

STARS AND STRIPES®

Wednesday, July 8, 2020

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Navy cancels fall physical fitness tests

BY THERON GODBOLD

Stars and Stripes

Sailors are spared their fall round of physical fitness tests, and professional education for senior enlisted sailors is being revamped because of the coronavirus, the Navy announced Tuesday.

The fitness tests have been suspended, along with body composition measures — what sailors call “getting taped” — according to a Navy administrative message. Fitness leaders are directed to make no official updates for fall to sailors’ information in the management system.

“The COVID-19 situation requires that we continue to minimize risk to personnel,” the message says, using the name for the respiratory disease caused by the coronavirus.

However, the suspended fitness requirements do not apply to new recruits in boot camp and sailors who need a passing score on a retest for retention or promotion. The

latter may take an unofficial, or “mock,” test administered under tight guidelines.

Sailors perform the mock fitness test, despite the name, but the results are not entered into the management system and apply only to reenlistment or retention, according to the message.

Other requirements apply to the unofficial test: subjects must be medically screened; no more than 10 people, including the administrators, may be present; and sailors must adhere to social distancing, face mask and other local requirements pertaining to the coronavirus.

Although the fall fitness test is suspended, “sailors are reminded to make good choices for a healthy diet and are to continue a level of fitness to maintain Navy physical fitness standards,” according to the message, which was signed by Vice Adm. John Nowell, chief of naval personnel.

In a separate message also released Tuesday, the Navy announced it is increasing class sizes and streamlining distance-

learning courses at its Senior Enlisted Academy, a 10-week leadership development program at Naval Station Newport, R.I.

Starting in October, each of the regularly scheduled nine classes will increase in size from 144 sailors to 198.

Distance learning will be delivered in a three-week block, mirroring the amount of time students will be in their residences, the message said.

Also, the Navy will not require academy students to complete two courses — primary professional military education and senior enlisted joint professional military education — prior to enrolling or completing the academy, according to the message.

Established in 1981, the academy is the Navy’s only professional military education institute for its senior enlisted force and provides senior enlisted leaders with education and training, according to the academy website.

US general sees smaller, enduring Iraq troop presence

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Six months after a deadly American airstrike in Baghdad enraged Iraqis and fueled demands to send all U.S. troops home, the top U.S. general for the Middle East is talking optimistically about keeping a smaller, but enduring military presence there.

Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie, the commander of U.S. Central Command, met Tuesday with Iraq’s new prime minister, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, and said afterward that he believes the Iraqis welcome the U.S. and coalition troops, especially in the ongoing fight to keep Islamic State militants from taking hold of the country again.

“I believe that going forward, they’re going to want us to be with them,” McKenzie told a small group of reporters, speaking by phone hours after he left Iraq. “I don’t sense there’s a mood right now for us to depart precipitously. And I’m pretty confident of that.”

Tensions spiked between the U.S. and Iraq in January after a U.S. drone strike near the Baghdad airport killed Iranian

Gen. Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi militia leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis. Angry Iraqi lawmakers, spurred on by Shiite political factions, passed a nonbinding resolution to oust all U.S.-led coalition forces from the country.

In response to the Soleimani killing, Iran on Jan. 8 launched a massive ballistic missile attack on al Asad Air Base in Iraq, which resulted in traumatic brain injuries to more than 100 American troops. Two months later, U.S. fighter jets struck five sites in retaliation, targeting Iranian-backed Shiite militia members believed responsible for the January rocket attack.

President Donald Trump has vowed to bring troops home and halt what he calls America’s endless wars. But he has also warned Iran to expect a bold U.S. response if Iranian-backed militias attack Americans in Iraq.

The U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003, but troops left in 2011. American forces returned in 2014, after Islamic State began taking over large swaths of the country,

McKenzie last visited Iraq in early February, slipping into the country for a few

hours to meet with leaders as anti-American sentiment was soaring and violent protests and rocket attacks were pummeling the American Embassy.

Relations, however, have improved since al-Kadhimi took over in May. And while some groups, such as parliament’s Iran-backed Fatah bloc, continue to call for the withdrawal of U.S. forces, there is an emerging dialog between the U.S. and Iraq on the future relationship between the two nations.

McKenzie said the U.S. recognizes that al-Kadhimi is in a difficult position as he tries to deal with all factions within the government and maintain relations with both the U.S. and Iran.

The U.S. has criticized Iraq’s government for being unable to rein in the Iran-backed militia groups it believes are orchestrating the attacks. And al-Kadhimi has pledged to protect American troops and installations from attacks.

The Washington Post reported, however, that McKenzie said Tuesday that al-Kadhimi has taken significant steps to confront the militias.

McKenzie skeptical bounties led to deaths

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The top U.S. general for the Middle East said Tuesday that the intelligence suggesting that Russia may have paid Taliban militants to kill American troops in Afghanistan was worrisome, but he is not convinced that any bounties resulted in U.S. military deaths.

Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie, the head of U.S. Central Command, said in a telephone interview with a small group of reporters that the U.S. did not increase force protection measures in Afghanistan as a result of the information, although he asked his intelligence staff to dig into the matter more.

