

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

US job market improves but still struggling

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. unemployment fell to 11.1% in June as the economy added a solid 4.8 million jobs, the government reported Thursday. But the job-market recovery might already be faltering because of a new round of closings and layoffs triggered by a resurgence of the coronavirus.

The jobless rate was down from 13.3% in May, but it is still at a Depression-era level. The data was gathered during the second week of June, before a number of states began to reverse or suspend the reopenings of their economies to try to beat back the virus.

“This is a bit of a dated snap-

shot at this point,” said Jesse Edgerton, an economist at J.P. Morgan Chase.

The news came as the number of confirmed infections per day in the United States soared to an all-time high of 50,700, more than doubling in the past month, according to the count kept by Johns Hopkins University.

The spike, centered primarily in the South and West, has led states such as California, Texas, Arizona and Florida to reclose or otherwise clamp down again on bars, restaurants, movie theaters, beaches and swimming pools, throwing some workers out of a job for a second time.

President Donald Trump

said the jobs report shows the economy is “roaring back,” although he acknowledged there are still areas where “we’re putting out the flames” of the virus.

The job losses over the past two weeks will be reflected in the July unemployment report, to be released in early August.

While the job market improved for a second consecutive month, the Labor Department report showed that the U.S. remains far short of regaining the colossal losses it suffered this spring. It has recouped roughly one-third of the 22 million jobs lost.

The reclosings are keeping layoffs elevated: The number of Americans who sought un-

employment benefits fell only slightly last week to 1.47 million, according to a separate report. Though the weekly figure has declined steadily since peaking in March, it is still extraordinarily high by historic standards.

And the total number of people who are drawing jobless benefits remains at a sizable 19 million.

The number of laid-off workers seeking jobless benefits rose last week in Texas, Arizona and Tennessee. Though the figure fell in California, it remained near 280,000. That’s more people than were seeking unemployment benefits in the entire country before the outbreak took hold in March.

House panel bill includes funding for Stripes

BY STEVE BEYNON

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A House committee’s version of the annual defense spending bill includes \$15.5 million in federal funding for Stars and Stripes after the Defense Department proposed cutting the military newspaper from its 2021 budget.

The House Armed Services Committee unanimously approved \$740.5 billion in spending in the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act, which sets yearly policy and funding priorities for the Pentagon, and that Stars and Stripes is to be funded at the same amount as fiscal year 2020. The final committee vote on the NDAA was 56-0.

“Stars and Stripes fulfills a niche in journalism that isn’t going to be matched by other journalists when it comes to

military families and the minutiae of benefits, it is a very necessary piece of journalism,” said Rep. Ruben Gallego, D-Ariz., who introduced the Stars and Stripes amendment.

The bill also requires Defense Secretary Mark Esper to submit a report to the House Armed Services Committee about maintaining Stars and Stripes as a benefit to service members.

The bill mandates Esper analyze reducing the newspaper’s operations and examine whether it should still receive annual funding provided by Congress.

The proposed Defense Department budget for fiscal year 2021 cuts Stars and Stripes of its federal subsidies, which equals about half of the news organization’s yearly funds to pay to print and distribute newspapers to American troops deployed around the globe, including remote and

often-dangerous locations such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. The rest of the organization’s money comes from sales, subscriptions and advertising.

Stars and Stripes first appeared during the Civil War, and it has been continuously published since World War II. It produces daily newspapers for U.S. military troops across the world and a website, stripes.com, which is updated with news 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Though it is part of the Pentagon’s Defense Media Agency, Stripes retains its editorial independence and is congressionally mandated to be governed by First Amendment principles.

The proposed cuts to Stars and Stripes were a product of the recent defense-wide review to cut spending and reallocate funds to efforts the Pentagon considers important for defense against threats from other mili-

tary powers, mainly China and Russia.

“So, we trimmed the support for Stars and Stripes because we need to invest that money, as we did with many, many other programs, into higher-priority issues,” Esper said during a Feb. 13 news conference at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

But Gallego said cutting Stars and Stripes funding from the Defense Department budget was not about money.

“It’s such a small number in comparison to the whole budget, it’s less than a rounding error,” he said before the committee approved the bill. “This has nothing to do with budgets. This has to do with the DOD not liking investigative journalism. If not for [Stripes], Congress might not know about some of these important issues. I think they believe this is the one time to get rid of Stars and Stripes.”

GOP requests Trump to not veto DOD bill

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump is increasingly isolated over his staunch defense of Confederate symbols on military bases, as uneasy congressional Republicans signal to the White House that now is not the time to hold the Pentagon hostage to this one issue.

