

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Navy has its 1st Black female fighter pilot

BY CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

A Navy officer has made history this week as the service's first African American woman to become a fighter jet pilot, the service said.

"BZ to Lt. j.g. Madeline Swegle on completing the Tactical Air (Strike) aviator syllabus," the Twitter account for the chief of naval air training said Thursday, using a Navy abbreviation meaning well done. "Swegle is the @USNavy's first known Black female TA-CAIR pilot and will receive her Wings of Gold later this month. HOOYAH!"

Graduates of the tactical air program generally go on to fly F/A-18E/F Super Hornets, EA-18G Growlers or F-35C Joint Strike Fighters.

Swegle's achievement appears to have first been made public Tuesday when Twitter user @paigealissa posted pho-

tos of the Naval aviator smiling and celebrating next to a T-45C Goshawk two-seat training jet at Naval Air Station Kingsville, Texas.

"Just my best friend making history," she wrote.

The Navy did not immediately respond to a request for further details on the achievement. Swegle, of Burke, Va., graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 2017. She is assigned to the Redhawks of Training Squadron 21 in Kingsville, Navy photo captions stated.

Swegle will receive her wings of gold at a ceremony slated for July 31, the Navy captions said.

"Go forth and kick butt," said Rear Adm. Paula Dunn, the Navy's vice chief of information, after lauding Swegle on Twitter.

The news comes as the Defense Department and its services move to address issues of race and diversity amid social

unrest in the U.S.

It also comes a little over two years after two Black male pilots, one a sailor and one a Marine, claimed they'd been kicked out of the tactical air training program because of their race. A Navy investigation found that they were correctly removed from their squadron, but had not been treated with "appropriate dignity and respect," which included being given discriminatory call signs.

In a May 2019 letter, Vice Adm. DeWolfe Miller, commander of Naval Air Forces, ordered reforms to the call sign process and rebukes or administrative punishment for some officers, Military.com reported.

Swegle's accomplishment also comes more than 45 years after Rosemary Mariner became the first woman in the Navy to fly tactical jets in 1974, an online Navy biography stat-

ed. Mariner, who died last year, commanded an operational air squadron during Operation Desert Storm in 1990, becoming the first woman to do so.

The first Black female pilot in the Navy was Brenda E. Robinson, who earned her wings on June 6, 1980, said a biography on the website for the nonprofit group Women in Aviation International. She also became the first Black woman certified for C-1A carrier landings in January 1981.

Arizona Sen. Martha McSally became the first woman to fly in combat for any service while serving in the Air Force 25 years ago.

Swegle's father, who had played basketball for the Naval Academy, applauded his daughter's milestone online.

"It's official," he said on Twitter. "My daughter, Maddy continues rise."

Navy allows off-base worship after virus policy challenged

BY ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

The Navy has pulled back on an order barring attendance at off-base religious services after at least five service members took action to fight the coronavirus-related restrictions.

Gregory Slavonic, acting Navy undersecretary, released a memo Wednesday that stated the service will not "restrict attendance at places of worship where attendees are able to appropriately apply [coronavirus] transmission mitigation measures, specifically social distancing and use of face covering."

Service members assigned to Navy units are now able to at-

tend religious services where mitigations to limit the spread of coronavirus are appropriately applied, Capt. Sarah Self-Kyler, spokeswoman for U.S. Fleet Forces, said Thursday.

"This change applies to those service members within the continental United States that remain at [Health Protection Level Charlie]," she said.

In an initial order issued June 24, attendance at off-base services was prohibited along with most other locations or events that encourage group gatherings. However, the order did allow attendance at on-base religious services, depending on available opportunities.

The five service members, who are stationed at Navy

bases, retained First Liberty Institute, a Texas-based legal office focused on defending religious freedoms, to challenge the order.

Last week, Mike Berry, general counsel for First Liberty, sent letters on behalf of the service members to each member's chain of command to ask for an accommodation from the order.