"I found it very worrisome. I didn't find that there was a causative link there," said McKenzie, who is the first Pentagon official to speak publicly

at length about the issue. He warned, however, that Russia has long been a threat in Afghanistan, where there have been many reports that it has backed Taliban fighters over the years with resources and weapons.

According to U.S. intelligence officials, information that Russia offered bounties to Taliban militants for killing American troops was included in an intelligence brief for President Donald Trump in late February. The White House, however, has denied Trump was briefed at that time, arguing that the intelligence was not credible enough to bring to his attention.

McKenzie said that while he could draw no direct link between any potential payments and U.S. casualties, it's common that intelligence is not definitive.

"We should always remember, the Russians are not our friends," said McKenzie, who is traveling in the Middle East. "They are not our friends in Afghanistan. And they do not wish us well, and we just need to remember that at all times when we evaluate that intelligence."

He said there was no need to beef up security for troops because the U.S. already takes "extreme force protection measures" in Afghanistan. "Whether the Russians are paying the Taliban or not, over the past several years, the Taliban have done their level best to carry out operations against us."

Just days after the February intelligence briefing, the U.S. signed an agreement with the Taliban, mapping out the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan by May 2021. That date would be nearly 20 years after American forces invaded

the country after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the U.S. by al-Qaida militants.

Trump had repeatedly said he wants to have all U.S. forces out of Afghanistan. His call in May for a quick exit fueled speculation that he wants troops out by the November election, as part of his vow to end U.S. involvement in what he calls "endless wars."

The U.S. pulled several thousand troops out this year, and now has about 8,600 there. Additional troop withdrawal is contingent on the Taliban's commitment that extremist groups, such as al-Qaida and Islamic State, not be able to use the country as a base to carry out attacks on the U.S.

Asked about the potential for pulling more U.S. troops out, McKenzie said he still does not believe the conditions allow for a significant reduction yet.

Bill would prevent the use of military funds for wall

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — House lawmakers are trying to prevent the wall along the U.S.-Mexico border from being funded with military construction money after billions have already been taken from Pentagon accounts, according to a new funding bill.

The legislation would prevent any funds for a military construction project from the fiscal years 2016 through 2021 budgets be used for projects related to the southern border wall, according to a provision in the fiscal year 2021 appropriations bill from the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies subpanel of the House Appropriations Committee.

Projects including the construction of "a wall, barrier, fence or road along the southern border" or roads to access

a wall or fence along the U.S.-Mexico border.

The funding bill was approved by the House subpanel Monday and will now be presented to the entire House Appropriations Committee.

In February 2019, President Donald Trump declared a national emergency at the U.S.-Mexico border and directed the use of military construction funds as well as counter-narcotic funding to pay for border-wall construction. The declaration diverted \$6.1 billion from military construction and counterdrug funds.

Up to \$3.6 billion in military construction funds were authorized to be used for the border wall and have been directed toward 11 barrier projects totaling 175 miles of fencing to be built in Texas, Arizona and California. The Pentagon diverted the money from 127 planned construction projects worldwide.

Trial witness reassigned by Trump to retire from Army

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Army Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman, the former Ukraine expert for the National Security Council who testified in President Donald Trump's impeachment case, will retire from the military, his lawyer announced Wednesday in a statement that charged Trump with bullying.

Vindman was ousted by Trump in February from his White House role as director of European Affairs, after the soldier testified to House lawmakers that a July 2019 phone call between Trump and Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky had been "inappropriate." Vindman, who received a Purple Heart for injuries sustained in combat in Iraq, testified publicly only after receiving a subpoena from Congress, his lawyer David Pressman wrote.

"[Lt. Col.] Vindman did what

the law compelled him to do, and for that he was bullied by the president and his proxies," Pressman wrote. "And yet, [Lt. Col.] Vindman would not be intimidated and will not be corrupted. He did what he has always done: put the interests of his country ahead of his own."

Vindman, 45, will retire after 21 year of Army service. Lawmakers in recent weeks expressed concerns the White House could attempt to block his scheduled promotion to colonel. Last week, Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., blocked the scheduled promotion of 1,123 military officers until Defense Secretary Mark Esper provided her a guarantee in writing Vindman would receive his promotion and not face further retaliation in the Army.

Pressman's statement indicated Vindman, at least in part, chose to retire so he would not block other promotions.

US envoy criticizes N. Korean official

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — The top U.S. official on North Korea accused a senior North Korean nuclear negotiator Wednesday of being “locked in an old way of thinking,” days after the negotiator said Pyongyang won’t resume talks with Washington because of its “hostile” policies.

The comments by Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun were a rare case of a senior U.S. official directly criticizing North Korea since the two countries launched now-stalled diplomacy on North Korea’s nuclear arsenal in 2018. The comments suggest that Washington may not be interested in resuming the diplomacy anytime soon.

“I’ve seen some recent press reporting that the North Koreans are not prepared to meet with me on this visit,” Biegun told reporters after talks with South Korean officials. “We did not request a meeting with the North Koreans. This visit is to meet with our close friends and allies, the Republic of Korea, and we had an excellent discussion.”