Trump threatened late Tuesday to veto a \$740 billion defense policy bill if it included bipartisan language mandating the removal of the names of Confederate leaders from military installations. Hours later, Republicans on both sides of the Capitol made it clear the president needs to back down in a fight over honoring secessionists who fought the United

States to maintain slavery.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., reaffirmed his support for the Senate's version of the bill that directs the Pentagon to rename such bases within three years. In the House Armed Services Committee — where lawmakers were expected Wednesday night to approve a similar provision accelerating that time frame to one year — the panel adopted a proposal by Rep. Anthony Brown, D-Md., to ban Confederate flags on all Defense Department property — with no Republicans objecting.

The panel is crafting the House version of the annual defense bill that authorizes a pay raise for service members and billions of dollars for new

weapons, fighter jets and ships.

The congressional push to remove Confederate symbols from defense installations faces opposition from some Republicans.

Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman James Inhofe, R-Okla., said Wednesday that while he regretted the president's veto threat, he agreed with Trump's view about stripping the names from military bases. He vowed to work to rid the defense bill of the provision before it reaches Trump's desk, all but assuring there will be an internal GOP fight.

"It's part of our history, it's part of our heritage," Inhofe said. "They're tearing down statues and doing all these un-American things. The presi-

dent feels strongly about it and I do too."

But those comments belied a growing sentiment among many Capitol Hill Republicans, including some who have long griped privately that Trump's racist comments repel Americans.

"I would hope the president would reconsider vetoing the entire defense bill, which includes pay raises for our troops over a provision in there that could lead to changing the names of these military bases," McConnell told Dana Perino in a Fox News interview. Changing military base names is "quite different from trying to air brush the statues in the Capitol," he added.

German firefighter injured while rescuing US soldiers

BY IMMANUEL JOHNSON
AND MARCUS KLOECKNER

Stars and Stripes

GRAFENWOEHR, Germany — A German firefighter was seriously injured in an operation to rescue soldiers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade who landed in trees during a parachute training exercise, officials said Thursday.

The 62-year-old firefighter sustained severe but non-life-threatening head injuries when one of the soldiers fell out of the tree he'd crashed into during the exercise Wednesday, said Werner Stopfer, chief of police in the town of Eschenbach, which is near Grafenwoehr. It was unclear what caused the injuries, Stopfer said, adding that the firefighter was in the intensive care unit of a local hospital.

The soldiers had drifted off course during the jump and ended up in trees on Grafenwoehr, a sprawling training area in Bavaria, brigade

spokesman Maj. Chris Bradley said.

The six paratroopers and another firefighter were slightly injured in the accident, which occurred at around 9 p.m., Stopfer said.

Rescue helicopters, firefighters and a mountain rescue team were mobilized to search for the soldiers as night began to fall over the vast training area, Stopfer said. Grafenwoehr covers roughly 57,600 acres, or the equivalent of about 43,600 football fields.

"We did not know exactly how many soldiers were hanging in the trees or if they were lying somewhere on the ground," Stopfer said.

Army officials did not immediately say what caused the soldiers to drift off course during the jump.

The soldiers involved in Wednesday's incident sustained "typical injuries for parachutists," said Stopfer, such as skin abrasions, bruises and bone fractures.

US envoy looks to start talks to end Afghan War

Associated Press

ISLAMABAD — Washington's peace envoy told Pakistani officials that Afghanistan's Taliban and Kabul's political leaders were close to starting negotiations to decide the face of a postwar Afghanistan, a crucial next step in a U.S. deal signed with the Taliban in February, according to a statement released Thursday by the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad.

Zalmay Khalilzad was in the region to pave the way for intra-Afghan negotiations expected to begin sometime this month. No date had been set, but Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said late Wednesday the first round would be held in Doha, Qatar, where the Taliban maintain a political office.

Both sides must still release the remainder of prisoners laid out in the deal, which calls for the Afghan government to free 5,000 Taliban and the insurgents to release 1,000 government personnel. So far, the

government has freed 3,500 and the Taliban about 700.

"Ambassador Khalilzad noted how close the sides are to starting intra-Afghan negotiations and the importance of resolving remaining issues quickly, underscoring the promise peace holds for regional stability and development," the embassy statement said of his meetings in Pakistan with the army chief and foreign minister.

Earlier this week, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo spoke to Taliban chief negotiator Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar. In Monday's video call, Pompeo "made clear the expectation for the Taliban to live up to their commitments, which include not attacking Americans," according to the State Department.

Taliban political spokesman Suhail Shaheen said, however, that no talks will begin until all 5,000 Taliban listed in the agreement are freed.

DOD: Taliban still working with al-Qaida amid US deal

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Taliban remain closely tied with al-Qaida despite assuring the United States they would disavow the terrorist group in exchange for a withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan, the Defense Department said this week.

Low-level insurgents routinely receive support from al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent — the group's regional affiliate — and work with the terrorists to undermine the U.S.-backed government in Kabul, the DOD said in a semi-annual report to Congress published Wednesday.

"Despite recent progress in the peace process, AQIS maintains close ties to the Taliban in Afghanistan, likely for protection and training," the report said, using an abbreviation for the terrorist group.