Air Force Maj. Daniel Schultz, who is assigned to the Naval Postgraduate School in California and therefore falls under the order's restrictions, is one of the service members who challenged the order. Schultz is part of the leadership and worship team of his off-base church, and the letter to Schultz's com-

mander stated the Navy's June 24 order banning attendance of off-base services "substantially burdens Maj. Schultz's sincerely held religious beliefs."

"We are grateful to acting Undersecretary Slavonic and Navy leadership for righting this ship, and to commander in chief [President Donald] Trump for making religious liberty a priority," Berry said in a statement. "This is a major victory for the Constitution and for religious freedom within our military. This memo means tens of thousands of our brave service members will be able to safely and freely exercise their religious beliefs."

Esper: DOD agencies yet to corroborate bounty reports

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Mark Esper told House lawmakers Thursday that Pentagon intelligence agencies had not corroborated reports Russia offered Taliban fighters payments to kill U.S. troops in Afghanistan and pledged a crackdown on leaks of sensitive information coming from his department.

Esper also told House lawmakers that top U.S. generals overseeing efforts in Afghanistan had been studying intelligence claiming a Russian program paid Taliban insurgents to target NATO service members, but the leaked information did not originate from the Defense Intelligence Agency or other military organizations. The defense secretary said briefings that he had received did not use the term “bounty” to describe the alleged Russian campaign, but he was informed some officials in the intelligence community had asserted the Russians offered “payment” to Taliban-linked groups to target Americans.

“All of the defense intelligence agencies have been unable to corroborate that report,” Esper told House Armed Services Committee members Thursday during a hearing on Capitol Hill. “Commanders take all reports seriously, regardless to the credibility or confidence [in the intelligence] ... I want to reassure you of that. We’ve been in discussions with commanders [in Afghanistan] about this.”

Esper and Army Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told lawmakers that the military continued to study the issue, pledging repercussions for Russia if the program was proven true. The Pentagon leaders, who testified Thursday in person from separate tables several feet apart due to the coronavirus pandemic, said Russia has for years worked to interfere with American work in Afghanistan.

“As of today, we don’t have cause-and-effect linkage to a Russian bounty program causing U.S. military casualties,” Milley said. “However, we are still looking. We are not done. We’re going to run this thing to ground.”

On June 26, The New York Times, citing unnamed officials, reported U.S. intelligence officials had discovered Russian military personnel had offered the bounties to Taliban-linked groups. The Times wrote President Donald Trump and others in the White House were made aware of

the intelligence but did not pursue it further. Trump has denied direct knowledge of the alleged Russian scheme.

As Esper took questions about the bounties Thursday during the hearing, he decried national security-related leaks coming from government officials, including from inside his own organization. The defense secretary said he launched an investigation after a series of “bad leaks” last year that have continued into 2020, including disclosure of the potential Russian program.

“We are aggressively pursuing leaks within the Defense Department,” Esper told lawmakers. “It’s something we need to get control of. It’s bad. It’s unlawful. And it needs to stop.”

Esper said he had recommitted the department to consider operational security measures when discussing military matters. He said his investigation seeks to find the people who leak classified information, sensitive but unclassified information including potential changes to policy that have not been finalized, and “unauthorized discussions with the media.”

Esper said his announcement of the investigation into leaks came only after he considered all aspects of the Constitution, including the First Amendment which protects a free press.

“I think a free and open press is critical to a free and functioning democracy,” he said.

Lawmakers had varying responses to Esper’s pledge to crack down on leaks. Rep. Don Bacon, R-Neb., was among those who supported the defense secretary’s effort.

“These leaks, I think, undermine our intelligence communities and just undermines the confidence of our citizens in the president, in this case, or ... in our intelligence organizations, themselves,” said Bacon, a retired Air Force brigadier general who served in Iraq. “I think it’s imperative we start holding people accountable to the maximum extent the law allows.”

Rep. Seth Moulton, D-Mass., a Marine veteran who also served in Iraq, asked Esper to focus more on supporting his troops than going after selected leakers.

“I don’t think you get to pick and choose which leaks you like,” Moulton said. “Which leaks aren’t damaging versus what is an [operational security] problem. This White House routinely uses leaks to their advantage, but suddenly it’s a problem to their apologists.”

