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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Officials use Roosevelt cases to study virus

The San Diego Union-Tribune

SAN DIEGO — An investigation by the Navy and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention into the outbreak of the coronavirus on board the San Diego-based aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt could yield data valuable not just to the military, but also to the greater scientific community in the race to better understand the virus, the Navy said.

The Roosevelt has been tied up in Guam for the last month as the virus spread throughout its crew. More than 17% of the ship's approximately 4,845 sailors have tested positive. Chief Petty Officer Charles Thacker,

41, died from the virus this month.

Since Monday, the Navy has been surveying members of the crew as part of its investigation. The Navy and CDC said previously that they hoped to survey 1,000 sailors, obtaining saliva and blood tests.

Cmdr. Denver Applehans, a spokesman for the Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, said in an email Friday that the service asked 1,400 sailors to participate. The Navy fell well short of that goal.

"We are very thankful to the roughly 400 crewmembers of the USS Theodore Roosevelt who provided specimens for this outbreak investigation,"

Applehans wrote in an email. "It's worth noting that the USS Theodore Roosevelt's crew has been impacted by this virus harder than any other military unit, and there are many competing demands on the crew to get the ship clean and ready to return to sea. We can't over-emphasize our appreciation for those who did volunteer."

The goal of the investigation, officials have said, is to better understand the behavior of the virus and to apply those lessons to other Navy ships and military units.

The outbreak on the Roosevelt presents an opportunity to understand how the disease spreads in a relatively

controlled environment, said Shane Crotty, a virologist and professor in the Vaccine Discovery Division at La Jolla Institute for Immunology in San Diego.

"It's really an outstanding opportunity to learn more," Crotty said. "That's the type of scenario — a controlled environment, far fewer variables — it's the kind of situation epidemiologists love because of the minimization of variables. For my side, we're very interested in understanding viral immunology — the response (to the virus). In particular, how that would help vaccine development."

US social distancing could continue for months

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Some form of social distancing will probably remain in place through the summer, Deborah Birx, the White House's coronavirus task force coordinator, said Sunday — the same day several governors expressed optimism about the course of the virus and outlined their plans for a piecemeal reopening of their economies.

It was the latest instance of conflicting signals coming not just from state and federal leaders, but also from within the Trump administration amid a coronavirus pandemic that has claimed the lives of more than 54,000 Americans so far. Last week, Vice President Mike Pence predicted that "we will largely have this coronavirus epidemic behind us" by Memorial Day weekend in late May.

But on Sunday, Birx said in an interview on NBC News'

"Meet the Press" that "social distancing will be with us through the summer to really ensure that we protect one another as we move through these phases." She cited the need for further testing to be developed after a potential scientific "breakthrough."

The mixed messages come as Americans are entering a confusing and uncertain new phase in the crisis. After weeks of being told to simply stay home to halt the spread of the virus, individuals and business owners are now facing more complex decisions about how to proceed in the absence of clear guidance from their leaders.

In places where restaurant dining rooms are reopening, is it safe to go? Is it a good idea to return to the hair salon for a much-needed trim? And for business owners facing a litany of new guidelines about how to reopen without endangering their workers or customers, are the risks worth it?

Emily Landon, chief infectious disease epidemiologist at University of Chicago Medicine, said that those calculations are hard for people in states that are starting to reopen because of the continued lack of broad testing and the inability to properly track people who might have been infected.

"It's hard for me to know what I'd do" in one of the states where governors have announced that spas and salons are able to reopen, Landon said. "I wouldn't go. And I wouldn't recommend that my family went. I would recommend that people stay home."

Landon said that in her view, it's still not safe for states to fully reopen — or for Americans to try to resume their lives as they were before the virus.

"This is a brand-new virus, and we have to do these things in a measured way," she said. "Without requirements for things like [personal protective equipment], social distancing

and really thoughtful policies for how to do these openings, it's not the time to do them."

While Pence and President Donald Trump have recently voiced optimism about the speed with which they expect the country to be able to reopen, Birx and Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, have voiced caution.

On "Meet the Press," Birx was asked about Pence's remark to a Cleveland radio station last week that "if you look at the trends today, I think by Memorial Day weekend we will largely have this coronavirus epidemic behind us."

She appeared to contradict Pence's comment, projecting that social distancing will continue through the summer, and said that the country needs to have a "breakthrough" in testing for antigens — molecules or molecular structures that trigger an immune response — to get on track toward normalcy.

Some restaurants reopen as Ga. trims restrictions

Associated Press

ATLANTA — With tables wide apart and staff wearing masks, some Georgia restaurants reopened for limited dine-in service Monday as the state loosened more coronavirus restrictions, but many eateries remained closed amid concerns that serving in-house meals could put staff and customers at risk.

The dine-in service and movie screenings resumed after other businesses, including barbershops, gyms, tattoo shops and nail salons, were allowed to start seeing customers Friday. While many gratefully opened their doors after a monthlong closure, others did not feel ready yet and stayed closed. A similar mixed response played out Monday.