The Pentagon's assessment, which covers the period from December to May, follows similar findings the United Nations published last month. It also underscores the challenges the Trump administration faces as it attempts to end the longest war in U.S. history, now in its 19th year. Under a U.S.-Taliban deal signed in February, all U.S. forces could be out of Afghanistan by next summer if the jihadis fulfill certain commitments, including renouncing al-Qaida and preventing terrorist groups from using Afghan soil to train, recruit, raise funds or plot attacks on the U.S. and its allies.

Officials believe the threat posed by AQIS to U.S. forces is "limited," the report said, and U.S. counterterrorism measures have reduced its ability to conduct operations in the country without the Taliban. But U.S. lawmakers are concerned that al-Qaida's presence could expand and threaten national security if U.S. troops withdraw without proof that the group's links to the insurgents have been severed.

Report: Marine review finds issues with probe of collision

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — A Marine Corps review has found multiple inaccuracies in the investigation of a midair collision off Japan's coast that killed six Marines more than two years ago, according to a report by Military.com.

Five crew members of a KC-130J tanker and the pilot of an F/A-18 Hornet died during the nighttime training mission on Dec. 6, 2018. The Hornet's weapons officer was the sole survivor. Both aircraft were based at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni.

An accident investigation report, released in September, determined that toxic leadership and the F/A-18 pilot's inexperience conducting nighttime, in-air refueling contributed to the collision. The investigation also found that the fighter pilot's use of the sleep aid Ambien contributed to the crash and that Marine All-Weather Fighter Attack Squadron 242 suffered from "inadequate oversight of training and operations" and an "unprofessional command climate."

Four Marine officers — the

squadron commander and its executive, operations and aviation safety officers — were fired as a result.

However, a review of the investigation's findings directed by Gen. Gary Thomas, the assistant commandant, has found "many inaccuracies" that led to "differing — and false — narratives," according to the Wednesday report by Military.com.

Marine Corps officials in Japan didn't immediately respond Thursday to questions about the review.

Lt. Gen. Robert Hedelund, the service's longest-serving aviator, assigned to carry out the review, wrote that the first investigation was not impartial in its focus, thorough in its scope or accurate in its findings, according to Military.com.

The review board dismissed the initial report's finding that trace amounts of Ambien found in Capt. Jahmar Resilard, the F/A-18 pilot who crashed into the tanker, played a role in the accident.

"There is no basis to conclude that ... Ambien use was casual or contributory to the 2018 mishap," the new 153-page in-

vestigation states, according to Military.com.

The new findings highlight challenges faced by Resilard on the night of the crash.

His aircraft (call sign Profane 12), the tanker and another F/A-18 (call sign Profane 11) were flying with their lights off during the refueling operation but, after tanking, the other fighter turned on its external lights, according to the review, Military.com reported.

"These circumstances set the conditions for Profane 12 to focus on the overtly lit Profane 11 aircraft instead of the dimly lit tanker," the report states, according to the website.

The experts on the review board determined that Resilard lost sight of the C-130 "because he became singularly focused on Profane 11." Resilard's night vision goggles washed out while flying off near the lighted second F/A-18, making it harder to see the tanker, Military.com reported.

"It must be noted, this specific set of circumstances would have been incredibly difficult for any pilot, let alone a junior, or less proficient pilot to overcome," the review board wrote, according to the website.

US troops, long-term residents and their families exempt from new EU travel ban

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — U.S. military personnel bound for assignments in Europe won't be affected by a new European Union travel ban on Americans, officials said.

Status of Forces and bilateral agreements with countries mean "we don't anticipate any direct impacts on U.S. personnel," U.S. European Command said in a statement after the EU travel restriction went into

effect Wednesday. The restrictions also "should not apply" to long-term EU residents and their family members, or "to people with an essential function or need," including health care workers, seasonal agricultural workers, researchers and diplomats, the European Council said. Military personnel are on the list of essential workers, said the EC, one of the main EU decision-making bodies.

The ban on American visitors was imposed to prevent a resurgence of the coronavirus

in Europe, where case numbers and transmission have fallen sharply from a peak several weeks ago. The restrictions will be reevaluated every two weeks, the EC said. If new cases are "close to or below the EU average" over a period of 14 days, the U.S. will be added to the list of countries whose citizens can travel to the EU.

But the likelihood of that happening soon is slim. New cases of the virus have spiked in the U.S. after several states lifted lockdown restrictions.

5 troops fighting Navy's ban on going to indoor church services

BY ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

At least five service members have hired a lawyer to fight a Navy order that bars them from attending indoor worship services to prevent the spread of the coronavirus because they believe it violates their constitutional right of religious freedom.

First Liberty Institute, a Texas-based legal office focused on defending religious freedoms, sent letters beginning Monday to five commanders, asking them to grant the service members an accommodation and to encourage the Navy to rescind the "unlawful order."

