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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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US envoy pushes on with Taliban deal

Associated Press

ISLAMABAD — Washington's envoy to Afghanistan stressed Saturday the economic benefits of the peace deal with the Taliban, forging ahead with an agreement that has run into new political obstacles both in the U.S. and regionally.

Zalmay Khalilzad was wrapping up a weeklong trip that included stops in Uzbekistan, Pakistan and the Gulf state of Qatar, where the Taliban negotiators are headquartered.

The U.S. signed a peace deal with the Taliban in February to end 19 years of war in Afghanistan.

Khalilzad has sought to stress the economic benefits of the peace deal throughout his tour. In a series of tweets early Saturday, the U.S. envoy

said he had met with the Qatar Investment Authority and the Taliban's chief negotiator Mullah Abdul Ghani, in the tiny Gulf state's capital of Doha.

"We agreed development plans in support of peace can never start too early," Khalilzad tweeted.

However, Washington has recently become embroiled in a controversy over intelligence reports that Russia was paying money to insurgents with links to the Taliban to kill American and NATO soldiers.

The identity of the insurgents who took the bounty money is still vague but the payments have been traced to an Afghan drug lord Rahmatullah Azizi, who is living in Moscow, according to Afghan officials who spoke with The Associated Press.

The New York Times first reported the U.S. intelligence claiming the payment of bounties as well as Azizi's involvement.

Added to the uncertainty and delays swirling around the U.S-Taliban peace deal, the Pentagon released a report on Wednesday that questioned the Taliban's commitment to end its ties with Al-Qaida.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid denied contacts with Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent, saying the insurgents were committed to the peace deal.

Khalilzad embarked on his tour of the region last weekend, even as the rate of coronavirus infections in the United States soared and countries worldwide struggled with the dangers of re-opening. He did not

travel to Afghanistan citing the dangers of the pandemic and instead held videoconference calls with both Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and his government partner, Abdullah Abdullah.

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi tested positive for COVID 19, just 48 after meeting with Khalilzad. Both had been pictured wearing masks during their meeting on Wednesday in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad.

Even as Khalilzad winds up his latest diplomatic mission, there was no date for crucial intra-Afghan negotiations that bring the Taliban together with the Afghan government and other local actors. Khalilzad called for a quick resolution of outstanding issues so those negotiations could begin.

Trump accuses protests of attacking 'legacies'

Associated Press

MOUNT RUSHMORE NATIONAL MEMORIAL, S.D. — At the foot of Mount Rushmore and on the eve of Independence Day, President Donald Trump dug deeper into America's divisions by accusing protesters who have pushed for racial justice of engaging in a "merciless campaign to wipe out our history."

The president, in remarks Friday night at the South Dakota landmark, offered a discordant tone to an electorate battered by a pandemic and seared by the recent high-profile killings of Black people. He zeroed in on the desecration by some demonstrators of monuments and statues across the country that honor those who have benefited from slavery, in-

cluding some past presidents.

Four months from Election Day, his comments amounted to a direct appeal to the political base, including many disaffected white votes, that carried him to the White House in 2016.

"This movement is openly attacking the legacies of every person on Mount Rushmore," Trump said. He lamented "cancel culture" and charged that some on the political left hope to "defame our heroes, erase our values and indoctrinate our children." He said Americans should speak proudly of their heritage and shouldn't have to apologize for its history.

"We will not be terrorized, we will not be demeaned, and we will not be intimidated by bad, evil people," Trump added. "It will not happen."

The speech and fireworks at Mount Rushmore came against the backdrop of a pandemic that has killed over 125,000 Americans. The president flew across the nation to gather a big crowd of supporters, most of them maskless and all of them flouting public health guidelines that recommend not gathering in large groups.

During the speech, the president announced he was signing an executive order to establish the National Garden of American Heroes, a vast outdoor park that will feature the statues of the "greatest Americans to ever live."

Republican Gov. Kristi Noem echoed Trump's attacks against his opponents who "are trying to wipe away the lessons of history."

"Make no mistake: This

is being done deliberately to discredit America's founding principles by discrediting the individuals who formed them," she said.

Some Native American groups used Trump's visit to protest the Mount Rushmore memorial itself, pointing out that the Black Hills were taken from the Lakota people.

More than 100 protesters, many Lakota, lined the road leading from the small town of Keystone to the monument holding signs and playing Lakota music in 95-degree heat. Some held their fists in the air as cars loaded with event attendees passed by. Others held signs that read "Protect SoDak's First People," "You Are On Stolen Land" and "Dis-mantle White Supremacy."

US, Russia share history in Afghanistan

Associated Press

ISLAMABAD — Moscow and Washington are intertwined in a complex and bloody history in Afghanistan, with both suffering thousands of dead and wounded in yearslong conflicts.

Now both superpowers are linked again over Afghanistan, with intelligence reports indicating Russia secretly offered bounties to the Taliban to kill American troops there.

But analysts suggest that despite these apparent differences, the two adversaries actually have much in common, especially when it comes to what a postwar Afghanistan should look like: Both want a stable country that does not serve as a base for extremists to export terrorism.