Milley: Pentagon is taking ‘hard look’ at rebel ties

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The military’s top officer on Thursday described Confederate leaders as traitors and said he is taking a “hard look” at renaming 10 Army installations that honor them, despite President Donald Trump’s opposition to any changes.

“The Confederacy, the American Civil War was fought, and it was an act of rebellion,” the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Mark Milley, told members of the House Armed Services Committee. “It was an act of treason at the time against the Union, against the Stars and Stripes, against the U.S. Constitution, and those of officers turned their back on their oath.”

The Army is now about 20% Black, he said.

“For those young soldiers that go onto a base — a Fort Hood, a Fort Bragg or a fort wherever named after a Confederate general — they can be reminded that that general fought for the institution of slavery that may have enslaved one of their ancestors,” he said.

Last month, Trump rejected calls to rename installations after Defense Secretary Mark Esper signaled a willingness to do so, saying his administration “will not even consider” that plan.

Milley stopped short of offering a policy prescription for how to handle the installation names, which has become a flash point at the Pentagon as the nation grapples with the history of racism in the wake of George Floyd’s death at the hands of police in May.

The installations, all in former Confederate states, were named with input from influential local residents during the Jim Crow era.

That decision was political, Milley told the committee, and renaming the installations would also be a political move.

Two of the Army’s biggest installations are named after Confederate commanders and avowed white supremacists.

Fort Bragg in North Carolina, the headquarters of the Special Forces, bears the name of Gen. Braxton Bragg. Fort Benning in Georgia, the home of Army infantry and airborne training, is named after Brig. Gen. Henry Benning.

The other bases named after Confederate commanders are Forts Lee, Pickett and A.P. Hill in Virginia, Forts Polk and Beauregard in Louisiana, Fort Hood in Texas, Fort Gordon in Georgia and Fort Rucker in Alabama.

US envoy reassures Japan over alliance

Associated Press

TOKYO — A U.S. envoy reassured top Japanese officials Friday of the importance of their alliance in dealing with regional security threats, just as the North Korean leader's sister expressed low expectations of a summit between her brother and President Donald Trump this year.

U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun is in Tokyo after his visit to Seoul where he discussed nuclear diplomacy with North Korea, which has refused to resume talks due to what it calls hostile American policies.

Biegun met with Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi and Defense Minister Taro Kono separately and reaffirmed the importance of their alliance in maintaining and strengthening "the free and open Indo-Pacific" and dealing with regional concerns including North Korea and China.

Earlier Friday, Kim Yo Jong said her

brother won't be meeting Trump because there is no need for the North to gift Trump meetings when it's not getting any reward in return. In her statement released through Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency, she called for major concessions from Washington to keep alive the nuclear diplomacy.

Kim Yo Jong is seen as her brother's closest confidant and was recently confirmed as his top official for inter-Korean affairs.

South Korea on Thursday asked Biegun to try to revive the talks with the North. He stressed during his meetings in Seoul that resuming the diplomacy with the North was important. But he separately accused a senior North Korean nuclear negotiator who had blamed the deadlocked talks on American hostility of being "locked in an old way of thinking." Those remarks indicated Washington won't likely make concessions to resume the talks despite the North's pressure.

Kim Yo Jong said "a surprise thing may still happen, depending upon the judgment and decision between the two top leaders" but that the U.S. needed summit talks while Pyongyang did not.

North Korea has demanded that the U.S. lift international sanctions and provide a security guarantee if it's truly committed to talks about the status of its nuclear weapons program.

Some analysts believe North Korea, which is sensitive about potential changes in U.S. leadership, will avoid serious talks with the Americans for now before an eventual return to negotiations after the U.S. presidential election in November.

Kim Yo Jong said that the diplomacy could be salvaged only by a reciprocal exchange of "irreversible simultaneous major steps."

The nuclear diplomacy has stalled since a second summit between Kim and President Donald Trump in early 2019.