"The commander in chief has already declared churches are essential in America," said Michael Berry, general counsel for First Liberty and the lawyer for the five service members. "It really strikes me that the Navy is either blatantly disregarding the president, the commander in chief, or they haven't been paying attention and are completely tone deaf to what's going on."

Air Force Maj. Daniel Schultz, who is assigned to the Naval Post Graduate School in California and therefore falls under

the order's restrictions, is part of his off-base church's leadership and worship team, according to Berry's four-page letter to Air Force Lt. Col. Matthew Garvin, commander of the school's Air Force element.

"Maj. Schultz is a devout Christian, and his sincerely held religious beliefs compel him to participate in religious services at his church, in person," Berry wrote. "Because [the order] bans him from attending church and participating on the worship team, the Navy order substantially burdens Maj. Schultz's sincerely held religious beliefs."

Berry's other four clients have declined to have their names or the specifics of their requests released publicly.

The Navy first issued orders to prevent the spread of the coronavirus in March, only granting sailors permission to travel from home to work and to the grocery store or pharmacy for essential items, said Capt. Sarah Self-Kyler, spokeswoman for the Navy's Fleet Forces Command. Since then, Navy chaplains have worked to make worship opportunities available to sailors in ways that don't require large gatherings of people, she said.

"The [Defense Department]

places a high value on the rights of members of the military services to observe the tenets of their respective religions or to observe no religion at all," Self-Kyler said.

On June 24, the Navy released an order to reiterate the March guidelines, which haven't changed, she said. However, the update did provide more specifics on what is and isn't allowed because many service members live in civilian communities that have begun reopening.

The order warns "the easing of community restrictions is not aligned with the Navy imperative to maintain [the coronavirus] infection as low as achievable across the force."

"While all region and installation commanders maintain a strong working relationship with local and state leadership and consistently monitor current health conditions, the Navy's unique mission sometimes demands that it impose greater burdens on its force than are imposed on our civilian counterparts in order to ensure operational effectiveness," Self-Kyler said.

Sasebo and Misawa ease limits before the holiday

BY JAMES BOLINGER
Stars and Stripes

Two more U.S. military bases in Japan eased coronavirus restrictions in time for sailors, airmen, families and civilian workers to stretch their legs over Independence Day weekend.

Misawa Air Base, at the northern tip of Honshu, the largest of Japan's four main islands, on Thursday opened the Tohoku region for travel by base personnel. Travel is now permitted in Akita, Aomori, Fukushima, Iwate, Miyagi and Yamagata prefectures, according to a post on the base Facebook page.

Likewise, personnel from Sasebo Naval Base are permitted to travel throughout Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands, with the exception of the Fukuoka metro area, Sasebo commander Capt. Brad Stallings said in a statement Wednesday.

Individuals from both installations may visit public baths, saunas and tattoo parlors. They can also dine in at off-base restaurants, as long as they practice social distancing and wear masks covering their nose and mouth when not eating.

Misawa imposed a 90-minute dining limit and a "hard cutoff" 9 p.m. restaurant curfew.

Sasebo's people may visit amusement parks and take part in sports; Misawa personnel can go to movie theaters and massage parlors. They may also stay at hotels and cabins.

"As long as we all continue to take personal responsibility seriously, maintain distance, wear our masks properly and maintain strict hygiene habits we won't catch this disease and it won't find its way onto the base or our ships," Stallings wrote.

USMC confirms 1st Okinawa virus case

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND AYA ICHIHASHI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The Marine Corps has reported its first case of coronavirus on Okinawa, a family member of a Marine who tested positive Wednesday after returning from the United States, Marine Forces Japan announced Thursday.

The case is the first on the island prefecture since April 30.

The family has been quarantined since their return June 19, and Navy health professionals and Marine Corps authorities are tracing their contacts "to determine whether anyone else may

have been exposed," the Marines' statement said.

The infected individual lives at Camp McTureous, a housing area in Uruma city less than two miles from Camp Courtney, the statement said.

"It is believed the individual contracted the virus from recent travel to the United States," the Marine statement said. "They have only had minimal contact with [U.S. Forces Japan] personnel and have not had any contact at all with anyone off base."

This is the fourth case associated with the U.S. military on the island since the global pandemic began. Most of the approximately 30,000 Marines stationed in Japan are based on Okinawa.

Putin strongly backed in controversial vote

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Almost 78% of voters in Russia have approved amendments to the country's constitution that will allow President Vladimir Putin to stay in power until 2036, Russian election officials said Thursday after all the votes were counted. Kremlin critics said the vote was rigged.

In the weeklong balloting which concluded on Wednesday, 77.9% voted for the changes, and 21.3% voted against, with 100% of the precincts counted by Thursday morning, Russia's Central Election Commission said. The turnout exceeded 64%, according to officials.

The reported numbers reflect the highest level of voter support for Putin in 10 years.

In the 2018 presidential election, 76.7% of voters supported his candidacy, while only 63.6% did in the 2012 election.