“The Russian endgame is an Afghanistan which will neither support jihadi movements in the former U.S.S.R. nor host American bases that might one day be used against Russia,” says Anatol Lieven, a Georgetown University professor in the Middle Eastern state of Qatar and a senior fellow at the New American Foundation.

Even the Pentagon said this week in a report to the U.S. Congress that Russia backed Washington’s deal with the Taliban as the best path forward, while at the same time the Kremlin has sought to cultivate interest with the group, limit the West’s military presence and encourage operations against Islamic State militants.

Lieven, who studied the Soviet Union’s invasion of the country in 1979 and its subsequent occupation, defeat and withdrawal a decade later, said Moscow would “prefer to see a mixed government in Afghanistan, with Taliban power limited.”

He says Moscow has not forgotten its experience in Afghanistan, where at least 15,000 Soviet troops were killed in fighting that began as an effort to prop up a communist ally and soon became a grinding campaign against the U.S.-backed mujahedeen insurgency.

But in today’s Afghanistan, the threat facing Russia is the Islamic State affiliate and its allies known as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, a terrorist organization that has taken aim at Russia’s Muslim regions and was born of brewing discontent in Muslim-dominated Central Asia.

Even as Russia and the U.S. vie for influence in Afghanistan, they are aligned in their opposition to ISIS. Lieven says Moscow regards the Taliban as the lesser evil and, like Washington, sees it as an ally in the fight against both ISIS and the IMU.

‘They would prefer an end state not that different from what the U.S. desires.’

Andrew Wilder
U.S. Institute of Peace

Remnants of the mujahedeen groups in Afghanistan are now warlords-turned-political leaders in the Kabul government and also are in the ranks of the Taliban. The chief Taliban negotiator in peace talks with the United States, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, fought in the 1980s on the side of the U.S.-backed mujahedeen, as did Mullah Mohammed Omar, the founder of the Taliban.

“A humiliating defeat of the U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan by the Taliban would provide some in Moscow with a feel-good sense of revenge for the U.S. support to mujahedeen groups in the 1980s that led to the humiliating defeat and withdrawal of Soviet forces,” says Andrew Wilder, vice president of the Asia Program at the U.S. Institute of Peace.

Wilder said Moscow’s vision of a postwar Afghanistan is much the same as Washington’s.

“They would prefer an end state not that different from what the U.S. desires — a political settlement that leads to the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces but leaves behind a relatively stable and ethnically inclusive government that can ensure Afghanistan doesn’t again become a safe haven for transnational terrorist groups,” he said.

He said Afghanistan’s neighbors, including the strategically sensitive nations of Central Asia bordering Russia, would be “the biggest losers” if a withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces led to a collapse of the country and a return to the anarchy of the 1990s.

As for the reports of bounties being paid to the insurgents, analysts also say that cash from abroad has flowed into Afghanistan for years. Loyalties are fluid in the country and money has been used to buy influence, curry favor or manipulate government officials since the collapse of the Taliban in 2001.

As far back as 2013, suitcases of cash given to the Afghan government by the CIA was being blamed for runaway corruption. Washington’s own watchdog, the Special Inspector general for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR) has alleged that

billions of dollars have been pocketed by government officials, warlords, drug lords and insurgents.

The money was pumped into Afghanistan by the U.S., Iran, Pakistan, Russia and India.

In Kabul’s Sherpur neighborhood, the multistory marble mansions owned by warlords, drug lords and Kabul’s political elite were built by corruption, according to Afghans who stage anti-graft protests. Last month, a group of lawyers and economists asked the International Monetary Fund not to lend money to Afghanistan because it would be pocketed by officials.

Insurgents also benefit from the exploding drug trade and have taken payments from countries seeking to buy influence, analysts say.

“U.S. military officials have often suggested that Russia is funneling arms to the Taliban, but the evidence hasn’t been nearly as strong as it is for Pakistani and, more recently, Iranian support for the Taliban,” said Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Asia Program at the Wilson Center. “While Moscow has sought to scale up its engagement with the Taliban in recent years, much of this has been meant to promote support for peace and reconciliation. And this is part of a broader Russian objective to increase its influence in Afghanistan,” he said.

But for Brian G. Williams, author of “Counter Jihad. The America Military Experience in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria,” and a former employee of the CIA’s Counter Terrorism Center, Russia’s endgame in Afghanistan is to hand Washington a humiliating defeat.

“The generals in the FSB (Federal Security Service) and GRU (Main Intelligence Directorate) would again be toasting should American Chinooks be forced to chaotically evacuate U.S. personnel from the U.S. Embassy in Kabul,” he said,

Williams said President Vladimir Putin “has always seen America as its primary competitor for power in post-Soviet Eurasia.”

1st Black man to lead USAF Academy

Associated Press

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — An African American man was nominated for the first time to lead the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, officials said.

The Air Force announced Thursday that President Donald Trump nominated Lt. Gen. Richard Clark to be the school's next superintendent, *The Gazette* reported. Clark is currently the deputy chief of staff for strategic deterrence and nuclear inte-

gration at the Pentagon.