Navy shipbuilder responds to union's threats to scabs

Associated Press

BATH, Maine — Navy shipbuilder Bath Iron Works on Friday accused the union representing striking production workers of threatening workers who choose to cross the pickets to return to work.

Machinists' Local S6 issued an alert warning that anyone who chooses to cross the pickets will be fined after the strike is over.

It also had some harsh words for so-

called scabs: "No man has a right to scab so long as there is a pool of water to drown his carcass in, or a rope long enough to hang his body with," the statement said.

The number of striking workers who've crossed picket lines is believed to be roughly a dozen.

The shipyard said Friday that employees have a right to continue working under the law, and that they "have the right to do so without being unlawfully harassed and

threatened." The statement also said workers who resign from the union to cross picket lines cannot be fined.

More than 4,000 Local S6 workers went on strike June 22 after overwhelmingly rejecting a three-year contract offer.

Bath Iron Works is one of the Navy's largest shipbuilders and a major employer in Maine, with 6,800 workers. The General Dynamics subsidiary builds Navy destroyers, the workhorse of the fleet.

US blocks Pakistani carrier after fake pilot scandal

Bloomberg

Pakistan's national airline has been barred from flying to the U.S. as a result of a scandal in which almost one-third of the nation's pilots were found to have faked certifications.

The Transportation Department notified Pakistan International Airlines Corp.'s lawyers in Washington on July 1 that its authorization to operate to U.S. destinations was being immediately suspended. The department released a copy of the letter on Thursday.

PIA has been wracked by years of financial losses and on May 22 suffered a fatal crash in which 98 people died after pilots of an Airbus jet inexplicably retracted the

landing gear just before touchdown, damaging its engines. The flight crew tried to lift off again, but the engines failed a short time later.

Pakistan said last month that 262 out of over 850 airline pilots had fake certificates and didn't sit in the qualification exams themselves that are conducted by the regulator. The South Asian nation fired 28 pilots this week while it continues to investigate the rest.

The Federal Aviation Administration had notified the department on June 30 that all of PIA's operations to the U.S. should be terminated as a result of the pilot-certification scandal. PIA was flying special flights from destinations including New Jersey

and Chicago in June to fly stranded passengers as nations imposed travel restrictions to curb the virus from spreading.

The U.S. move follows the European Union Aviation Safety Agency's decision last month to ban airlines from Pakistan flying to its member states.

"It is a setback for PIA due to the prevailing scandal," Pakistan International Airlines spokesman Abdullah Hafeez Khan said by phone. "PIA had worked very hard to get direct flights permission."

The carrier had received permission to operate 12 flights to the U.S. after a three-year hiatus, according to Khan. It used the permission to fly seven special flights to transport stranded passengers.

Court: Much of east Okla. is native land

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court said Thursday that a large swath of eastern Oklahoma remains an American Indian reservation, a decision with potential implications for nearly 2 million residents and one of the most significant victories for tribal rights in years.

The land at issue contains much of Tulsa, the state's second-largest city. The question for the court was whether Congress officially eliminated the Muscogee (Creek) Nation reservation when Oklahoma became a state in 1907.

In a 5-to-4 decision invoking the country's long history of mistreating Native Americans, the court said "we hold the government to its word" and the land Congress promised to

the Creek Nation is still Indian land.

"If Congress wishes to withdraw its promises, it must say so. Unlawful acts, performed long enough and with sufficient vigor, are never enough to amend the law," wrote Justice Neil Gorsuch, who was joined by the court's liberal justices.

"To hold otherwise would be to elevate the most brazen and long-standing injustices over the law, both rewarding wrong and failing those in the right."

The dissent, led by Chief Justice John Roberts, warned of significant upheaval in the criminal justice system, and in other areas of government such as taxing and zoning. But state and tribal leaders downplayed those concerns and said they are negotiating an agreement to address jurisdictional issues.

Most directly, the ruling means that federal officers, not state authorities, have the power to prosecute tribal members for major crimes committed in the defined area. Less certain is how the decision affects the authority of state and city leaders when it comes to imposing taxes, zoning laws and other regulations.