But Kremlin critics said the numbers alone show they are false, with an unrealistic approval rating for the Russian leader amid wide frustration in the country over declining living standards.

"A record in falsifying votes has been set in Russia," opposition politician Alexei Navalny said in a Facebook post Thursday. "The announced result has nothing whatsoever to do with the people's opinion."

Putin's approval rating was at 59% in May, according to the Levada Center, Russia's top independent pollster. That was the lowest in two decades.

The weeklong plebiscite was tarnished

by widespread reports of pressure on voters and other irregularities, with independent election observers criticizing the voting procedure as having a complete lack of transparency and independent control.

For the first time in Russia, polls were kept open for an entire week to bolster turnout and avoid election-day crowds amid the coronavirus pandemic — a provision that Kremlin critics denounced as an extra tool to manipulate the outcome, as ballot boxes remained unattended for days at night.

Observers also pointed to the relentless pressure that state and private employers put on their staff to vote, monitoring that was hindered by bureaucratic hurdles, virus-related restrictions and the dubious legal standing of the early voting.

Statue of Stonewall Jackson removed in Richmond

Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. — Work crews wielding a crane, harnesses and power tools wrested an imposing statue of Gen. Stonewall Jackson from its pedestal along the famed Monument Avenue in Richmond, Va., on Wednesday, just hours after the mayor ordered the removal of all Confederate statues from city land.

Mayor Levar Stoney's decree came weeks after Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam ordered the removal of the most prominent and imposing statue along the avenue: that of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee, which sits on state land. The removal of the Lee statue has been stalled pending the resolu-

tion of several lawsuits.

The Jackson statue is the latest of several dozen Confederate symbols to be removed from public land in the United States in the five weeks since the death of George Floyd at the hands of police sparked a nationwide protest movement.

In most instances, state or local governments moved to take down monuments in response to impassioned demonstrators, but in a few cases — including several other Virginia Confederate statues — protesters toppled the figures themselves. Also this week, Mississippi retired the last state flag in the U.S. that included the Confederate battle emblem.

Confederate statues were erected de-

cares after the Civil War, during the Jim Crow era, when states imposed new segregation laws, and during the "Lost Cause" movement, when historians and others tried to depict the South's rebellion as a fight to defend states' rights, not slavery. In Richmond, the first major monument — the Lee statue — was erected in 1890.

Work crews spent several hours Wednesday carefully attaching a harness to the massive Stonewall Jackson statue and using power tools to detach it from its base. A crowd of several hundred people who had gathered to watch cheered as a crane lifted the figure of the general atop his horse into the air and set it aside.

Turkey demands French apology over naval incident

Associated Press

BERLIN — Turkey's foreign minister on Thursday demanded an apology from France over its depiction of a standoff between ships from the two countries in the Mediterranean Sea that prompted Paris to suspend its involvement in a NATO naval operation.

France said its frigate Courbet was "lit up" three times by Turkish naval targeting radar on June 10 when it tried to approach a Tanzanian-flagged civilian ship suspected of involvement in arms trafficking. The ship was being escorted by three Turkish warships. The Courbet backed off after the confrontation.

At the time, the French frigate was part of the Sea Guardian mission, which is help-

ing to provide maritime security in the Mediterranean.

France said it was acting based on NATO information and that under the alliance's rules of engagement, such conduct is considered a hostile act.

Turkey has denied harassing the Courbet. Both countries are NATO allies.

"France has not told the truth to the EU or to NATO," Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said during a visit to Berlin.

"The claims that our vessels locked onto (French vessels) are not true," Cavusoglu added. "We have proven this with reports and documents and gave them to NATO. NATO saw the truth."

NATO has confirmed only that investigators have submitted their report into the

incident, but said it was "classified" and declined to say what conclusions, if any, had been drawn.

"Instead of engaging in anti-Turkish activities and such leanings, France needs to make a sincere confession," Cavusoglu said. "Our expectation from France at the moment is for it to apologize in a clear fashion, without ifs or buts, for not providing the correct information."

The French government sent a letter Tuesday to NATO saying it is halting its participation in Sea Guardian "temporarily."

France has accused Turkey of repeated violations of the U.N. arms embargo on Libya and branded the Turkish government as an obstacle to securing a cease-fire in the African nation, which Turkey has firmly denied.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Most food scraps now unfit for trash, landfill

VT MONTPELIER — Most food scraps are now banned from the trash and landfill in Vermont.

Vermonters now must collect their food scraps and either compost them in their yards, take them to food waste drop-off sites such as transfer stations or have them hauled away by a service. Trash haulers are required to offer food scrap collection services to nonresidential customers and apartments with four units or more, unless another hauler is willing to do the collection, the state said. It's part of Vermont's Universal Recycling Law to cut down on trash in landfills.

Residents who compost in their yards will still be allowed to throw away meat and bones in the trash.

Woman gets 3½ years after faking own death

WV CHARLESTON — A West Virginia woman who faked her own death to get out of a fraud charge has been sentenced to 3½ years in prison, officials said Tuesday.