Clark is expected to take command in August if the Senate confirms the nomination, becoming the second Black general to head up a service academy, officials said. He would replace Lt. Gen. Jay Silveria.

"I am extremely humbled and honored by the nomination to serve as the Superintendent of the Air Force Academy," Clark said.

Clark graduated from the Academy in 1986. He previously served as the school's

commandant of cadets, was a junior varsity football coach and candidate counselor.

"I have no doubt that Lt. Gen. Clark will be an extraordinary leader for the Academy," Silveria said. "He has a long history with USAFA and an exceptional leadership record."

Lt. Gen. Darryl A. Williams became the first African American superintendent of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, in 2018.

2 hit by car on highway closed during protests

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Two women were struck by a car whose driver sped through a protest-related closure on a freeway, authorities said early Saturday.

One suffered life-threatening injuries and the other had serious injuries, a Washington State Patrol spokesperson tweeted. The Seattle Fire Department tweeted that the injured women appeared to be in their 20s.

"A vehicle drove through the closure and struck multiple pedestrians on the freeway," the State Patrol's District 2 public information account for King County tweeted shortly after 2 a.m. Just before midnight, he had tweeted that portions of Interstate 5 were closed because of protests.

The vehicle was stopped and the driver was in custody, the State Patrol account tweeted. Charges remain under investigation, as does the motive and point of entry onto the interstate.

Video on social media showed a white car traveling at a high rate of speed navigate around two vehicles positioned across the lanes as a barrier. The car careened toward a small crowd of protesters on the freeway, striking two people who flew into the air before landing on the ground.

A nearly two-hour-long Facebook livestream captioned

"Black Femme March takes I-5" from Diaz Love ended abruptly; with about 15 seconds left, shouts of "Car!" can be heard as the camera starts to shake before screeching tires and the sound of impact are heard. The Associated Press could not immediately reach her.

Seattle has been the site of prolonged unrest following the May 25 police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, which sparked nationwide protests.

Dozens of people were arrested this past week in connection with protests as demonstrations continue after authorities cleared the "Capitol Hill Occupied Protest" zone Wednesday morning.

Washington State Patrol Capt. Ron Mead said at the press conference that protesters had shut down the interstate for 19 days in a row.

He emphasized that the freeway is "simply not a safe place for pedestrians," and said he hoped protesters would reconsider what he termed illegal activity "as a result of this tragedy."

The state patrol tweeted out two pictures of the driver's car, a white Jaguar with significant damage to its bumper and windshield.

Seattle police tweeted that they were assisting the State Patrol with the scene, as southbound lanes of the freeway remained closed for investigation.

North Korea says it has no plans for talks with US

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea on Saturday reiterated it has no immediate plans to resume nuclear negotiations with the United States unless Washington discards what it describes as "hostile" policies toward Pyongyang.

The statement by North Korean First Vice Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui came after President Donald Trump's former national security adviser, John Bolton, told reporters in New York Thursday that Trump might seek another summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un as an "October surprise" ahead of the U.S. presidential election.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who had lobbied hard to help set up the now-stalled negotiations between Washington and Pyongyang, also expressed hope that Trump and Kim would meet again before the election in a video conference with European leaders on Tuesday.

Kim and Trump have met three times since embarking on their high-stakes nuclear diplomacy in 2018, but negotiations have faltered since their second summit in February last year in Vietnam, where the Americans rejected North Korean demands for major sanctions relief in exchange for a partial surrender of its nuclear capability.

Kim entered 2020 vowing to bolster his nuclear deterrent in face of "gangster-like" U.S. sanctions and pressure. Choe's statement followed a series of similar declarations by the North that it would no longer gift Trump with high-profile meetings he could boast of as his foreign policy achievements unless it gets something substantial in return.

"Is it possible to hold dialogue or have any dealings with the U.S. which persists in the hostile policy toward the DPRK in disregard of the agreements already made at the past summit?" Choe said, referring to North Korea by its formal name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

"We do not feel any need to sit face-to-face with the U.S., as it does not consider the DPRK-U.S. dialogue as nothing more than a tool for grappling its political crisis," she said.

Some analysts believe North Korea would avoid serious negotiations with the United States at least until the November presidential election as there's a chance U.S. leadership could change.

Choe said the North has already established a "detailed strategic timetable" for managing what she described as U.S. threats.

"The U.S. is mistaken if it thinks things like negotiations would still work on us," she said.

Governors put onus for virus safety on public

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — As Tennessee registered what then was its highest single-day coronavirus case increase, Gov. Bill Lee held a news conference and issued a stern response.

It wasn't a mandate to wear masks in public or clamp down on businesses or social gatherings. Instead, it was a plea for residents to do the right thing.

"When we have people dying in this state as a result of this virus, we should be taking personal responsibility for this," the Republican governor said.

It was the same message Lee issued in late March as the COVID-19 disease was beginning to spread. He has vowed to stick to the personal responsibility mantra, with no plans to reinstate stay-at-home restrictions or impose statewide mandates — even as photos of unmasked people crowding bars and outdoor concerts across Tennessee spread across social media.