Oklahoma Attorney General Mike Hunter and leaders of five tribal groups issued a joint statement after the ruling indicating they have made "substantial progress toward an agreement" to submit to Congress and the Justice Department that would put in place a "framework of shared jurisdiction."

"We have a shared commitment to maintaining public safety and long-term economic

prosperity for the Nations and Oklahoma," according to the statement from Hunter and the Creek, Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw and Seminole nations.

Lawmakers in Washington would have to pass legislation, for instance, for state officials to continue prosecuting crimes involving tribal members in the area affected by the Supreme Court's ruling.

The case was brought by Jimcy McGirt, a member of the Creek Nation who was convicted in state court of molesting a child. Because the crime occurred on the land in question, McGirt said that state courts had no jurisdiction and that the federal government would have to prosecute. The court's ruling tosses McGirt's state conviction and means he must be tried in federal court.

US Roman Catholic Church got \$1.4B in federal virus aid

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The U.S. Roman Catholic Church used a special and unprecedented exemption from federal rules to amass at least \$1.4 billion in taxpayer-backed coronavirus aid, with many millions going to dioceses that have paid huge settlements or sought bankruptcy protection because of clergy sexual abuse cover-ups.

The church's haul may have reached — or even exceeded — \$3.5 billion, making a global religious institution with more than a billion followers among the biggest winners in the U.S. government's pandemic relief efforts, an Associated Press analysis of federal data released this week found.

Houses of worship and faith-based organizations that promote religious beliefs aren't usually eligible for money from the U.S. Small Business Administration. But as the economy plummeted and jobless rates soared, Congress let faith groups and other nonprofits tap into the Paycheck Protec-

tion Program, a \$659 billion fund created to keep Main Street open and Americans employed.

By aggressively promoting the payroll program and marshaling resources to help affiliates navigate its shifting rules, Catholic dioceses, parishes, schools and other ministries have so far received approval for at least 3,500 forgivable loans, AP found.

Simply being eligible for low-interest loans was a new opportunity. But the church couldn't have been approved for so many loans — which the government will forgive if they are used for wages, rent and utilities — without a second break.

Religious groups persuaded the Trump administration to free them from a rule that typically disqualifies an applicant with more than 500 workers. Without this preferential treatment, many Catholic dioceses would have been ineligible because — between their head offices, parishes and other affiliates — their employees exceed the 500-person cap.

Disney World to reopen with new rules for safety

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — Forget about up-close "meet-and-greet" sessions with Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck when Walt Disney World parks reopen. There will be no firework shows or parades — those would draw too many people together — and both visitors and employees will be getting temperature checks when they enter.

Despite a huge surge of Floridians testing positive for the new coronavirus in recent weeks, two of Disney World's four parks are scheduled to reopen Saturday. When they do, visitors to "The Most Magical Place on Earth" will find new rules in place.

Everyone has to wear a mask and maintain social distance. No hopping between parks is allowed, for the time being, and visitors will need reservations to enter.

Disney employees won't be allowed to take photos of visitors in front of Cinderella's Cas-

tle since it involves touching the tourists' cameras. There will be no live shows since the reopening has caused a labor dispute between Disney World and its actors and singers.

"That is a very different Disney World than the one you worked at back in March, and that is because of the need for safety," Eric Clinton, president of Unite Here! Local 362, told his members in a recent Facebook discussion.

Though Magic Kingdom and Animal Kingdom are scheduled to reopen Saturday, Disney World's other two parks, Epcot and Hollywood Studios, won't welcome back guests until four days later. All of the parks closed in mid-March in an effort to stop the virus's spread. Disney World's cross-town rivals, Universal Orlando and SeaWorld Orlando, also closed in March but have been back open for several weeks after instituting similar rules to protect employees and customers from the virus.

Ariz. governor caps restaurant capacity

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey on Thursday capped restaurants at half of their capacity but declined to shut them down entirely as he looks to beat back one of the world's largest outbreaks of the coronavirus.