Gov. Brian Kemp announced last week that he would relax restrictions despite health experts' warnings of a potential surge in infections and disapproval from President Donald Trump. Kemp issued 39 requirements that restaurants must follow if they reopen, including observing a limit of 10 customers per 500 square feet and ensuring all employees wear face coverings all the time. Movie theater ushers were ordered to enforce social distancing.

At Plucked Up Chicken &

Biscuits in Columbus, eight regulars showed up Monday morning to have coffee and breakfast and "chatted at each other across the room," manager Alesha Webster said.

The restaurant followed the governor's restrictions, including constantly disinfecting and sanitizing, placing tables 6 feet apart and practicing social distancing, Webster said. The restrictions also mean only 10 customers can be inside at a time, rather than the normal capacity of 45.

The decision to reopen for dine-in service was difficult, Webster said.

"You don't want people to bash you because you're just trying to make ends meet," she said.

Georgia-based Waffle House planned to resume limited dine-in service at many of its 400 restaurants across the state.

Alex Brounstein, the owner of Atlanta-based burger chain Grindhouse Killer Burgers, said he had no plans to reopen Monday and he questioned how any restaurant can safely resume dine-in service.

"You're talking about people putting their mouths on things in your restaurant. You now have dirty dishes going back into your kitchen. To me, it's just completely illogical," he said.

States see virus status, reduce Army hospitals

The Washington Post

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has sprung into action in response to COVID-19, fanning out to convert dozens of conference centers, dorms and hotels into makeshift hospitals in a herculean aid effort for American cities.

But as the engineers and contractors take their hammers and hard hats to the front lines of the evolving pandemic, social distancing measures are reducing estimates of hospital overload, raising questions about how many of the facilities constructed as part of the Corps' broader \$1.7 billion COVID-19 response effort will ultimately be used at anywhere near capacity — or even at all.

The Corps said that it is building at least 32 facilities through contractors, 17 of which the Pentagon said have been completed as of Friday, including at New York City's Jacob K. Javits Convention Center. The Corps said that it is providing designs for another 52 temporary hospitals that states are erecting on their own.

States are already beginning to scale back. New York has hit the brakes on opening three of the makeshift facilities the Army Corps of Engineers has

completed, and has scrapped construction on another four. Virginia paused plans for three large field hospitals that it was planning to build using Army Corps plans. And Michigan downsized a Corps-built facility from 1,110 to 250 beds.

Sites that have opened so far have seen low occupancy rates. The first Corps-built makeshift hospital to come online, at the Javits Center, is about 20% occupied. It has roughly 200 patients at the moment, down from a little over 400 at its peak, according to a state official. Only about 33 patients have been treated at a 970-bed Army Corps-built facility at the TCF Center, a convention center in Detroit, since it opened on April 10.

"Regarding the convention center beds that the Army Corps of Engineers are building, they are building those in response to requests from governors in states," Air Force Gen. John Hyten, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said in a briefing Wednesday. "I've been asked, 'Does it bother you when you look at those convention centers and you see that the beds are empty?' For gosh sakes, no. That's what I want to see."

NY nixes Democratic presidential primary, cites virus risks

Associated Press

In an unprecedented move, New York has canceled its Democratic presidential primary that was scheduled for June 23 amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The Democratic members of the State's Board of Elections voted Monday to nix the primary. New York will still hold its congressional and state-level primaries on June 23.

Commissioner Andrew Spano said he worried about potentially forcing voters and

poll workers to choose between their democratic duty and their health. While there will still be other offices on the ballot, Spano reasoned it made sense to give voters an opportunity to choose in contested races but not to "have anyone on the ballot just for the purposes of issues at a convention."

Local election officials and voting groups have called on the state to use federal funds to purchase cleaning supplies and protective gear, and boost staff ahead of 2020 elections.

The state's Democratic

Party and Gov. Andrew Cuomo have said they didn't ask election commissioners to make the change, which is allowed, thanks to a little-known provision in the recently passed state budget that allows the New York board of elections to remove names of any candidates who have suspended or terminated their campaign from the ballot.

The decision to cancel a Democratic primary is left up to Democratic state election commissioners.

Bernie Sanders earlier this

month suspended his campaign. In a letter obtained by The Wall Street Journal, a lawyer for his campaign asked commissioners not to cancel the primary.

"Senator Sanders has collaborated with state parties, the national party and the [Joe] Biden campaign, to strengthen the Democrats by aligning the party's progressive and moderate wings. His removal from the ballot would hamper those efforts, to the detriment of the party in the general election," the lawyer, Malcolm Seymour, wrote.

As lockdown eased, Italy contemplates its high death rate

Associated Press

ROME — As Italy prepares to emerge from the West's first and most extensive coronavirus lockdown, it is increasingly clear that something went terribly wrong in Lombardy, the hardest-hit region in Europe's hardest-hit country.

Italy had the bad luck of being the first Western nation to be slammed by the outbreak, and its total of 26,600 fatalities lags behind only the U.S. in the global death toll. Italy's first homegrown case was recorded Feb. 21, at a time when the World Health Organization was still insisting the virus was "containable" and not nearly as infectious as the flu.