Instead, Lee signed an executive order Friday that allows local officials to issue their own mask mandates if they want —

as Nashville and Memphis had already done.

Elevating a message of personal responsibility over statewide crackdowns on businesses and requirements for people in public spaces has been a consistent approach among certain governors during the coronavirus crisis. That's especially true in Republican-leaning states that had relatively few cases in the initial months of the outbreak but have begun to spike in recent weeks.

Governors in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Montana, South Carolina, South Dakota and Utah also have invoked some form of the "personal responsibility" message over issuing strict statewide mandates.

"You shouldn't have to order somebody to do what is just in your own best interest and that of your family, friends and neighbors," Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey, a Republican, said earlier this week as she urged people to wear masks and take other precautions but downplayed the effectiveness of statewide orders.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, a

Republican, has frequently invoked personal responsibility but took more decisive action this week in ordering Texans to wear masks in public in most cases. That came after another Republican governor, Doug Ducey of Arizona, changed direction and allowed mayors to make mask-wearing mandatory in their cities.

Those actions contrast with governors such as Republican Henry McMaster of South Carolina, who has refused a statewide mask order even as confirmed cases rise swiftly and the state's rate of positive tests is three times the recommended level.

McMaster's focus on rebooting the economy placed South Carolina among the first states to reopen. He has since said he won't close down the state again while emphasizing the need for the state's residents to follow hygiene and social distancing recommendations.

"We cannot keep businesses closed forever," McMaster said in defending his decision. "What it boils down to is, we must be careful individually."

West Virginia Gov. Jim Justice, a Republican, has appealed to residents' sense of duty to help prevent the disease from getting worse, but recently warned that he might impose a mask mandate as cases in the state continue to rise.

In South Dakota, Republican Gov. Kristi Noem has largely avoided ordering restrictions during the pandemic and refused to order social distancing or mask-wearing for President Donald Trump's visit to Mount Rushmore on Friday, an event that drew thousands. She has consistently invoked personal responsibility as a key strategy in combating the virus.

"Every one of them has the opportunity to make a decision that they're comfortable with," Noem told Fox News.

The personal responsibility ethos has been GOP orthodoxy for decades, often used to justify smaller government and promote individualism. In the current climate, personal responsibility is being used to encourage wearing masks, social distancing and avoiding large crowds.

UK reopens pubs as rest of the world still struggles

Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG — Pubs across England were reopening Saturday in an effort at normal life, while South Africa signaled anything but — reporting another record daily high in confirmed coronavirus cases as the health system showed strain.

"Let's not blow it now," British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said as some in England rushed to restaurants or barbers for the first time in more than three months.

The U.S. plunged into Fourth of July weekend with many parades and fireworks displays canceled, and health authorities warned it will be a crucial test of Americans' self-control. Confirmed cases are climbing in 40 states, and the U.S. set another record Friday with 52,300 newly reported infections, according to the tally kept by Johns Hopkins University.

More than 11 million people around the world are known to have been infected since the pandemic began, 2.7 million of those in the U.S., according to the Johns Hopkins data. With shortages of testing materials,

the real number of cases is unknown.

In South Africa, a growing hot spot as the pandemic picks up speed in parts of Africa, confirmed cases have climbed to more than 177,000, with a record 9,063 reported in the most recent 24-hour period.

Around 30% of cases are in Gauteng province, home of Johannesburg and the capital, Pretoria, as the country loosens lockdown measures under economic pressure.

Russia marked a milestone as the death toll rose above 10,000. The national coronavirus task force also reported 6,632 new infections, raising the total for the outbreak to 674,515.

Russia's caseload is the world's third-largest behind the United States and Brazil, but its reported deaths are lower than many other countries. Officials have denied speculation that the figures are being manipulated.

Elsewhere, authorities targeted communities for special measures as virus clusters emerged.

Australia's Victoria state locked down

nine public housing towers and three more Melbourne suburbs after 108 new cases. Premier Daniel Andrews said 3,000 people in the towers will go into "hard lockdown," meaning "there will be no one allowed in ... and no one allowed out."

Authorities in northeast Spain ordered the lockdown of El Segria county around the city of Lleida, home to over 200,000 people after health officials recorded a jump in 60 cases in 24 hours. The outbreaks are linked to agricultural workers in the rural area.

France said it is sending medics to its South American territory of French Guiana to help treat growing numbers of patients in a region where half the population lives below the French poverty level. Infections surged as the virus swept neighboring Brazil.

In Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel said that "the way our country reacted to the pandemic has largely proved to be right." The country has over 190,000 confirmed cases and has started testing asymptomatic people in care homes.

Curfews, closures as virus burdens Fla.

Associated Press

MIAMI — As coronavirus infections surge across Florida and hospital authorities nervously count their available intensive care beds, the state's most populous county is closing down again, imposing a curfew and closing beaches over the Fourth of July weekend to contain the spread.

Miami-Dade County Mayor Carlos Gimenez said the 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew begins Friday night and will be in place indefinitely. A new county order also closes casinos, strip clubs, movie theaters, the zoo and other entertainment venues a month after they were allowed to reopen.