Biegun was likely referring to recent North Korean state media reports that

cited Vice Foreign Minister Choe Sun Hui as saying Pyongyang won’t resume the diplomacy unless Washington discards what she described as “hostile” policies. Choe, who has been deeply involved in the nuclear talks, also slammed the United States for its “shallow tactic” to use North Korea for domestic political gains.

In both his verbal and written remarks, Biegun, who has previously described Choe as his potential counterpart when talks resume, said the U.S. would be ready for talks with North Korea when his dialogue interlocutor is named, in his apparent disapproval of Choe as his counterpart.

“When Chairman Kim appoints a counterpart to me who is prepared and empowered to negotiate on these issues, they will find us ready at that very moment,” Biegun said, referring to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

North Korea’s state news agency Wednesday didn’t issue any fresh statements on the U.S. Earlier in the day, it reported that Kim had visited a mausoleum in Pyongyang to pay tribute to his late grandfather and state founder Kim Il Sung on the 26th anniversary of his death.

Trump and Kim have met three times since 2018, but the nuclear negotiations have fallen apart since their second summit in February last year in Vietnam. North Korea has repeatedly said in recent months that it would no longer give Trump the gift of high-profile meetings he could boast of as foreign policy achievements unless it gets something substantial in return.

North Korea recently dialed up pressure on South Korea by cutting off virtually all cooperation and blowing up an inter-Korean liaison office in its territory last month. That followed months of frustration over Seoul’s unwillingness to defy U.S.-led sanctions and restart joint economic projects that would help the North’s broken economy.

Some analysts believe North Korea will also avoid serious talks with the Americans for now and instead focus on pressuring the South in a bid to increase its bargaining power before an eventual return to negotiations after the U.S. presidential election in November. They say North Korea likely doesn’t want to make any major commitments or concessions when there is a chance that U.S. leadership could change.

Recent West Point graduates reveal racist incidents

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Recent U.S. Military Academy graduates implored leaders at the West Point, N.Y., institution to strongly condemn racism and institute a zero-tolerance policy in a letter that revealed some of them were victims of racist acts while attending the school.

In the June 25 letter to West Point and Army leaders, nine graduates of the academy from 2018 and 2019, including the top ranking cadets and graduates from both classes, condemned racism at their alma mater and urged leaders to introduce a curriculum meant to address race and diversity directly. The now-Army lieutenants, in a 40-page policy proposal included with their letter, documented such racist incidents including a noose left on a Black cadet’s dormitory desk “as a joke” by a white roommate, a top cadet leader’s photo altered to portray her as a monkey, and reports by

dozens of Black cadets subjected to racial slurs by their classmates in recent years.

“West Point has demonstrated an inability to meaningfully discuss race and a tendency to silence such conversations when grassroots efforts attempt to start them,” the West Point graduates wrote in the letter that has been distributed via social media. “Not only should we be concerned that West Point graduates arrive at their units unprepared to have conversations about race, we should also be concerned that West Point’s inability to do so means that it is far easier for racist beliefs to be maintained through the academy, to the extent that West Point graduates are tying nooses and joking they be used on their Black peers.”

The policy proposal calls for West Point leaders to take specific steps to address “systemic racism [which] continues to exist at West Point,” and for the institution to teach anti-racism and provide space specifi-

cally for minority cadets on the campus.

The authors ask that West Point leaders take a stronger public stance against racism, voice support for the Black Lives Matter movement, investigate any racial disparities in its disciplinary system, hire a full-time diversity chairperson, and publish 20 years of climate surveys that detail issues cadets report anonymously about their units.

They also called on the removal of Confederate-linked images on the campus. The policy proposal would strip West Point of “names, monuments and art honoring or venerating Confederate figures,” including a dormitory named for Gen. Robert E. Lee and artwork depicting Lee and Gen. Pierre Gustave Toutant-Beauregard, both West Point graduates.

West Point officials said Tuesday that academy leaders had received the letter and policy proposal and the school’s inspector general had begun a

“comprehensive review of all matters involving race at the academy.”

“The academy expects all cadets to be treated with dignity and respect. We take seriously all forms of racial inequality that marginalize or devalue members of our team,” said Lt. Col. Christopher Ophardt, West Point spokesman. “West Point does not accept, condone, or promote racism.”

But the authors of the letter — who include white and Black alumni — argued Black cadets’ assertions of racist incidents went ignored and that, in at least some cases, Blacks faced harsher punishment for minor violations than their white peers.

They also wrote the proposal was meant as a quick response to a request issued last month by Defense Secretary Mark Esper for service members to provide his office actionable proposals to address racial injustice within the military.

GOP eyes bill as evictions, cuts in aid loom

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — An eviction moratorium is lifting. Extra unemployment benefits are ending. Parents are being called to work, but schools are struggling to reopen for fall as the COVID-19 crisis shows no signs of easing.

With Congress bracing for the next coronavirus aid package, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., is outlining Republican priorities as earlier programs designed to ease Americans through the pandemic and economic fallout begin to expire. He is eyeing \$1 trillion in new aid.

“This is not over,” McConnell said during a visit to a food pantry Monday in Louisville, Ky.