There's also evidence that demographics and health care deficiencies combined with political and business interests to expose the 10 million people in the northern Italian region of Lombardy in ways unseen anywhere else, particularly the most vulnerable in nursing homes.

Virologists and epidemiologists say what went wrong there will be studied for years, given how the outbreak overwhelmed

a medical system considered one of Europe's best.

Prosecutors are deciding whether to lay any criminal blame for the hundreds of dead in nursing homes, many of whom aren't even counted in Lombardy's official death toll of 13,325.

By contrast, Lombardy's front-line doctors and nurses are being hailed as heroes for risking their lives to treat the sick under extraordinary levels of stress, exhaustion, isolation and fear.

Even after Italy registered its first homegrown case, doctors didn't understand the unusual way COVID-19 could present itself, with some patients experiencing a rapid decline in their ability to breathe.

Because Lombardy's intensive care units were filling up within days of Italy's first cases, many primary care physicians tried to treat their patients at home, even putting them on supplemental oxygen. That strategy proved deadly, since many people died at home or soon after being hospitalized, having waited too long to call an ambulance.

Russian businesses find Kremlin aid lacking

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Desperate business owners in Russia have been pleading with the Kremlin for help in the pandemic shutdown. The response, however, has been slow and largely focused on big industries, leaving most smaller companies to fend for themselves and raising the prospect of massive unemployment and social unrest.

The Kremlin's anti-crisis measures reflect both its long-held emphasis on state-controlled companies and a fear of opening state coffers at a time when government revenue is drying up due to a plunge in oil prices and economic slump.

When President Vladimir Putin ordered most Russians to stay home through April 30 to contain the coronavirus, he said employees must continue to be paid.

Weeks later, the president promised subsidies and loans for private-sector companies to help them pay wages. But businesses paralyzed by the lockdowns imposed by the majority of Russia's 85 regions see the Kremlin's support as sorely insufficient.

"The situation is catastrophic," said Dmitry Nesvetov, the owner of a dry cleaning chain and a leading member at the Opora Russia business association. "The measures that have

been announced are not enough to deal with it."

Nesvetov said the state subsidies — about \$160 per employee per month, the equivalent of minimum wage — are too small and deferments on taxes and social security payments don't address the underlying problems. "It's a 'die another day' logic," he said, adding that the inefficient state bureaucracy can't properly manage even those limited support measures.

While the non-food retail and services sector ground to a halt, big state-controlled companies and industrial plants have kept operating. Putin has promised subsidies to airlines, car and aircraft plants, and defense manufacturers, among others.

The Kremlin's approach contrasts with that of the United States and many EU nations, which provided more generous subsidies to workers and businesses.

With tears in her eyes, cafe chain owner Anastasia Tatulova told Putin during a recent meeting with business managers that more support is needed quickly. She urged the Kremlin to temporarily waive taxes instead of offering tax deferments and to provide more subsidies.

Putin promised help, but Tatulova said authorities have since stonewalled most of her proposals.

Wuhan hospitals report all virus patients cleared

New York Daily News

The Chinese city of Wuhan, site of the initial coronavirus outbreak, has no COVID-19 patients in its hospitals for the first time since the pandemic began in earnest at the beginning of this year.

"The latest news is that by April 26, the number of new coronavirus patients in Wuhan was at zero, thanks to the joint efforts of Wuhan and medical staff from around the country," National Health Commission spokesman Mi Feng said at a briefing Sunday, according to NBC News.

Wuhan, in central Hubei province, was the starting point for the outbreak that

turned into a pandemic that is ricocheting across the globe, with 5.2 million confirmed infections and nearly 206,000 deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University's coronavirus map.

In the province itself, the number of infections is below 50 for the first time since the crisis began late last year, with no new confirmed cases reported in the province for more than 20 days, according to Chinese news agency Xinhua.

In all of China, 801 patients were still being treated and 77,394 had recovered and been discharged from hospitals, Xinhua said, out of 82,827 confirmed cases on the mainland. In Wuhan itself, there were

46,452 cases, 56% of the national total, Reuters reported, with 3,869 fatalities, which was 84% of China's total.

Wuhan reported 12 total coronavirus cases Saturday, one of them classified as "severe," but no new infections, reported Forbes.

A study out of Hong Kong published in The Lancet last week suggested that China's number of cases might have been four times higher than it reported, according to The Guardian. If the later definition of what constitutes a case of COVID-19 had been used and applied to the earlier cases, then more illness would have been attributed to the coronavirus.

Decline in civilian casualties reverses amid Taliban attacks

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Growing violence since the signing of the U.S.-Taliban peace agreement contributed to a first-quarter death toll of over 500 civilians in Afghanistan, the United Nations said Monday.

The deaths highlighted an “urgent need” to protect civilians from the conflict, especially in light of a worsening coronavirus outbreak across the country, the U.N. said in a report.

Overall, civilian deaths and injuries in the conflict were down for the first three months of the year, marking the least bloody first quarter since 2012, but that was largely attributed to fewer attacks in weeks leading up to the deal’s signing Feb. 29.