Julie M. Wheeler, 43, was sentenced for defrauding a federal health care program and now faces local charges for reporting a false emergency, according to a news release from U.S. Attorney Mike Stuart.

Authorities said Wheeler pleaded guilty to the fraud charge in February but before she could be sentenced, she and her family staged her fall from the Grandview State Park overlook. The report of her falling led to an extensive effort to find her body.

Eventually, state police found Wheeler at her home in Beckley, hiding in a closet.

Quake was aftershock of 2018 temblor

AK ANCHORAGE — A minor earthquake was felt throughout Alaska's Cook Inlet region Tuesday, and officials said it was an aftershock of a more powerful earthquake that struck the Anchorage area 19 months ago.

The Alaska Earthquake Center said the magnitude 3.6 earthquake struck shortly before 3 p.m.. It was centered 4 miles southwest of Anchorage and was recorded at a depth of about 26 miles. The center said the earthquake was felt in the Anchorage area and in the northern suburbs in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

Officials said this is an aftershock from the magnitude 7.1 quake that caused widespread damage in November 2018.

Man admits using drone for delivery to prison

NE LINCOLN — A Nebraska man accused of using a drone to try to deliver marijuana and tobacco to Lincoln Correctional Center pleaded no contest Tuesday to the charges.

Robert M. Kinser, 38, of Lincoln, faces up to four years in prison at his August sentencing. He entered the pleas to charges of attempted delivery of marijuana and attempted conveyance of an article to an inmate, the Lincoln Journal Star reported.

An inmate on a work detail in February 2018 found a crashed drone and two white bags on prison grounds adjacent to the prison, Deputy Lancaster County Attorney Jeff Mathers said. One bag contained 17.5 grams of marijuana, the other had tobacco and rolling papers.

The Nebraska State Patrol's computer crimes division was able to pull digital photos,

video clips and metadata from the drone's SD card, which led to a demolition site in Beatrice where Kinser works.

Man who spiked ex's tea with meth gets 3 years

VA ROANOKE — A Virginia man has been sentenced to three years in prison for spiking his ex-girlfriend's pitcher of tea with methamphetamine.

The Roanoke Times reported that Elvis Jarrett Mullins, 41, of Troutville, was sentenced last week. Authorities said he broke into his ex's Roanoke house. The woman returned home, consumed the tea and "felt drugged," prosecutors said. Hospital tests later showed a positive result for amphetamines. The woman was otherwise not injured.

Mullins has already served about 15 months. He pleaded no contest in November to breaking and entering and to adulterating food or drink. Mullins also has taken part in a drug rehabilitation program and apologized.

Judge David Carson said Mullins' actions could have been disastrous if the couple's young son also drank the tea.

Family saves bear with head stuck in container

WI BLOOMER — A Wisconsin family helped save a young bear that was struggling to breathe while swimming in a lake with its head caught in a plastic food container.

Tricia and Brian Hurt and their son, Brady, were fishing Saturday on Marsh Miller Lake in western Wisconsin's Chippewa County when they came across what they first thought was a swimming dog. They soon realized, though, that it was a young bear with a clear

plastic cheese ball container stuck on its head.

Their first attempt to pull the tub off the bear's head failed, but another try was successful. They captured the rescue on video.

"That was the thing I remember most, is that bear panting heavily, trying to get air. Can you imagine having that down in the water, it sealed it off so it couldn't get fresh air into that jug?" said Brian Hurt.

The Hurts then went to a nearby resort, where some people had watched the rescue and told them the bear had been that way for at least a few days. Locals had been trying to figure out how get the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to help it.

Brian Hurt estimated the bear was a year old and likely still with its mother.

Police car pursuit ends in ocean cliff plunge

CA SANTA CRUZ — A carjacking suspect fleeing Santa Cruz County authorities ended up in the drink and then the clink.

The Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office says deputies responded Tuesday afternoon to reports of a man shooting a handgun in the air near Davenport.

Soon after, the same man allegedly carjacked someone and fled at speeds over 100 mph toward the city of Santa Cruz, where deputies called off the pursuit for safety reasons.

A short time later Santa Cruz police found the vehicle had gone off West Cliff Drive and plunged into the ocean.

The Sheriff's Office said the suspect climbed out of the car and up the cliff, where he was taken into custody without further incident.

No injuries were reported.

From wire reports

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Read us online at www.stripes.com.

STARS AND STRIPES®

Source: NFL to cut preseason to two games

Associated Press

The NFL will cut its preseason in half and push back the start of exhibition play so teams have more time to train following a virtual offseason made necessary by the coronavirus pandemic, a person with knowledge of the decision told The Associated Press.

The person spoke Wednesday on condition of anonymity because the league hasn't announced that the preseason will be cut from four games to two.