The GOP leader’s next virus aid package is centered on liability protections, a top priority for Republicans seeking to shield doctors, schools, businesses and

others from coronavirus-related lawsuits brought by patrons claiming injuries during reopenings.

McConnell is also considering a fresh round of direct payments, noting they are especially helpful for those earning \$40,000 a year or less. He wants the liability shield to run for five years, retroactive to December 2019.

“Liability reform, kids in school, jobs and health care,” he said. “That’s where the focus, it seems to me, ought to be.”

Democrats have proposed a far more ambitious aid approach in the \$3 trillion House-passed coronavirus rescue package, setting the outlines of a robust debate over how best to help Americans as COVID-19 cases surge in hot spots nationwide, threatening public health and economic livelihoods.

Congress is away for a two-week recess, but the contours of the debate are taking

shape before lawmakers resume session July 20. Deadlines for many programs expire by the end of the month.

McConnell’s earlier decision to hit “pause” on new relief has infuriated Democrats, especially as state and local governments clamor for aid to prevent worker layoffs.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said in a statement Tuesday that McConnell “has created needless uncertainty and pain for millions of families who are still reeling from the public health and economic crises.”

Schumer said, “Senator McConnell ought to be working across the aisle to prevent mass evictions, a new hunger crisis, and the layoff of more essential state and local government employees — all things that will happen if Republicans continue to delay action or act stingily.”

Japan battered by more heavy rain and deadly floods

Associated Press

TOKYO — Pounding rain that already caused deadly floods in southern Japan was moving northeast Wednesday, battering large areas of Japan’s main island, swelling more rivers, triggering mudslides and destroying houses and roads. At least 58 people died in several days of flooding.

Parts of Nagano and Gifu, including areas known for scenic mountain trails and hot springs, were flooded by massive downpours.

Public broadcaster NHK showed a swollen river gouging into its embankment and destroying a highway. In the city of Gero, the rising river was

flowing just below a bridge.

Flooding and mudslides blocked parts of a main road connecting Kamikochi and Matsumoto, two major tourist destinations in Nagano, stranding hundreds of residents and visitors, though they were believed to have safely evacuated. In neighboring Gifu, hundreds were isolated in the hot spring towns of Gero and Ontake.

In the scenic mountainous town of Takayama, several houses were hit by a mudslide, but their residents were safely rescued.

As of Wednesday morning, the death toll from the heavy rains had risen to 58, most of them from the hardest-hit Ku-

mamoto prefecture. Four others died in Fukuoka, another prefecture on Kyushu, Japan’s third-largest island.

At the peak, as many as 3.6 million people were advised to evacuate, although it wasn’t mandatory and the number who sought shelter was not known. About half of the advisories had been lifted by Wednesday afternoon.

In places where rain has subsided, residents were busy cleaning up their homes and workplaces.

In Gero, a man washed off mud at the entrance of his riverside house despite the evacuation advisory.

“I was told to run away and

my neighbors all went, but I stayed,” he said. “I didn’t want my house to be washed away in my absence.”

In Oita, teachers at a nursery school were wiping the floor and drying wet furniture.

“I hope we can return to normal life as soon as possible,” Principal Yuko Kitaguchi told NHK.

As the rains pounded central Japan, flooding continued to affect the southern region. Search and rescue operations continued in Kumamoto, where 14 people remained missing.

Tens of thousands of army troops, police and other rescue workers mobilized from around the country to assist.

Neary takes command of Marines in Europe, Africa

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Maj. Gen. Stephen M. Neary took command of Marine Corps missions in Europe and Africa on Wednesday during a change in leadership ceremony at Panzer Kaserne in Boeblingen.

Neary replaced Maj. Gen. Patrick J. Hermessmann, who led U.S. Marine Corps

Forces Europe and Africa for the past year and is retiring.

Neary previously served as the II Marine Expeditionary Force deputy commander and commander of the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade.

At the same ceremony, Sgt. Maj. Aaron G. McDonald took over as the senior enlisted leader for the Marines in Europe and Africa. He replaced Sgt. Maj. Michael

Woods, who had served as the command’s sergeant major since 2018.

While the Marine Corps has the smallest number of forces in Europe among the Pentagon branches, its mission has grown in recent years. In addition to crisis response forces based out of Spain and Italy, the Marines’ Stuttgart area headquarters oversees troops on rotation in Norway who train with allies in the Arctic.

Trump 'flexible' on GOP convention size

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — With coronavirus cases surging in Florida, President Donald Trump said Tuesday that he's "flexible" on the size of the Republican National Convention in Jacksonville.

The president spoke as a growing number of Senate Republicans said they'd skip the event, and even as the White House tried to tamp down nationwide concern about the virus's spread.

Asked in an interview Tuesday whether he'd want to limit the gathering if the state's coronavirus cases continue to rise, Trump replied that the decision "really depends on the timing."

Florida's COVID-19 positive test rate is 18.7%, making it second only to Arizona among states where coronavirus infections are surging.

California

SAN FRANCISCO — Indoor restaurants and outdoor bars in San Francisco will not open next week as planned, while in Santa Clara County officials expect to reopen hair and nail salons but will also hold off on indoor dining because of rising coronavirus infection rates.