Ducey also said the state will increase testing with a focus on low-income areas of Phoenix as many people report it's hard or impossible to find tests. Most people are waiting up to a week or more for test results.

He encouraged people to continue sacrificing, noting the early signs of potential improvement nearly two weeks after he ordered the closure of bars and gyms and urged people to stay home whenever possible.

Arizona continues to report record highs for hospitalizations and use of ventilators. After a drop in the number of additional cases reported in the early part of the week, they shot back above 4,000 on Thursday.

"We are seeing some better results," Ducey, a Republican, said during a televised news conference. "We need to see more. But the actions we took 10 days ago are making a difference. We need to increase this difference."

California

SACRAMENTO — As California enters wildfire season, the state is scrambling to find sufficient firefighters amid a coronavirus outbreak that has depleted the ranks of inmates who usually handle some of the toughest duties and caused a budget deficit that derailed plans to hire 600 new state firefighters and support personnel.

Gov. Gavin Newsom on Thursday said the state has enough money to instead add 172 professional firefighters, but he said he will use his emergency authority to beef up seasonal crews as the state enters another hot, dry summer when fires often rage out of control.

Firefighting hand crews that typically include 15-17 inmates or civilian California Conser-

vation Corps members do what Newsom called "the really hard grunt work." They use hand tools and chainsaws to cut and scrape road-like clearings through trees and brush in hopes of stopping the spread of wildfires.

The number of such crews is "substantially down from where we've been in the past," Newsom said. Of the prison system's 192 authorized inmate crews, just 94 are currently available.

Florida

TALLAHASSEE — Health authorities in Florida reported 120 new deaths from the new coronavirus on Thursday, grimly marking the highest one-day jump yet amid a surge in new infections that continues to befuddle the state's attempts to contain the outbreak.

The number of deaths was the highest since the 113 reported in early May. The cumulative death toll has now surpassed 4,000 as confirmed cases climbed by nearly 9,000 to more than 229,000.

The state also reported on Thursday the biggest 24-hour jump in hospitalizations, with 409 patients admitted.

Intensive care units are quickly filling up, including those in some hospitals with the largest bed capacity such as the University of Florida Health Shands Hospital in Gainesville and Tampa General Hospital.

Louisiana

BATON ROUGE — Despite Louisiana's surging coronavirus outbreak, Gov. John Bel Edwards and a majority of state House members oppose a state senator's call for the cancellation of public school athletics this fall.

Edwards said Senate Education Chairman Cleo Fields' push to suspend K-12 athletic events as a safety precaution was well-meaning — but the Democratic governor said it's "just a little too early" to make such a sweeping determination.

"I think we all have some

concerns," Edwards said. "But I don't think we're at that point in time where that decision needs to be made, and I think we need to know a little bit more."

Louisiana is seeing renewed spikes in the COVID-19 disease caused by the coronavirus, with patient hospitalizations rising and public health officials expressing worry about the significant jump in positive tests for the virus.

Nevada

RENO — Leaders of a rural Nevada church are asking the U.S. Supreme Court to suspend the state's 50-person cap on religious gatherings while an appellate court considers their claim that COVID-19 restrictions treating casinos and others more leniently violate their constitutional right to freely exercise their beliefs.

Gov. Steve Sisolak's June 4 directive allowing casinos, restaurants, bowling alleys and amusement parks to reopen at 50% of capacity while maintaining a hard cap for church services "simply turns the First Amendment on its head," lawyers for Calvary Chapel Dayton Valley wrote in the request to the high court for an emergency injunction.

"The Free Exercise Clause protects the exercise of religion. No constitutional provision protects the right to gamble at casinos, eat at restaurants, or frolic at indoor amusement parks," they said.

North Carolina

RALEIGH — A decision on how North Carolina public schools will start the year teaching students during the COVID-19 pandemic will come next week, Gov. Roy Cooper said on Thursday as case and hospitalization rates remain stubbornly high.

