said at least 25 players are outside the U.S., along with at least 35 caddies, all subject to international travel restrictions.