A Northern California county, meanwhile, authorized fines Tuesday of up to \$10,000 for businesses that repeatedly violate health orders.

Despite the variations in what's open for business, health officials from both San Francisco Bay Area counties on Tuesday stressed the need for people to stay home, wear a face covering when in public and practice social distancing in order to coexist with a stubborn virus that's "going to be with us for a long time."

Connecticut

Data released Tuesday indicates there were no new COVID-19-associated deaths in Connecticut since Monday, marking the first time since mid-March that the state has not reported a death tied to the

disease.

To date, there have been 4,338 deaths associated with COVID-19 in Connecticut. The state has had over 47,000 cases, including 57 new ones since Monday, and currently has an infection rate of about 1%.

"For the first time in months, there were zero COVID-related fatalities, zero COVID-related fatalities," said Democratic Gov. Ned Lamont, during a news conference in New Haven. He partially credited residents with continuing to wear face masks, noting "it makes a difference."

Hawaii

HONOLULU — Hawaii reported 41 additional cases of the coronavirus on Tuesday, the most in one day since the pandemic began.

The increase, coming after a 29-case increase on Friday, is an indicator the virus was circulating more widely and was part of a "disturbing" trend, said Bruce Anderson, the director of the state Department of Health.

Hawaii has had the lowest infection rate per capita among the 50 states along with the lowest hospitalization and fatality rates. The state held the numbers down in part due to stay-at-home orders maintained in March and April, mask-wearing rules and a requirement that arriving travelers quarantine themselves for 14 days.

Iowa

URBANDALE — Local officials don't have the authority to require that residents use masks to halt spread of the coronavirus, Gov. Kim Reynolds said Tuesday, a day after the mayor of Muscatine issued such an order.

Asked at a news conference about Muscatine Mayor Diana Broderson's order, which took effect Monday, Reynolds said local officials need the governor's approval to implement such rules.

Because Reynolds has a public health proclamation

in effect, a local official can't implement requirements that conflict with the state rules, the governor said.

Louisiana

BATON ROUGE — One of Louisiana's education leaders is calling for the cancellation of public school athletics this fall amid the resurgence of the state's coronavirus outbreak, with nearly 2,000 new virus cases confirmed Tuesday and hospitalizations from the COVID-19 disease heading above 1,000.

Senate Education Chairman Cleo Fields, a Baton Rouge Democrat, sent letters to the leaders of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Louisiana School Boards Association, calling for the suspension of athletic events at K-12 public schools during the fall semester as a safety precaution.

Fields' request comes as Louisiana is seeing a sharp uptick in confirmed cases of COVID-19 and patients who are hospitalized with complications from the disease. More than 3,200 Louisiana residents have died from COVID-19, according to the state health department, a number that grew by 23 on Tuesday.

Montana

BILLINGS — A Billings nursing home said 58 residents and staff have tested positive for the coronavirus and the facility has been put under quarantine, as Montana on Tuesday reported its highest daily total of confirmed infections since the pandemic began.

Residents and staff of Canyon Creek Memory Care Community were tested July 3 after a staff member recently tested positive, said spokesman Chase Salyers with Koelsch Communities, the Washington state company that runs the facility.

Two of the 43 residents who tested positive were hospitalized, and the rest remain at Canyon Creek. The facility has 55 residents, including those

with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of memory loss, and 56 staff members.

Tennessee

NASHVILLE — As Nashville's coronavirus cases continue to surge, a city official on Tuesday called on the mayors of surrounding counties to require masks in public, saying the problem needs to be addressed regionally.

"There has been an increase in cases among all our neighboring counties," Mayor John Cooper said in a Tuesday news conference. Cooper singled out Rutherford, which has more cases than Hamilton, home to the state's fourth-largest city, and Sumner, which Cooper said has "recently been forced to place ambulances on diversion due to a record number of hospitalizations."

Nashville issued a mask order June 29, but surrounding counties, which don't have their own health departments, were not allowed to issue their own orders until Friday, when Gov. Bill Lee granted them that power.

Vermont

Vermont announced Tuesday mandatory guidance and health protocols for colleges and universities to follow — including a health safety contract for staff and students to sign — as they reopen amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The guidance, developed by a task force, includes initial quarantines for students arriving from certain areas of the country, testing of all students and staff at the start of the school year and the use of face coverings while around others in public. The density of classrooms and dining halls must also be reduced.

The academic calendar will also likely change with students going home at Thanksgiving and returning later in the spring, said former Norwich University President Richard Schneider, who chairs the task force.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Footbridge damaged by derailment reopens

WV HARPERS FERRY — A popular pedestrian footbridge in West Virginia is repaired and back open following a train derailment.

The footbridge crosses the Potomac River from Harpers Ferry into Maryland and draws tourists, bicyclists and hikers along the Appalachian Trail.

The footbridge is connected to a CSX span crossing the river. A CSX freight train derailed in December as it crossed the river, damaging the footbridge.

The derailment closed access to some parts of Harpers Ferry National Historic Park and the Chesapeake & Ohio National Historic Park.