Players are still discussing with their union whether to ask

for cancellation of all preseason games, according to two people familiar with their thinking. Both people spoke on condition of anonymity because a decision hasn't been made.

The pandemic forced teams to conduct their entire offseason programs via videoconference. So, teams will be gathering together for the first time when training camps open July 28.

Minus the usual minicamps, on-field practices and in-person weight training from April to June, players' conditioning won't be what it normally is. So, eliminating the first week of preseason games Aug. 13-

16 will give them more time to ratchet up their football fitness.

Teams will now play exhibitions Aug. 20-24 and Aug. 27-31 during what were originally the second and third weeks of exhibition play, with all 32 teams playing one home and one road game.

Most of those games will remain the same as originally scheduled, although some matchups in that second slate will have to be changed so every team gets a game at home.

The exhibition finales on Sept. 3 were also scrapped, giving teams more time to

get ready for the regular season, which opens Sept. 10 with Houston at Kansas City.

There are no changes to the regular-season schedule.

The league continues to draw up protocols, not only for COVID-19 mitigation but for ramping up practices during the first few weeks of training camp.

The annual Hall of Fame Game pitting Pittsburgh and Dallas on Aug. 6 was recently scrapped as the induction ceremonies were pushed back to 2021.

AP pro football writer Rob Maaddi contributed to this report.

COVID-19 quarantined Cubs pitching coach for a month

Associated Press

CHICAGO — An emotional Chicago Cubs pitching coach Tommy Hottovy is recovering from a severe case of COVID-19 that quarantined him for 30 days.

The 38-year-old Hottovy broke down as he detailed a harrowing ordeal during a conference call on Wednesday. The Cubs resume workouts Friday for the first time since Major League Baseball shut down camps on March 12.

"It's still kind of raw in the fact that we just got through it and to relive it," said Hottovy, in his second season as the Cubs' pitching coach. "Obviously, it affected us pretty significantly for a month. I felt it was important for me to talk through what I went through because too much of what's out there is the easy stories of what people go through with this."

The former major leaguer learned he had the virus on the third day he felt ill, following a nasal test. He isolated in a spare bedroom with symptoms that got so bad he spent part of one day at the hospital.

Hottovy tested negative about two weeks ago and still gets winded easily. He is grateful his wife, Andrea, and young children did not get sick.

Hottovy had a relentless fever, difficulty breathing, dehydration and an increased heart rate. It was particularly bad at night, making sleep just about impossible.

He got depressed, wondering if he could have done more even though he wore masks and gloves outside the house prior

to becoming ill.

Hottovy spent eight hours at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago on the 12th day and was prepared to stay overnight. Instead, he got sent home with a breathing apparatus.

"If my story, if my journey through this, helps one person realize how severe this can get — and if that saves one life — then I want my story to be heard," he said. "Again, I'm sorry I'm emotional. It's still fresh."

Hottovy coughed so much during one Zoom meeting with pitchers that manager David Ross took over for him.

Hottovy kept a cooler filled with drinks in the spare room because he didn't want to risk exposing his family by going to the kitchen. He said his wife was constantly cleaning and neighbors brought supplies to sanitize the home. If he went outside, Andrea and the kids would clear the house and open the doors. Hottovy would then exit as quickly as he could, without touching anything, and he would go straight to his room when he went back inside.

Hottovy thought about opting out of the season. But he has faith in the league's protocols and will be with the team at home and away.

"I do still believe for society and for people, having sports and having baseball ... is important," he said. "But at the same token, one little misstep, one little contact situation by one person, can derail an entire industry."

Six FC Dallas players test positive for virus

Associated Press

Six players with FC Dallas have tested positive for COVID-19 and the entire team has been quarantined ahead of the MLS Is Back tournament.

The club confirmed in a statement Wednesday that the players tested positive upon arrival in Florida for the month-long tournament starting next week.

The team said all players and staff tested negative for coronavirus before leaving for the tournament on Saturday. Upon arrival, two players tested positive. Four more positive tests were uncovered in subsequent testing.

"In consultation with MLS medical officials, FC Dallas took proactive steps to isolate the newly affected players as well as all FC Dallas players and staff in Orlando out of an abundance of caution. All members of the club delegation are following MLS health and safety protocols and will remain quarantined in their hotel rooms pending the results of further COVID-19 testing," the team said in a statement.

The names of the players were not released.

The league said that no other team has been in contact with the FC Dallas delegation since its arrival.

All of the league's 26 teams are sequestered in hotels in advance of the tournament played without fans at the ESPN Wide World of Sports complex at Disney World. The tournament opens Wednesday.

MLS shut down because of the coronavirus pandemic on March 12, after the league's teams had played two games.

NBA season assured of being unique

Associated Press

The 2020 NBA champion, if one is crowned, will have emerged as the ultimate winner from a season that lasted more than a full year from start to finish. A season that saw political unrest between the NBA and China, the deaths of David Stern and Kobe Bryant, racial issues across the nation and, if that wasn't enough, a pandemic.