Cooper previously delayed the disclosure set for July 1, saying he wanted more time to receive feedback from educators and students, review the latest science on school re-

openings, and get more "buy-in across the board." Cooper was reticent on Wednesday to reveal how he is leaning. Schools have been asked to plan for three scenarios in preparation for classes to begin Aug. 17.

Oklahoma

OKLAHOMA CITY — Despite rising numbers of confirmed cases and hospitalizations due to COVID-19 infections in Oklahoma, Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt said Thursday he remains opposed to mandating that residents wear masks.

"I'm going to protect the freedoms in Oklahoma," said Stitt, who rarely wears a mask in public, even when he's around groups of people. "I'm not comfortable with mandating masks. It's not something that I would do."

Stitt also said he wouldn't take steps to stop local ordinances requiring people to wear masks in public, which have been implemented in Stillwater and Norman.

In Oklahoma City on Thursday, Archbishop Paul Coakley announced a new requirement to wear masks or face coverings at all public masses and church gatherings. Parishioners were previously encouraged to wear masks, but it wasn't mandatory.

South Carolina

COLUMBIA — The eight historically black colleges and universities in South Carolina are getting more than \$2 million for technology upgrades, part of emergency relief parceled out from a federal funding package related to the coronavirus outbreak.

Gov. Henry McMaster's office said Thursday that the money would be used to upgrade the schools' abilities to conduct online learning, a need revealed during the switch to distance learning earlier this year. Funding is expected to be used on hardware, software, distance-learning resources and electronic textbooks.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man accused of driving plow truck into home

NH LANCASTER — A man is accused of driving a plow truck into his ex-wife's mobile home and two cars following a fight over yard work, prosecutors in New Hampshire said.

Coos County prosecutors said George Bell, 71, and his ex-wife have been divorced for 15 years, but were living together, WMUR-TV reported. Investigators said Bell was asked to leave after the two started to fight Tuesday night, and then he allegedly drove the truck into the cars and porch.

Police said Bell told them he was drunk at the time.

"Ms. Bell told police and our office that this incident terrified her and that after she fell, she crawled back under her deck and back into her residence," prosecutor Jessica Cain said.

Pilot injured as plane crashes into backyard

WA PORT ORCHARD — At least one person was seriously injured when a plane crashed into the backyard of a Port Orchard home Wednesday afternoon.

KOMO-TV reported the Cessna 150 plane went down into the trees along Genesis Avenue just before 4 p.m., according to the Kitsap County Sheriff's Office.

The pilot was trapped in the burning wreckage, but witnesses near the scene were able to begin firefighting efforts before firefighters from South Kitsap Fire & Rescue arrived. The pilot was eventually freed and airlifted to a local hospital, deputies said. It's still unclear what caused the plane to go down.

Teen hurt when device detonated in home

PA PHILADELPHIA — The detonation of an explosive device inside a Philadelphia row home has left a teenage girl seriously injured and the residence damaged, authorities said.

The 16-year-old girl was with two other teens when the device was detonated around 8:30 p.m. Wednesday. The injured girl apparently lost most of her right foot and had other injuries, and she remains hospitalized in stable condition.

Authorities have not provided specific details about the device or how it was detonated. The blast left a foot-wide hole in the ceiling of the two-story home, authorities said. The two other teens apparently were not injured.

Right whale critically endangered, group finds

ME PORTLAND — A worldwide conservation organization said Thursday that the status of a rare species of whale has worsened to the point where it deserves greater attention from the global environmental community.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature said it is moving the North Atlantic right whale from "endangered" to "critically endangered" on its Red List of jeopardized species. The Switzerland-based organization's Red List is one of the most-cited endangered species lists in the world.

The IUCN said the total population of the whales declined about 15% from 2011 to 2018. The population is estimated to be about 400 animals. The species has been plagued by high mortality and poor reproduction in recent years.

Shootout between masked suspects probed

CO FOUNTAIN — Police in southern Colorado are investigating a shootout between people in two cars who were all reportedly wearing bandannas.

There were no known injuries from the shooting, which happened at around 7 p.m. Tuesday on a main thoroughfare in a residential area in Fountain, about 10 miles south of Colorado Springs, police spokesperson Lisa Schneider said Wednesday.