The agreement, which outlined a conditional withdrawal of U.S. and other foreign forces to be completed by mid-2021, was expected to bring markedly less fighting and peace talks between insurgent and government representatives. Instead, the Taliban has resumed attacks against Afghan forces.

“UNAMA is gravely concerned with the acceleration in violence observed in March and the consequent increase in the number of civilian casualties and harm caused,” the new report said.

From January through March, the U.N.’s Assistance Mission in Afghanistan documented 533 civilians killed and 760 injured in the fighting, a 30% decrease from the same period last year.

But while significantly fewer casualties were attributed to the Taliban in January and February, compared to the same months last year, the group was deemed responsible for 40% of all casualties during the quarter, largely due to the March spike in attacks that exceeded last year’s numbers for the same month, UNAMA said.

Overall, the Taliban and other militant groups like the local Islamic State affiliate were blamed for 55% of all civilian casualties, while Afghan government forces and their allies were said to have caused about one-third of the casualties. The remaining 13% were unattributed.

The report called on both sides to stop fighting to protect civilians from further conflict and the growing coronavirus outbreak, which has caused more than 40 deaths in the country. More than 1,300 people have tested positive for the disease there.

The Taliban have so far rejected the Afghan government’s appeals for a cease-fire during the pandemic.

AFRICOM: Somalia strike killed 2 civilians

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — A review of civilian casualties connected to its airstrike campaign in Somalia found two noncombatants were killed during a February 2019 attack, U.S. Africa Command said Monday.

The findings were part of AFRICOM’s first quarterly report on civilian casualties, which it says it launched to boost transparency.

AFRICOM said it’s likely that two civilians were unintentionally killed and three were injured as a result of an airstrike on Feb. 23, 2019. The strike also killed two al-Shabab terrorists, who were the intended targets, AFRICOM said.

“While we follow very precise and rigorous standards, in instances where we fail to meet our expectations, we will admit the mistake,” AFRICOM’s Gen. Stephen Townsend said in a statement.

Between February 2019 and March 31, AFRICOM conducted 91 airstrikes against militants in Somalia and Libya.

During this period, AFRICOM said it received allegations of civilian casualties based on 27 different incidents. There were a total of 90 alleged civilian casualties.

AFRICOM said it has closed its investigation of 20 of the alleged incidents, while the other seven remain under review.

To date, AFRICOM has acknowledged three total civilian deaths connected to airstrikes in Somalia, where the U.S. has increased pressure in recent years on the al-Shabab militant group.

Last year, Amnesty International issued multiple reports that accused AFRICOM of killing more than a dozen civilians in various strikes in Somalia.

US still world’s biggest military spender

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The U.S. continues to drive growth in global military spending, which saw its largest annual increase in a decade as European countries also ramped up expenditures, a new report on defense spending said.

Global military spending rose by 3.6% year-on-year to reach \$1.9 trillion in 2019, the highest level since the 2008 financial crisis gutted many military budgets, said the report released Sunday by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Since 2010, global military spending has increased by 7.2%, it said.

The U.S. was by far the biggest spender, with its \$732 billion military budget accounting for more than a third of global military spending last year and marking an increase of 5.3% compared with 2018, the report said.

“The increase in U.S. spending in 2019 alone was equivalent to the entirety of Germany’s military expenditure for that year,” it said.

But Germany, which in recent years has faced harsh criticism from President Donald Trump for its lackluster investment in defense, also

posted big gains. Spending by Berlin increased by 20% in 2019 to \$49.3 billion — the largest increase among the top 15 military spenders, SIPRI said.

There also were sharp increases in countries that made major weapons system acquisitions, such as Bulgaria, where military spending increased by 127%, and Romania, up by 17%.

China, India, Russia and Saudi Arabia rounded out the top five behind the U.S. Together, they accounted for nearly two-thirds of global military spending.

China is estimated to have spent \$261 billion on its military in 2019, or 14% of the global total and just over 5% more than in 2018. Compared with 2010, what China spent on its military has increased by 85%, the report said.

A 6.8% increase in India’s military spending in 2019 and a 16% decline in Saudi Arabia meant India moved into third place for the first time since SIPRI began tracking global military spending, the report said. SIPRI has been compiling its military spending database since 1949.

Russia’s spending increased by 4.5% compared with 2018, also pushing it past Saudi Arabia.

Census delay could hold up drawing new voting districts

Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — The U.S. Census Bureau needs more time to wrap up the once-a-decade count because of the coronavirus, opening the possibility of delays in drawing new legislative districts that could help determine what political party is in power, what laws pass or fail and whether communities of color get a voice in their states.

The number of people counted and their demographics guide how voting districts for the U.S. House and state legislatures are redrawn every 10 years. The monthslong delay in census data could make a divisive process more complicated, potentially forcing lawmakers into costly special sessions to complete the work or postponing some primary elections.

"It will pinch the timing for sure on everybody," said Justin Levitt, a professor at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles who tracks redistricting nationwide. "For a few states, that's incredibly meaningful."

Despite the complications, advocates, lawmakers and others largely embraced the census delay as necessary to get a complete count.