Police: Jogger finds human head along road

FL ST. PETERSBURG — A Florida woman discovered a human head on the side of the road while out jogging, according to authorities.

The remains were in a grassy area between the sidewalk and the edge of the road, just west of an interstate overpass, The Tampa Bay Times reported.

Investigators could not immediately determine the person's gender or race, the newspaper quoted St. Petersburg police spokeswoman Yolanda Fernandez as saying.

Investigators said they do not think the victim died at the scene, though it was unclear how long the remains had been there, news outlets reported.

Cargo of pork roasted in a big rig fire

CA LAKESIDE — A big rig fire on a highway east of San Diego roasted its cargo of pork.

Overheated brakes ignited

the truck's trailer on Interstate 8 in Lakeside, The San Diego Union-Tribune reported.

The trailer and its 41,000 pounds of pork were a total loss, the newspaper said.

Siberia wildfire smoke reaches US states

AK ANCHORAGE — Smoke from wildfires in Siberia carried to Southcentral Alaska and the Aleutian Islands, the National Weather Service said.

Strong winds pushed the smoky air into the region beginning last week from fires burning across more than 5,300 square miles of the northern Russian region, The Anchorage Daily News reported.

The wildfire smoke also has been reported in western Oregon and Canada.

Patrick Doll of the National Weather Service said cloud cover began shifting into Alaska, which may cause difficulty in determining whether the air over parts of the state has been touched by the smoke or is simply cloudy.

Sheriff: Man pulls gun after losing contest

KY FLORENCE — An arm-wrestling contest between a father and son turned violent and led to an 8-hour standoff with Kentucky deputies, authorities said.

Curtis Zimmerman, 55, was charged with wanton endangerment, news outlets reported.

Boone County Sheriff's Office Lt. Philip Ridgell said Zimmerman was intoxicated when he challenged his son to an arm-wrestling competition.

When Zimmerman lost multiple times, he became "agitated" and got into a physical fight with his son, Ridgell said.

Zimmerman grabbed a gun and fired two shots into the

ceiling while his son was going upstairs, Ridgell said. No one was injured.

When authorities arrived, two family members were outside but Zimmerman refused to leave the home.

2nd man dies in 7 days at skydiving facility

NY GARDINER — A second skydiver died within seven days at a skydiving facility in Gardiner, located about 80 miles north of New York City.

The New York State Police said David Richardson, 41, was attempting a "swoop landing" on July 5 when he hit the ground at high speed. He was transported to a hospital where he died. A week earlier on June 28, William McCartin, 40, jumped out of a plane run by the same facility and was found dead without his parachute in a fire station parking lot. A state police spokesperson told the Poughkeepsie Journal it remained unclear if McCartin took the parachute off himself or if it came off as he was falling.

State police said Richardson's parachute opened properly, and the Times Herald-Record reported a police spokesperson said there is no connection between the deaths.

Vet helps save man from drowning in reservoir

UT SALT LAKE CITY — A retired veteran and former state trooper from Nevada helped prevent a man from drowning at Sand Hollow Reservoir in Southeast Utah, a park official said.

Sand Hollow State Park manager Jonathan Hunt said a family was using a rope swing when a man, who was not identified, went into the water and did not resurface.

The veteran, who also was not identified, got the man to the shore and began CPR while bystanders called for help.

Park rangers who arrived at the scene took over CPR and revived the man, who was transported to a hospital.

Boater who fled storm killed by falling tree

NC CHARLOTTE — A boater who sought shelter from a storm in North Carolina was killed after being struck by a fallen tree.

The Charlotte Observer reported that the incident occurred on Mountain Island Lake near Charlotte.

Gaston County Police said that two people had fled the lake to avoid getting struck by lightning and took shelter on an uninhabited island. A large tree uprooted and landed on one of the two people, police said. Several people were on the island at the time, and some tried to provide lifesaving care.

Pier damaged in 2016 hurricane reopens

SC MYRTLE BEACH — A South Carolina pier heavily damaged in a hurricane four years ago has finally reopened.

The Springmaid Pier at the south end of Myrtle Beach welcomed its first visitors since its rebuilding.

The 1,000-foot long pier suffered extensive damage in 2016 when Hurricane Matthew scraped the South Carolina coast.

Crews rebuilt the pier with steel instead of wood and separated it into five sections so it would be stronger and easier to fix if damaged, said Lindsay Rice, a spokeswoman for the privately owned structure.

From wire reports

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Ultimately, safety falls to MLB players

Associated Press

MIAMI — Reliever Nick Vincent signed last week with the Miami Marlins and settled in for two days of quarantine in his hotel room while awaiting clearance to join workouts.

“That was a little bit different,” he said. “In 48 hours, you’re definitely a little stir-crazy.”

Vincent spent a lot of time watching TV, including the news, which reinforced that it was wise to lay low with the coronavirus crisis worsening in Florida and much of the country.

And as Major League Baseball attempts to salvage the 2020 season, behavior away from the ballpark will help determine the outcome. Just like on the field, success will depend on how many players are safe at home.