"This curfew is meant to stop people from venturing out and hanging out with friends in groups, which has shown to be spreading the virus rapidly," Gimenez said in a statement.

Florida reported 341 new hospital admissions of COVID-19 patients on Friday, the biggest daily jump since the pandemic began. The state health department also reported 9,488 new confirmed cases and 67 deaths, a day after setting a new daily record with more than 10,000 cases.

The mayor's order also tightens mask rules at restaurants, requiring customers to wear facial coverings at all times unless eating or drinking. Under the previous order, customers were allowed to remove masks when they sat down.

California

LOS ANGELES — California counties that fail to enforce health orders could lose state funding, the governor warned as cases of the coronavirus jumped, prompting renewed closures of businesses and beaches heading into the Fourth of July weekend.

With hospitalizations and infection rates rising, Gov. Gavin Newsom has ordered the three-week closures of bars, indoor restaurant dining areas and other indoor venues for 21 of 58 counties, including the two

most populous, Los Angeles and San Diego.

Public health officials have pleaded with people to obey social distancing and mask-wearing requirements — and to stay home this holiday because big crowds could further fuel the outbreak.

But law enforcement and other officials in some areas have publicly said they can't or won't issue citations or conduct sweeping crackdowns against those who ignore the statewide directives.

While Newsom has acknowledged the difficulty of enforcement for 40 million people, on Friday he warned that local governments could "jeopardize their eligibility for state funding" if they fail to abide by and enforce them.

Georgia

ATLANTA — A dog in Georgia is believed to have been the second canine in the U.S. to test positive for the virus that causes COVID-19, health officials said. The 6-year-old mixed breed dog was tested after its owners contracted COVID-19 and the dog began suffering from a neurological illness, the Georgia Department of Health said in a news release Wednesday.

The dog was positive for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

The dog was euthanized after the neurological illness progressed. Officials said the dog's neurological illness was caused by a condition unrelated to the coronavirus.

Guidelines from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say that based on the limited information available so far, the risk of pets spreading coronavirus to people "is considered to be low."

Iowa

DES MOINES — The number of confirmed positive coronavirus cases identified in Iowa increased by 389 on Friday, bringing the state's total known positive cases to nearly 30,500,

state health officials said.

Three more COVID-19 deaths also were reported Friday, bringing the state's total to 720 since the outbreak began.

Iowa Department of Public Health data indicates positive case numbers had been in decline since early May but began a slow climb again around mid-June. That is about two weeks after Gov. Kim Reynolds reopened bars and restaurants and relaxed other restrictions on large gatherings and social activities.

The latest numbers come as state health officials confirmed a second outbreak of the virus at a long-term care facility in Story County, the Ames Tribune reported.

Accura Healthcare of Ames has had three residents and three employees test positive for the virus, said Lisa Toti, the facility's vice president of strategic and organizational engagement. That follows 12 staff members and nine residents who tested positive for the virus at Bethany Life nursing facility in Story City. Two of those residents died.

New Hampshire

CONCORD — The federal government is no longer sending nursing homes disposable isolation gowns described in New Hampshire as useless garbage bags and instead is providing a different style, according to a spokesperson for the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The New Hampshire Health Care Association, which represents nursing homes, said this week that the bulk of the items sent by FEMA to protect workers against the coronavirus were unusable, including child-sized gloves, surgical masks with ear loops that broke when stretched and isolation gowns with no arm openings.

A FEMA spokesperson said Thursday that the agency coordinated two shipments to nearly 15,400 nursing homes nationwide.

Gov. Chris Sununu said the state is replacing any of the

defective items with items from its stockpile and is asking FEMA to do the same. He said he would prefer that FEMA send such items to the state for distribution rather than to individual facilities.

Pennsylvania

HARRISBURG — The rising number of COVID-19 infections in the Pittsburgh area helped drive Pennsylvania's number of confirmed new cases to 667, the state Health Department said Friday.

Pennsylvania's death toll from the coronavirus pandemic rose by 34 to more than 6,700 since the infection began to spread in the state earlier this year. There have been nearly 89,000 people diagnosed with the disease in the state so far.

In response to a spike in cases there, the county's Health Department closed bars and restaurants for a week, starting Friday, although they can still provide take-out and delivery.

Allegheny County also ordered the casino there to close and banned gatherings of more than 25 people for the next week, while encouraging residents to stay at home to help stem the spread.

Wisconsin

MADISON — Wisconsin health officials have confirmed nearly 600 more cases of COVID-19 in the state.

The state Department of Health Services said Friday that the state has now seen 30,317 confirmed cases since the pandemic began in March. That's up 579 cases from Thursday.

The department reports three more people have died since Thursday, bringing the total dead to 796.

Nearly 40 additional people were hospitalized since Thursday, bringing the total hospitalizations to 3,555, or about 12% of the total cases.

Nearly 80% of people infected have recovered, however, leaving the state with 5,473 active cases as of Friday.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man fatally beat father he thought was vampire

PA HEMPFIELD — A man who said he fatally beat his 92-year-old father in their home because he believed his father was a vampire has been sentenced to 10 to 30 years in prison.