With the U.S. so politically polarized, redistricting plays a major role in whether Republicans or Democrats drive the agenda in each state and how those lawmakers' decisions can affect people's lives. Parties that win large legislative majorities can tilt policy to the left or right on abortion, guns, taxes

and other contentious issues.

Redistricting typically is done by state lawmakers and governors, but an increasing number of states have shifted to special commissions.

The new districts frequently are challenged in court for not properly representing minority communities or for favoring one party over another in what is called gerrymandering.

The census delay could trigger more lawsuits.

Because of stay-at-home orders designed to combat the coronavirus, the Census Bureau put off hiring and training temporary census takers in mid-March. They won't start knocking on doors of people who haven't answered the questionnaire until August. The bureau pushed back the deadline to wrap up the count from the end of July to the end of October.

Congress must approve the Census Bureau's request to delay turning over redistricting data to the states from the end of March 2021 to the end of July 2021.

A delay could have big implications for states with legislative elections next year — New Jersey and Virginia.

"There will not be enough time for redistricting, candidate filing, preparing for an election and running a general election. There simply won't be time for it," said Michael McDonald, a political science professor at the University of Florida.

Seoul rebuts rumors N. Korea's Kim is ill

BY KIM GAMEL
AND YOO KYONG CHANG
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea is confident that reports suggesting Kim Jong Un is ill are unfounded, a senior official said in one of the firmest rebuttals to a swirl of speculation about why the North Korean leader has made no public appearances in two weeks.

The comments by the South's unification minister, who oversees policy with the North, were made Sunday in a closed-door forum and released on YouTube on Monday.

"Our government has enough intelligence-gathering capabilities that it can say with confidence that there are no unusual trends," the minister, Kim Yeon-chul, said in dismissing the reports about the North Korean leader's health.

Meanwhile, Kim Jong Un remained out of sight amid concern over potential instability in the region if the leader of the nuclear-armed state is incapacitated.

The North Korean leader expressed his gratitude to workers building a tourist zone in the eastern coastal area of Wonsan, state-run media reported Monday, but no details or photos were published.

Satellite images released by the monitoring website 38 North this weekend showed that

Kim's train has been parked in the area, giving credence to earlier claims by South Korean officials that the young leader was spending time at his palatial, seaside compound.

His last known public appearances were around April 11 when he was shown in photos presiding over a meeting of the ruling Workers' Party's political bureau and inspecting an air defense unit in a western part of the country.

Speculation, including unconfirmed reports that he may be "gravely ill" after surgery or was isolated because of the coronavirus pandemic, mounted after he failed to appear at celebrations marking the April 15 birthday of his late grandfather and the North's founder Kim Il Sung, a major holiday.

President Donald Trump and other U.S. officials also have dismissed the reports.

The unification minister called the flood of rumors an "infodemic" and said the government has said "nothing unusual" was afoot in North Korea based on a careful assessment of several sources of information. Kim declined to provide details about the intelligence due to the secret nature of the work.

South Korean presidential foreign policy adviser Moon Chung-in also was quoted by CNN as saying that "Kim Jong Un is alive and well."

El Paso shooting death toll rises to 23 as man succumbs

Associated Press

EL PASO, Teas — A man shot in the Aug. 3 attack targeting Latinos in an El Paso Walmart died after months in the hospital, raising the death toll from the attack to 23, according to a hospital official.

"After a nearly nine-month fight, our hearts are heavy as we report Guillermo 'Memo' Garcia, our last remaining pa-

tient being treated from the El Paso shooting, has passed away," said Del Sol Medical Center CEO David Shimp.

Garcia and his wife Jessica Coca Garcia were fundraising for their daughter's soccer team in the Walmart parking lot when the suspected gunman opened fire that Saturday morning.

Garcia is survived by his wife, who suffered leg wounds

but recovered.

The suspect, Patrick Crusius, 21, from the Dallas area, remains in jail awaiting trial. State prosecutors have charged him with murder and are pursuing the death penalty, and federal prosecutors charged him with hate crimes.

Police said they arrested Crusius near the shooting after he surrendered to officers,

telling them he was targeting "Mexicans." They also attributed to him a four-page racist screed that decried a Hispanic "invasion" of Texas and the U.S., and called for ethnic and racial segregation.

The shooting was the largest terrorist attack targeting Hispanics in modern history, and spread fear throughout the Latino community.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Board bans 5 books from high school classes

AK PALMER — A school board north of Anchorage, Alaska, has banned the teaching of five books considered literary classics used for high school English elective courses without public comment, sparking criticism from some educators.

The Matanuska-Susitna School Board voted 5-2 to remove “Invisible Man” by Ralph Ellison; “Catch-22” by Joseph Heller; “The Things They Carried” by Tim O’Brien; “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” by Maya Angelou; and “The Great Gatsby” by F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Police: Man made bomb threat to avoid work

FL WELLINGTON — A Florida construction worker called in a bomb threat to a water treatment facility to get a day off work, authorities said.

Richard Hamilton, 36, was arrested and charged with making a bomb threat, the Palm Beach Post reported.