It is a season like no other.

So, an asterisk-bearing champion? Not a chance.

To the teams in the NBA, this championship might be the toughest one ever claimed. It'll come after more than three months of living in a quasi-bubble at the Disney complex near Orlando, Fla., after an entire postseason is played without fans, with most if not all that time spent away from friends and family. And only one of the 22 teams headed to Disney will be able to say it was absolutely worth the trouble.

"I've heard a lot of people say that there's going to be, like, a star next to this championship," Milwaukee forward and reigning NBA MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo said. "I feel like at the end of the day this is going to be like the toughest

championship you could ever win because the circumstances are really, really tough right now. So, whoever wants it more is going to be able to go out there and take it."

He's not alone in feeling that way.

Most of the 22 teams that will be headed to the Disney campus next week — the first arrivals are scheduled for July 7 — spent Wednesday beginning Phase 3 of the NBA's restart process. Workouts are still individual, but now mandatory. No team can practice or play 5-on-5 until arriving at Disney.

Teams won't be back together, all at once, in person, until getting to Central Florida.

"I think this might be certainly the most worthy of all world championships in the NBA because of all the things that every team is going to have to navigate and overcome to be able to be crowned a champion," Miami coach Erik Spoelstra said.

The season has been daunting and won't get any easier. That's why Los Angeles Lakers coach Frank Vogel — whose team was in China when the political issues hit this fall, took the enormous emotional blow that followed Bryant's

death, has championed societal change during these troubled times in the country and has had players infected with the coronavirus — wholeheartedly agrees with Antetokounmpo's stance.

"Our team has been through a lot this year," Vogel said. "And we've endured, and we've come out strong each time we've faced adversity. I don't know about other teams but if we were able to come through all of this and achieve the ultimate prize, I do think it deserves a harder-than-ordinary asterisk. If you're going to put an asterisk on it, I don't think it weakens it at all."

There are elements of the restart that are not easy for anyone involved, such as the isolation from the outside world, the daily testing, and the highly restrictive rules that the NBA put in place after consultation with health officials.

Denver coach Michael Malone said that will prove someone's championship mettle.

"If you're able to go into a bubble to be isolated from your friends and family, to have no home court advantage, to have a league interruption of four months, and you're able to spend 90 days and come out of

there a champion, I think this will be the toughest championship ever won," Malone said. "There's no asterisk. You win an NBA championship anytime, it's a hell of an accomplishment. But in these circumstances, these unprecedented times, with everything going on ... I think it will be a remarkable accomplishment."

Some may argue otherwise, but the 1999 championship by San Antonio after a 50-game regular season and the 2012 championship by Miami after a 66-game season — both shortened because of labor strife in the league — come with no formal asterisk attached. This NBA season will see the 22 remaining teams all play between 71 and 75 games before the playoffs, and the league's plan is for a full four-round, best-of-seven-throughout postseason.

No one is being gifted a title this season.

"I saw (Houston guard) Austin Rivers said today, you know that the idea of an asterisk next to this championship, I think he said it exactly right," Boston coach Brad Stevens said Wednesday. "This is going to be a super unique situation and whoever wins it is going to really earn it."

SEC considering shortened basketball season

Lexington Herald-Leader

LEXINGTON, Ky. — Going strictly by the calendar, there would be no 2020-21 college basketball season. Instead, there would be a 2021 college basketball season.

Former Kentucky coach Rick Pitino put that idea into the bulging suggestion box for the resumption of sports. He proposed via Twitter on Wednesday that the next college basketball season begin in January. A season contracted by the coronavirus pandemic would have teams playing only league games.

A delayed start would "buy

some more time for a vaccine and to get things under control," he tweeted. "Although I can't wait to be back on the sidelines, the health of my players and staff is what's really important."

Pitino, who will be in his first season as Iona coach in 2020-21 (or just 2021), did not break new ground.

Former Big East Commissioner Mike Tranghese, now a consultant to the Southeastern Conference, said he had discussed a January start — and many other ideas — with Dan Leibovitz, the SEC's associate commissioner for men's

basketball.

"I think everything's on the table," Tranghese said. "I think everything has to be on the table. You know, the problem is nobody knows where we're headed."

First things first, the next football season "consumed" officials in various conferences, Tranghese said.

As for basketball, the metaphorical ground continually shifting makes it impossible for the SEC to be confident in any plan.

"Danny Leibovitz and I have talked about a lot of things regarding basketball," Tranghese said. "The question, though, is

will things be better in January than they are in November? Who knows?"

Tranghese said he found it difficult to believe a 2020-21 (or just 2021) college basketball season would be played if schools do not reopen.

"The easy answer is a vaccine, obviously," Tranghese said. "What Rick says, I think everything is on the table."

"And — you know what? — not everybody may do the same thing. Some conferences may elect just to play conference schedules. Others may elect to play, who knows? There's nobody in charge who can say this is what we're doing."