“That’s going to be the biggest challenge for this game to move forward — the off-the-field stuff and what guys do,” said Vincent, an eight-year major league veteran. “It’s just going to take one team to mess it up for everybody. I hope everybody gets that. It’ll take five guys to get a whole team sick, and then if a whole team is sick,

that could end the season for everybody else.”

Multiple issues could sabotage baseball’s relaunch. Some players — including David Price of the Los Angeles Dodgers and Ryan Zimmerman of the Washington Nationals — decided not to take part because of the health risk, and testing glitches further raised concerns. Positive tests for four Atlanta Braves, including four-time All-Star first baseman Freddie Freeman, underscored the fragility of MLB’s plan to navigate the pandemic.

There’s also worry regarding what happens when players are away from work and beyond whatever bubble can be created at the ballpark.

“Guys are 23, 24. They’re young. They’re in a sense bulletproof,” Marlins manager Don Mattingly said. “But if we’re going to run around at night and do whatever we want to do, we’re going to put everybody’s family at risk.”

Long lines of cars at the virus testing site at the Marlins’ ballpark provide the team with a daily reminder of the hazards off the field.

Players broadly acknowledge they must police themselves — and each other. Dodgers ace

Clayton Kershaw said he trusts his teammates to act responsibly away from the ballpark, but he acknowledged it might be harder for players who are single or living in confined spaces like apartments.

“Everyone has to take accountability for being as safe as possible, and I have trust in that,” Kershaw said. “If you want to see the season through, if you want to give it the best shot, you can’t be stupid.”

MLB has given players guidance regarding off-the-field conduct during the pandemic, discouraging the sort of after-the-game activities that have been part of baseball since before Babe Ruth toasted his first home run.

Or, as Chicago Cubs manager David Ross put it: “We’re not going to be able to go out to bars. That would be an extremely selfish move.”

Potential repercussions extend beyond any player seeking a thirst-quencher to his family, teammates, opponents and even the sport’s ability to continue.

Part of the motivation for good behavior might be the same thing that drives most things in baseball — wins and losses.

The defending NL East champion Braves were rocked

at the start of camp by the positive tests. Their setback underscored the new weight of the annual preseason mantra, “If we can stay healthy ...”

“I think we all recognize that the team that is hit the least hard by the virus, that’s able to keep themselves healthy out there, is going to have the best chance to compete,” Houston Astros general manager James Click said.

For a major leaguer, it’s counterintuitive: Avoid crowds.

Teamwork can help players adopt an appropriately low-key lifestyle.

“I just make Christian Yelich get me everything, man,” Milwaukee Brewers outfielder Ryan Braun said. “That’s my strategy. I send him text messages with my grocery requests, all my food requests.”

Braun was joking, of course, but Brewers manager Craig Counsell said each player must decide how seriously to take the virus.

“Everybody treats COVID differently,” Counsell said. “Everyone has their own viewpoint of it. In this case, we all have to understand what can happen if there’s a number of positive tests — it’s not going to work. So, we have to all do this together.”

Johnson cleared to start racing again in NASCAR

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Seven-time NASCAR champion Jimmie Johnson has twice tested negative for the coronavirus and will race Sunday at Kentucky Speedway.

Johnson missed the first race of his Cup career when he tested positive last Friday. He was tested after his wife received a positive result.

Hendrick Motorsports said Johnson tested negative on Monday and Tuesday and will return to the No. 48 Chevrolet at Kentucky. NASCAR confirmed Wednesday that Johnson has been cleared to return.

“It’s been an emotional jour-

ney and I’m so happy to be back,” he tweeted.

Johnson’s streak of 663 consecutive starts — most among active drivers — was snapped when he didn’t race Sunday at Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Justin Allgaier replaced him at the Brickyard 400 and finished 37th after an early multi-car crash on pit road.

Johnson is the only NASCAR driver to test positive for the coronavirus since the series resumed racing on May 17. He is scheduled to retire from full-time NASCAR competition at the end of this season.

“My family is so grateful for the incredible love and sup-

port we’ve received over the last several days,” he said. “I especially want to thank Justin Allgaier for stepping in for me at Indy and being a true pro. I’m excited about getting back to business with my team this weekend.”

Johnson never experienced any symptoms; his wife, Chani, was tested after suffering from what she thought was routine seasonal allergies. When she received her positive result, Johnson and their two young daughters were tested. Their daughters were negative.

Hendrick Motorsports had four crew members tested for COVID-19 after Johnson’s diag-

nosis and all four received negative results. The No. 48 team will have its regular personnel roster for Sunday’s race.

Missing the Brickyard 400 dropped Johnson to 15th in the driver standings, 46 points above the cutoff for playoffs.

Even before Johnson’s diagnosis, Hendrick Motorsports had implemented strict protocols that include daily health screenings for employees working at team facilities. The organization works in split work schedules with stringent face covering and social distancing requirements. Hendrick has also increased its level of disinfecting and sanitizing all work areas.

NBA teams on cusp of real practices

Associated Press

Practice facilities in the NBA have been open for a couple of months, with one major element missing from them.

No team has had an actual practice yet.

Most of the work that has gone on in those buildings during the NBA's shutdown has been voluntary, and all of it has been of the individual variety — one player working at one basket with one ball. That changes starting Thursday, when the first handful of teams at the Disney complex will be permitted to have full-fledged practices again.