More than 20 people evacuated Wellington’s water treatment plant shortly after the threatening 911 call, according to the Palm Beach County Sheriff’s Office. Hamilton had been working with a construction crew at the facility and later told deputies that he made the threat because he was having a bad day and didn’t want to work.

Museum given Frederick Douglass’ walking stick

SC COLUMBIA — The South Carolina State Museum is now home to a walking stick given to abolitionist Frederick Douglass when he visited Charleston in 1888.

Douglass escaped slavery before the Civil War and spent his life trying to abolish slavery. After the Civil War, he made speeches reminding people to never forget the horror of keeping people in bondage. One of those speaking tours came in 1888 in Georgia and South Carolina.

At Douglass’ stop in Charleston, he was honored by an African American militia unit calling themselves the Douglass Light Infantry, the majority of whom were former slaves, the museum said in a statement. They gave Douglass the walking stick with a gold cap.

Ex-FBI agent accused of taking \$200K in bribes

CA LOS ANGELES — A retired FBI agent from Northern California was arrested for allegedly taking more than \$200,000 in bribes to pass law enforcement information to a lawyer with ties to organized crime, prosecutors announced.

Babak Broumand, 53, of Lafayette in the San Francisco Bay Area, was arrested on a charge of conspiracy to commit bribery of a public official that was filed in Los Angeles federal court, the U.S. attorney’s office said in a statement.

Prosecutors said that from 2015 to 2017 while working on national security matters at the San Francisco field office, he received gifts and cash averaging \$10,000 a month. The bribes came from a lawyer with links to Armenian organized crime, prosecutors alleged.

Man threatened, sent dead rat to ex-wife

FL TAMPA — An Indiana man faces up to five years in federal prison for threatening his ex-wife over several years and mailing a

dead rat to her Florida home.

Romney Christopher Ellis, 55, of Indianapolis, pleaded guilty in Tampa federal court to making interstate threats and mailing injurious articles, according to court records.

According to a criminal complaint, Ellis had engaged in a four-year-long campaign of harassment against his ex-wife, who lives in Tampa, through text messages, photographs, videos and mailings. He threatened to decapitate her and set her on fire, investigators said.

Ellis sent text messages stating that he had traveled from Indiana to Florida to see his ex-wife. On one occasion, Ellis mailed a package to the victim’s home containing a dead rat and black rose.

Nurse suspended after neglecting an inmate

OR UMATILLA — A nurse who works at the Two Rivers Correctional Facility in Umatilla has had her license suspended because she neglected care for an inmate at the prison.

In May 2015, Linda Gruenwald ordered Steven Fox on a liquid diet for six months, according to the nursing board’s suspension order.

“Licensee acknowledges that from May 27, 2015, to July 10, 2015, there was a lack of follow up and assessment for the inmate, which lead to a weight loss of 34 pounds,” the order states. “Additionally, a decrease in blood pressure and heart rate from lack of nutrition led to a fall on July 10, 2015, that resulted in hospitalization and permanent injury.”

The fall left Fox paralyzed. He requires a motorized wheelchair to move and 24-hour care.

Oregon Department of Corrections spokeswoman Jennifer Black said Gruenwald remains employed.

Businessman buys amusement park

IN MONTICELLO — A Chicago businessman has bought a northern Indiana amusement park that abruptly closed in February and hopes to reopen the 94-year-old tourist destination’s rides and other attractions this summer if coronavirus restrictions allow.

Gene Staples purchased Indiana Beach before its former owner, California-based Apex Parks Group, declared Chapter 11 bankruptcy, White County Commissioner John Heimlich said.

Apex had cited the park’s disappointing financial performance when it announced in February that it had shuttered the Monticello site, which is about halfway between Chicago and Indianapolis.

Staples said in a statement that he is excited “to be part of a new era for Monticello.”

Bike shop salvages and donates trashed bicycles

KS LAWRENCE — A Lawrence bicycle repair shop is earning praise for salvaging and donating dozens of bicycles dumped by a bike-share company at a scrapyard.

Lawrence Re-Cyclery used about \$2,000 in donations from the community to buy and repair bikes from a 20-foot-tall pile scrapped by Veo, the bike-share company, the Journal-World reported.

Re-Cyclery co-owner Kristie Shay said the shop was able to salvage and repair 15 bikes that suffered only minor damage.

The repaired bikes are being donated to the Lawrence Community Shelter, O’Connell Youth Ranch and the Transitional Living Program, which serves youth who have recently aged out of foster care.

From wire reports

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Former Vilseck standout drafted

Stars and Stripes

Former Vilseck Falcons football player Kyle Hinton was selected in the NFL Draft this weekend.

The Minnesota Vikings took Hinton, an offensive lineman out of Division II Washburn University, with the 253rd overall pick in the seventh and final round on Saturday. Hinton started his prep career as a multiple-sport star at DODEA Europe school Vilseck before transferring to Liberty High School in Peoria, Ariz.

Before leaving for the States, he was fourth in the shot put at the DODEA Europe track and field championships in 2014.

Hinton developed into an NFL-level prospect over an impressive four-year career for the Ichabods. The 6-foot-3, 310-pounder was named a first-team All-American by d2football.com as a senior and was invited to participate in the NFL Players Association Bowl Game. A standout performance at the offseason pro day at Kansas State University further raised Hinton's draft profile, the Pro Football Network reported this spring.