Douglas Novak pleaded guilty but mentally ill to murder, arson, reckless endangerment and risking a catastrophe charges. Authorities said he fatally beat Frank Novak with the wooden arm of a dining room chair.

The Novaks were found when police responded to a fire at their Hempfield home. Authorities said the fire started when candles used as part of a vampire ritual burned to the floor.

5 stabbed in dispute over illegal fireworks

NY NEW YORK — Five men were stabbed after a dispute over illegal fireworks in the Bronx turned violent, police said.

Police said a man was setting off fireworks in a public park in the South Bronx shortly before 1:30 a.m. when he was confronted by someone who objected to the fireworks, sparking a fight.

The man who had been setting off fireworks stabbed or slashed four men, and one of the men grabbed the knife and stabbed him, police said.

All five men were hospitalized with wounds that police said were not life-threatening.

Man jailed for taking dead mom's payments

FL ORLANDO — A Florida man was sentenced to two years in federal prison for collecting his mother's Social Security payments after

her death.

A federal judge in Orlando sentenced Bobby Morlen, 54, according to court documents. The Deltona man pleaded guilty to theft of government funds.

Morlen's mother was receiving Social Security Retirement Insurance Benefits when she died in 2014, according to court records. Her death was never reported to the Social Security Administration, and the benefit payments continued. Prosecutors said Morlen continued to access the funds, totaling \$131,457.

City to make famed stairs public attraction

HI HONOLULU — Ownership of a stairway that snakes along a mountainside in Hawaii has been transferred to the city of Honolulu in hopes of transforming the currently off-limits hike into a public attraction.

The Board of Water Supply transferred the staircase known as the Stairway to Heaven or Haiku Stairs to the city, the Honolulu Star-Advertiser reported. They also transferred 200 acres of land that surrounds the structure.

The staircase was built in the 1950s when the Navy replaced a World War II ladder that was used to access mountaintop radio equipment.

Car crashes into house, misses woman inside

NH MANCHESTER — A vehicle crashed into a house and stopped inches away from a woman who was watching television in her living room, police in New Hampshire said.

The driver, identified as a 29-year-old woman, and the resident suffered minor injuries

and were taken to a hospital, Manchester police said.

The vehicle swerved off the road and struck a utility pole, snapping it in half. It then continued across the lawn of the house before crashing through the side, police said.

Coast Guard rescues 5, dog from sinking boat

MI BAY CITY — Five people and a dog were rescued from a sinking boat in Michigan's Saginaw Bay.

The 50-foot vessel was half-way submerged and one person wearing a life jacket was in the water when a Coast Guard rescue boat arrived, the Coast Guard said in a news release.

A line was tossed to the person who was pulled aboard the Coast Guard Station Saginaw River rescue boat.

The other four people and the dog were helped aboard the rescue boat from the sinking vessel. They were taken to Bay Harbor Marina in Bay City.

Cop accused of giving information to prostitute

MD LANDOVER — A police officer in Maryland was accused of giving confidential information about a case to a prostitute he was paying to engage in sexual acts with him, officials said.

Prince George's County Cpl. Ivan Mendez was indicted by a grand jury on a misconduct charge, the Prince George's County Police Department said in a news release. Police said the information Mendez provided to the prostitute related to an on-going police investigation.

The indictment comes more than a year after another officer was made aware of the allegations against Mendez and notified the department's Internal Affairs Division to look into the

accusations, Prince George's Interim Police Chief Hector Velez said in the release.

Mendez was subsequently suspended and the investigation was turned over to the State's Attorney's Office, Velez added.

2 people changing tire killed in freeway crash

CA SAN BERNARDINO — Two people changing a flat tire were killed while on the shoulder of a Southern California freeway when a box truck drifted out of its lane and struck them, authorities said.

The man and woman in their 50s were outside of two parked cars along Interstate 215 in San Bernardino when the collision occurred, according to the California Highway Patrol.

One of the two had arrived in another vehicle to help change the flat, left rear tire of a 1997 Toyota Camry, the Riverside Press-Enterprise reported.

The box truck, a 2013 Ford, went out of its lane and onto the shoulder, striking the rear of the Camry and the couple, the highway patrol said.

Vandals damage dozens of gravestone markers

IA WATERLOO — Police in Waterloo are investigating after dozens of gravestones were damaged in a late-night vandalism spree.

Up to 50 gravestones were toppled or moved at Elmwood Cemetery, cemetery manager Joe Fox told the Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier.

"They toppled some huge markers. It would take two or three adults to cause some of this. To do that many, and that many large ones, they had to have really intentionally wanted to come out and do some damage," Fox said.

From wire reports

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Baseball begins preparing for season

Associated Press

His N-95 mask squarely in place, Mike Trout stroked line drives, streaked around the bases and caught flyballs at Angel Stadium. The sport's biggest star then let something drop — he's not "comfortable" in this COVID-19 environment and isn't sure he'll play this season.

At Citi Field, Mets two-time Cy Young Award winner Jacob deGrom ran sprints by himself in shallow right field, then grabbed his personal bag of baseballs to throw off a bullpen mound. At Camden Yards, Baltimore manager Brandon Hyde watched practice from the stands behind the dugout.