“Every day will be an adventure, a little bit of, ‘OK, here’s where we are today, this practice will reflect this, tomorrow’s practice might be totally different,’” Houston coach Mike D’Antoni said. “And that’s what makes it interesting. It makes it fun. But it’s a little bit like a training camp. Every year you know you lay out all these grand plans and about the third practice you go, ‘Ooop, they’re out.’”

The teams that arrived at Disney on Tuesday, assuming quarantines are com-

pleted and other issues haven’t popped up, will likely be permitted to practice sometime Thursday. More teams arrive Wednesday and Thursday, so their first practice sessions, in theory, would be as early as Friday and Saturday respectively.

Teams will be assigned a three-hour window and be able to run practice on a pair of side-by-side courts, with training and weight rooms nearby. Disney staff will clean and disinfect everything after one team leaves, preparing it for the next team to arrive.

“Just like with probably everything the league is doing, I think it’d be wise to have a degree of flexibility sprinkled in with everything that you’re planning, a degree of being able to either back off or turn it up a little bit, either way,” Milwaukee coach Mike Budenholzer said. “But to be honest with you, that happens a lot even in the normal season. There’s a plan for the first practice and we’ll see how it goes.”

Players haven’t even been allowed to play 1-on-1 yet at team facilities, per the rules of the individual workouts. That all changes

at Disney, where teams will be able to practice for about two weeks before a series of three scrimmages begin on July 22. The season resumes on July 30. Players have said throughout the shutdown that having only three weeks of actual practice to get ready for game action may not be enough — but that’s what the league ultimately decided the schedule would allow.

NBA coaches — D’Antoni, Budenholzer, Dallas’ Rick Carlisle and more — are going in believing plans must be flexible.

“It’s not going to be a typical training camp where you jump in on Day One and just go full-bore,” Carlisle said. “Our players have done a great job of working on their individual conditioning with individual workouts with the coaches on the floor on a 1-to-1 basis.”

Toronto, the reigning NBA champion, has been getting individual work in at a pre-camp of sorts in Fort Myers, Fla. The Raptors couldn’t get their pre-Disney work in at home because of travel restrictions that would have applied to players coming into Canada from the U.S.

Beal, Dinwiddie opt out of restart

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Wizards leading scorer Bradley Beal and Nets guard Spencer Dinwiddie won’t take part in the restart of the NBA season, two significant absences in the Eastern Conference playoff race.

Beal is out because of a right rotator cuff injury; Dinwiddie announced that he is still testing positive for coronavirus.

Washington, Orlando and Brooklyn are the three teams left in the chase for the final two playoff spots in the East. If the Wizards finish within four games of the club finishing eighth, two games will be determine the No. 8 seed.

“He’s worked religiously to get this thing back to where it feels right, and it just hasn’t felt right,” said Wizards general manager Tommy Sheppard, who doesn’t believe Beal’s injury will linger long-term or require surgery. “To hear him say himself that he’s just not

right right now, ‘I’ve got to keep working, I’ve got more work to do,’ made that decision much easier.”

Washington will also be without forward Davis Bertans, who decided to opt out of playing as a pending free agent, and injured guard John Wall. With Beal and Bertans out, a Wizards team that has been without Wall all season will have to replace more than 40 points per game if it is to somehow get into that postseason mix.

“Going to Orlando is very important — it’s a very big opportunity — but would it make sense if we went there and Bradley’s injured?” Sheppard said. “Let’s say our next season starts in December, who’s to say he’s ready for next season? We’re trying to mitigate risk and give him the best opportunity to have a great year next year, which is better for him obviously, for us obviously, big picture.”

Beal averaged 30.5 points a

game this season, almost twice as much as Bertans, the Wizards’ No. 2 scorer. The 27-year-old Beal was preparing to play, even while the decision was up in the air.

“I was loving my game this year and how I was playing towards the end of the year,” he said last week. “It’s more or less going to be a decision that comes down to the medical staff and I, just because of our precautions and just coming back from being zero to 100. Then I had some nagging stuff at the end of the year we’re trying to clean up, too.”

That team said that was shoulder discomfort Beal experienced early in the season and it worsened over time. The decision to hold him out of play at Walt Disney World was made in consultation with chief of athletic care and performance Daniel Medina, orthopedist Dr. Wiemi Douguih, Beal and his representatives.

“This was a difficult decision

and one that I did not take lightly as the leader of this team,” Beal said in a statement.

At least six players on the Nets have tested positive for the virus. But Brooklyn general manager said last week there was no discussion of the team not traveling to Florida for the resumption of the NBA season.

“After another positive test yesterday and considering the symptoms, (the Nets), team doctors and I have decided that it would be in the best interest for me and the team that I do not play in Orlando,” Dinwiddie wrote on Twitter.

Beal’s absence also all-but clinches the NBA scoring title for Houston’s James Harden, who would be mathematically assured of staying ahead of Beal by scoring a total of 12 points in the seeding games. If Harden sits out any of Houston’s last eight games, that would also be enough to ensure his average — 34.4 points per game — does not fall below Beal’s.