Hinton continued to successfully pursue multiple sports in college. He was a second-team All-American and holds multiple school records as a discus thrower in track and field. Hinton also excelled in the classroom, earning three Mid-America Intercollegiate Athletics Association Scholar-Athlete awards in his time at Washburn.

He was scheduled to be a member of the school's track team again this season before the coronavirus wiped out the NCAA's entire spring sports schedule.

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Saints, Winston close to deal

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — The Saints and quarterback Jameis Winston are working on a contract proposal to make the former Buccaneers starter a backup to Drew Brees in New Orleans, a person familiar with the situation told The Associated Press.

Winston and the Saints are in "advanced" talks, the person said, speaking to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity Sunday because negotiations were ongoing. The person declined to say whether there was any agreement on either the length of the contract or financial terms.

Yahoo Sports first reported the Saints' interest in signing Winston as a backup.

Meanwhile, the Saints have announced that dynamic reserve QB and utility player Taysom Hill has a new two-year contract.

Winston is coming off a season in which he led the NFL with 5,109 yards passing and ranked second with 33 touchdown passes, but he also led the NFL in interceptions with 30. That made Winston the first QB in NFL history to have at least 30 TDs and 30 interceptions. Tampa Bay allowed Winston, whom it drafted first overall out of Florida State in 2015, to enter free agency and replaced him with former Patriots QB Tom Brady.

Now it appears Winston is open to going from five-year NFL starter to being Brees' understudy in hopes of rebuilding his credentials as a prospective franchise quarterback. Teddy Bridgewater recently did just that, serving as Brees' backup for two seasons before the Carolina Panthers signed him last month to replace their longtime starter, Cam Newton.

Winston was a two-year starter at Florida State, where he won the Heisman Trophy and led the Seminoles to a national title as a freshman in the 2013 season.

In five seasons with the Buccaneers, he has passed for 19,737 yards and 121 touchdowns while throwing 88 interceptions. But while he was productive statistically, that didn't amount to winning. The Bucs went 28-42 in games Winston started.

Saints coach Sean Payton has said throughout this offseason that he intended to have three active quarterbacks on game days so that Hill may continue in a multifaceted role that has helped the Saints go 13-3 the past two regular seasons.

A person familiar with the contract told the AP that the deal for Hill, who was a restricted free agent and turns 30 in August, is worth \$21 million, with \$16 million guaranteed and up to \$1 million in incentives. The person spoke on the condition of anonymity Sunday because financial terms have not been announced.

Question no longer where Tagovailoa will play — it's when

Associated Press

MIAMI — Tua Tagovailoa has been dogged for months by uncertainty, upheaval and close calls, from a career-threatening injury to an encounter with a tornado.

Now he knows where he'll play next. He still doesn't know when.

The Miami Dolphins are willing to wait — perhaps even until 2021.

They took the Alabama quarterback with the fifth overall pick in the NFL Draft, optimistic he'll fully recover from a hip injury that ended his college career in mid-November. He says doctors have indicated he's on schedule for a return in 2020.

"I've been really encouraged to say that I'm able to play if need be," Tagovailoa said.

But the Dolphins don't need for him to rush back, especially if his hip isn't yet 100%. Returning starter Ryan Fitzpatrick is 37 and ideally suited for the

role of caretaker quarterback and mentor to the rookie.

With the coronavirus pandemic, it's uncertain whether there will even be a 2020 NFL season. For now, Tagovailoa plans to begin bonding with new teammates by long distance.

"We've just got to hope and pray that everything works out, and that we can get back to spending time as a team," he said. "I think for me, the most important thing is probably getting everyone's phone number on the team and just creating relationships."

For the rebuilding Dolphins, the pick is a huge investment: the highest they've used to draft a quarterback since taking Bob Griese in 1967.

General manager Chris Grier said the Dolphins are comfortable about Tagovailoa's health, despite a long injury history that includes at least four surgeries at Alabama. Grier declined to say whether Tagovailoa is ex-

pected to participate fully in workouts whenever they begin.

This offseason has been a long one for Tagovailoa, and not just because he hasn't played a game since Nov. 16.

Tornadoes on March 3 killed 25 people in Middle Tennessee and damaged or destroyed hundreds of buildings. Tagovailoa was in Nashville to work out and rehabilitate his hip.

All in all, Tagovailoa said, it has been a stressful stretch, partly because he didn't know where he would be drafted.

"I went through that tornado; my car got destroyed," he said. "I'm going through rehab during that process. And then there's a lot of uncertainty at the same time. There were just a lot of things piling up. This was probably the most difficult time for me in my life."

After being drafted, however, the Hawaiian wore a grin.

"A dream come true, man," Tagovailoa said.

Loss of LLWS would hurt Williamsport

Associated Press

Put them in, coach. The boys and girls of summer are ready to play.

But Little League, like most of the sports world, has been benched. Youth baseball fields sit empty, and parents mourn the loss of spring ball, yearning for the days when the best way to flatten the curve was with a line drive up the middle.