"It's weird," Reds star Joey Votto said.

At Nationals Park, Max Scherzer limbered up with 65 pitches as the World Series champion Washington Nationals got back to work at 7:45 a.m. High in the press box, it was possible to hear players talking on the field about the virus.

No doubt, those sentiments echoed all around the majors.

Baseball tried to take another step forward Friday in a most uncertain setting, with play-

ers on the field at their empty home ballparks for the first team workouts since exhibition games ended March 12.

A few players were missing: San Diego outfielder Tommy Pham, Cleveland outfielder Delino DeShields Jr. and Texas reliever Brett Martin are among those who have tested positive for the virus.

"I'm sure they have fears and are dealing with the change, the protocol, the testing. All of that is different," Marlins manager Don Mattingly said. "But when we got out on the field and started working, it felt a lot like the beginning of spring training."

It was a very strange scene in Miami.

While the team worked out on the new artificial turf, there was a long line of cars outside Marlins Park because it's a testing site for the coronavirus, and cases have been surging in South Florida.

Major League Baseball announced 31 players and seven staff members tested positive for COVID-19 during intake for the resumption of training, a rate of 1.2%. The positive tests occurred among 19 of the 30 teams.

Opening day for the delayed, shortened 60-game season is July 23. Major League Baseball said the All-Star Game, scheduled for July 14 at Dodger Stadium, has been canceled.

At Comerica Park in Detroit, the effects of virus precautions were evident.

"There's Xs in the dugout where we can and can't stand. You have to come down to the field one way and back off the field another way," Tigers pitcher Michael Fulmer said. "It's going to definitely take some getting used to, but as long as we're playing baseball, I can follow about anything."

Trout, the three-time AL MVP, wants to wait a bit.

The Los Angeles Angels outfielder and his wife, Jessica, are expecting the couple's first child in August.

"Honestly, I still don't feel that comfortable," the 28-year-old star said.

"If I test positive, I talked to doctors and they said I couldn't see the baby for 14 days or Jess can't see the baby for 14 days if she's positive, we're going to be upset," he said.

Mets catcher Wilson Ramos could sympathize.

"It's hard right now to be

here," Ramos said, thinking of his wife and children in Florida. "But at the same time, I'm very happy to be here doing what we love to do."

The Mets worked out in three separate shifts during the day. Music played softly over the stadium sound system as hitters took their cuts. Mini cones spaced well apart marked sections of grass for separated stretching and calisthenics.

Air horns blew at different intervals, a sound more familiar at a football practice. A makeshift infield was pieced together in the outfield for defensive drills.

"Everything that we can do in order to keep the guys distanced from each other," rookie manager Luis Rojas said.

Phillies star Bryce Harper had his own crowd. His pregnant wife and their 10-month-old son accompanied him to Philadelphia.

"The last three days, understanding what we're going to do on the field, understanding that we do have to wear masks wherever we go, those are things you have to get used to and respect the people around you ... I feel safe right now," Harper said.

All-Star Game canceled for first time since 1945

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Dodger Stadium's 40-year wait to host the All-Star Game is going to last even longer.

The game scheduled for July 14 was canceled Friday because of the coronavirus pandemic, and Dodger Stadium was awarded the 2022 Midsummer Classic. The 2021 game is set for Atlanta's Truist Park, home to the Braves since 2017.

Because of the pandemic, opening day had already been delayed from March 26 to July 23 or 24.

"Once it became clear we were unable to hold this year's All-Star festivities, we wanted to award the Dodgers with the

next available All-Star Game, which is 2022," baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred said in a statement.

No date for the 2022 game has been announced, although Dodgers President Stan Kasten said it would take place in the third week of July.

This year will be the first time since 1945 that no game is held. Travel restrictions because of World War II kept the game scheduled for Boston's Fenway Park and any player selections from taking place that year. It was pushed back to the next season.

The Dodgers hosted the only Midsummer Classic in Dodger Stadium history in 1980, won 4-2 by the National League.

The stadium — third-oldest in baseball behind Fenway and Chicago's Wrigley Field — is the only park in the majors not to have increased its 56,000-seat capacity since it opened in 1962.

That's not to say it hasn't changed, however.

Since 2013, the stadium that overlooks downtown Los Angeles has undergone a series of structural and behind-the-scenes improvements, including two entrance plazas on the field level, tiered seating and bar areas overlooking both bullpens. The ballpark has also gotten new HD video screens and sound systems, wider concourses and renovated restrooms, kids play areas, displays

to honor the franchise's storied history, new home and visiting clubhouses and batting cages.

And that doesn't include the \$100 million in renovations that helped the Dodgers land the 2020 game. Those feature two acres of food and entertainment offerings in a new center-field plaza and spruced-up outfield pavilions.

Also added were elevators, escalators and bridges to improve circulation around the ballpark without changing its picturesque look and feel. The speaker tower sound system in center field is being replaced. New so-called "home run seats" are being added in front of existing outfield seats.