The youth baseball program that boasts more than 2.5 million kids spread over 6,500 programs in 84 countries is on hold at least until May 11 due to the coronavirus pandemic. Even that target date seems optimistic, and the fate of its signature event, the Little League World Series in August in South Williamsport, Pennsylvania is unclear.

“If we were going to play the world series, traditionally like we have done for many, many years, we need to be playing and picking teams by the middle of June,” said Little League President Stephen Keener, who has yet to set a drop-dead date for a tournament decision.

Keener has been the Little League CEO since 1996 and spent almost 40 years in the organization, but trying to figure out the dynamics of a rescheduled tournament is more complex than the infield fly rule.

At best, Little League would have to loosen rules on qualifying — such as minimum number of games — for teams to participate. Postponement to even a fall date is a thorny issue because anything beyond August would disrupt the school year.

“If we were to do it in the fall, pretty much every team that would be here would have to be uprooted from school,” Keener said. “I’m not so sure that it would be in the best

interest of a child’s education, after having missed probably a couple of months school already, to take them out of school in the fall to come play in a baseball tournament. That, to me, would be quite unimportant.”

And there’s this: It is a World Series, emphasis on world. The 2019 international bracket features teams from Curacao, Japan, Mexico, Australia and Italy. There are travel restrictions guidelines because of the global pandemic that could make it impossible for some teams to participate.

“Ultimately, we’ll have to go country by country,” Keener said.

If the LLWS is canceled, the hardest-hit town would surely be Williamsport, a city of about 29,000 that is the heartbeat of Lycoming County, and synonymous with Little League since 1947.

The World Series is scheduled to run Aug. 20 to Aug. 30, and any kind of cancellation would crush the hospitality industry. Hotels would not have the packed floors of families, fans and ballplayers that send business booming for two weeks every August.

Nilesh Patel, the general manager of the Red Roof Inn across the street from the complex, said 30 to 40% of its business is generated during the World Series.

The Major League Baseball Little League Classic was added in 2016 and the Boston Red Sox and Baltimore Orioles are still set to play Aug. 23 at Bowman Field, the home of the Phillies’ Class-A team.

Fink said the economic impact of the LLWS on the region is “well over \$30 million” and there is no event that could raise even a fraction of the potential lost revenue.

There’s also the exposure that comes with a television contract with ABC/ESPN that earns the organization more than \$9 million per year through 2022. The 2019 championship game got 3.02 million viewers on ABC.

But if the event is canceled this year, Fink said the city will bounce back.

The Little League World Series turns 75 next year, and the quaint traditions of the event such as pin trading and cardboard box sled rides down the hill behind Howard J. Lamade Stadium are sure to return once it is safe.

Without a tournament, there would be no feel-good stories like the one Alex Rice enjoyed.

He was the coach of the Taney Dragons and then 13-year-old Mo’ne Davis, the 2014 Associated Press Female Athlete of the Year who became an instant celebrity and the first girl to win a Little League World Series game.

“The first night game, with I think 35,000 people, and about 95% Philadelphia folks, that was really terrific,” Rice said. “... But kind of like we are now, we were sequestered in our little dorms. The kids were are on social media and everything but you really have a good sense of what was going on with how excited the city was getting.”

Rice didn’t feel the Dragons got a chance to really live the full World Series experience so he took the majority of the team back in 2015 as regular kids.

“We did the pin trading. We did the cardboard down the hill,” Rice said. “We kind of relaxed on the hill and enjoyed it.”

Once it’s safe for play to resume, so should the memorable times at Williamsport.

Kenseth to replace Larson at Ganassi

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Former NASCAR champion Matt Kenseth will again come out of retirement to compete for Chip Ganassi Racing as the replacement for fired driver Kyle Larson.

Larson lost his job two weeks ago for using a racial slur while competing in a virtual race. Although Ganassi development driver Ross Chastain was assumed to be the leading contender to replace Larson in the No. 42 Chevrolet, the team instead announced Monday it

will go with the two-time Daytona 500 winner.

“I think Matt gives us the best chance to win, run up front and compete for wins,” Ganassi told The Associated Press.

Ganassi said the team will petition NASCAR for a waiver to make Kenseth, the 2003 Cup champion, eligible to race for the title this season. NASCAR completed just four of its 36 races before the season was suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Kenseth retired from Joe Gibbs Racing after the 2017

season but came back for 15 races to drive for Roush Fenway Racing, his original team, in 2018. He turned 48 on March 10.

In other racing news:

■ Ryan Newman said he will be ready to race when NASCAR resumes competition, which could be as early as May 17.

Newman suffered a head injury in the season-opening race at Daytona International Speedway. The Indiana native spent less than 48 hours in the hospital before walking out holding hands with his two

daughters.

Ross Chastain drove the No. 6 Ford in place of Newman for three races before the NASCAR season was suspended March 13 because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Speaking before NASCAR’s iRacing event Sunday, Newman said on Fox Sports that he will be ready to race when NASCAR calls drivers back to the track.

“That’s the absolute plan for sure. I am healthy,” Newman said.