Johnson first NASCAR driver to test positive

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Seven-time NASCAR champion Jimmie Johnson has tested positive for the coronavirus and will miss this weekend's race at Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

The 44-year-old Johnson is the first driver in any NASCAR series to test positive and the news Friday evening cast a shadow over the historic NASCAR-IndyCar doubleheader races coming up Saturday and Sunday. There was no indication any races would be affected.

Hendrick Motorsports said Johnson will not return until he is cleared by a physician. He was tested earlier Friday after his wife, Chani, tested positive after experiencing allergy-like symptoms.

Johnson is asymptomatic.

"My first priority is the health and safety of my loved ones and my teammates," Johnson said. "I've never missed a race in my Cup career, but I know it's going to be very hard to watch from the sidelines when I'm supposed to be out there competing. Although this situation

is extremely disappointing, I'm going to come back ready to win races and put ourselves in playoff contention."

Johnson earlier Friday held a Zoom session with reporters to discuss Sunday's race and an upcoming test of an Indy car on the road course at the fabled venue. He will now miss that test, as well as what was supposed to be his final Brickyard 400. Justin Allgaier will replace him in the No. 48 Chevrolet.

"Jimmie has handled this situation like the champion he is," said Rick Hendrick, owner of Hendrick Motorsports. "We're relieved he isn't showing symptoms and that Chani is doing great, and we know he'll be back and ready to go very soon. It's going to be difficult for him to be out of the car and away from his team, but it's the right thing to do for Jimmie and everyone involved."

Hendrick Motorsports said it has implemented detailed procedures to protect the health of its team members. They include daily COVID-19 screenings at the team facilities; the separation of facility operations and traveling personnel; split work

schedules; stringent face covering and social distancing requirements; and an increased level of disinfecting and sanitization of all work areas.

Johnson is scheduled to retire from full-time NASCAR competition at the end of the season and was trying to tie Jeff Gordon and Michael Schumacher as the only five-time winners at Indianapolis.

Johnson has made 663 consecutive Cup Series starts — the longest streak among active drivers — and is currently 12th in the standings, 63 points inside the playoff picture. NASCAR's rules state a driver must be symptom free and have two negative coronavirus tests in a 24-hour span to return.

NASCAR said it has granted Johnson a playoff waiver.

"Jimmie is a true battle-tested champion, and we wish him well in his recovery," the series said.

Johnson could potentially also miss the Cup race at Kentucky and the All-Star race at Bristol. Next week's test of the road course at Indy in Scott Dixon's car has also been scrapped.

NASCAR was one of the first sports to resume competition from the pandemic shutdown and has completed 11 Cup races since its May 17 return. The sanctioning body does not test for coronavirus but participants are required to do a temperature check as they enter the facility.

Drivers have been told to isolate at the track and there is very little interaction beyond radio conversation between the competitor and his crew.

Although Stewart-Haas Racing and Team Penske both said they've had positive tests from shop-based team members, Johnson is the first driver. Earlier Friday, Brazilian sports car driver Felipe Nasr said he had tested positive and will miss Saturday's IMSA event at Daytona International Speedway.

Johnson earlier Friday discussed the Indy car test scheduled with Chip Ganassi Racing, which he said was the first step in determining if actual races are in his future. If he's any good, he said, he would be open to racing all 12 street and road course events on the IndyCar schedule.

Briefly

Braves star Freeman, 3 others test positive for virus

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Atlanta Braves four-time All-Star Freddie Freeman, reliever Will Smith and two teammates have tested positive for the coronavirus.

Manager Brian Snitker said Saturday the four players, including right-hander Touki Toussaint and infielder Pete Kozma, agreed to have the team disclose their positive tests.

Snitker said Freeman had a negative intake test before having a positive test Friday. Snitker said the first baseman has a fever and "is not feeling great."

Major League Baseball has scheduled the 60-game season

to start on July 23. Freeman is the biggest star in the sport so far to have his positive virus test publicly announced.

In other MLB news:

■ Amid new pressure sparked by a national movement to correct racial wrongdoings, the Cleveland Indians said Friday night they will review their long-debated nickname which has been in place for 105 years.

"We are committed to making a positive impact in our community and embrace our responsibility to advance social justice and equality," the team said in a statement that came just hours after the NFL's Washington Redskins announced a similar move.

Top recruit snubs big schools for Howard

WASHINGTON — Five-star prospect Makur Maker verbally committed to Howard University on Friday, picking the Bison over college basketball powerhouses UCLA, Kentucky and Memphis.

The highly touted recruit is the highest-ranked player to commit to a Historically Black College or University since ESPN began tracking rankings in 2007. Maker is a 6-foot-11, 235-pound center who declared for the NBA draft in April before opting to consider college basketball.

McCallie won't return to coach Duke women

Joanne P. McCallie won't return for a 14th season as Duke's women's basketball coach.

McCallie announced her departure in a 6-minute video posted Thursday on the program's Twitter. She said she was "choosing to step away" as coach as she entered the final year of her contract.

McCallie led the Blue Devils to a 330-107 record in her 13 seasons and was a three-time ACC coach of the year. Duke won at least a share of the ACC regular-season title four times as well as three ACC Tournament titles.