The four men suspected of being involved left before officers arrived but multiple shell casings were found, she said. The men have not been found and it's not known why they were wearing the face coverings, she said.

Volunteer firefighter arrested for arson

LA JEANERETTE — A volunteer firefighter has been accused of starting a fire in south Louisiana.

The State Fire Marshal's Office, in a news release Tuesday, said Kentrelle Beasley Jr., 18, was arrested on a charge of simple arson for setting an abandoned house on fire in Iberia Parish shortly after midnight July 4.

Beasley reported the fire to the Jeanerette Fire Department, where he had worked for three months, the fire marshal's office said. He also helped extinguish the blaze, authorities said.

An investigation found the blaze was intentionally set on the home's front porch, the fire marshal's office said. When investigators questioned Beasley, he confessed to starting it so he could help put out a fire, officials said.

No injuries were reported.

2 workers rescued after scaffold malfunctions

MA BOSTON — Two workers were rescued from a scaffold dangling off a building in Boston on Thursday, officials said.

Boston Fire Department said on Twitter that the scaffold was located on a building in Chinatown and malfunctioned at around 11 a.m. One side of the scaffold fell, causing the equipment to hang at a steep angle around the 12th floor.

At least one worker was pulled safely into the building because a window was shattered by the falling scaffold.

The fire department said two others had to be rescued by firefighters. None of the workers required hospitalization.

Teen riding in shopping cart hit by car dies

FL WEST PALM BEACH — A Florida teenager has died more than a week after he was hit by a car while riding in a shopping cart that was being pulled by a bicycle, sheriff's officials said.

The crash occurred June 30 a few blocks from Shamal Alezie's West Palm Beach home. He died Saturday at St. Mary's Hospital, the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office said.

Alezie, 17, was riding in a cart attached by a plastic grocery bag to a bicycle pedaled by a 16-year-old boy, the Palm Beach Post reported. Alvarado Nathan Bauld, 28, hit the bike and cart as it crossed the road, a sheriff's report said. The impact separated the cart from the bike and sent Alezie onto the vehicle's hood and windshield. Neither Bauld nor the teen on the bike were injured, officials said.

From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES

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Tennis proving vulnerable as schools look at cutting sports

Associated Press

Dozens of college tennis players across the country are facing questions about their athletic futures — men's and women's tennis are the only sports dropped by more than four Division I schools since the start of the pandemic, according to AP research.

East Carolina, Northern Colorado, Southern Utah and Wright State have eliminated men's and women's tennis over the last three months. Green Bay suspended its men's and women's tennis programs indefinitely while in Arkansas, UAPB suspended them for the year. Appalachian State cut men's tennis, while Akron dropped women's tennis. Connecticut won't have a men's tennis team after 2020-21.

"My assessment is some of these cuts had probably been in the works," said Timothy Russell, the CEO of the Intercollegiate Tennis Association, the governing body for college tennis. "Usually when there's a cut, there's a big hue and cry. There's so much going on with the noise in this environment, it's easier to make these cuts with nobody paying as much attention."

Nearly 89% of Division I schools had women's tennis programs and 71.5% had men's teams as of 2019, but these recent cuts have raised concern and pushed officials to seek solutions.

Tim Cass, a former New Mexico and Texas A&M coach, now is general manager for the U.S. Tennis Association's national campus in Florida. He believes colleges can help their programs by opening on-campus tennis facilities to their communities, hosting junior or adult tournaments and offering after-school programs.

"If you're doing that, more than likely your program has a very good chance of being safe," Cass said.

Big Ten scraps nonconference competition due to pandemic

Associated Press

The Big Ten Conference announced Thursday it will not play nonconference games in football and several other sports this fall, the most dramatic move yet by a power conference because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The conference cited medical advice in making its decision and added ominously that the plan would be applied only "if the conference is able to participate in fall sports."

Big Ten Commissioner Kevin Warren said it was "much easier if we're just working with our Big Ten institutions" in terms of things like scheduling and traveling.

"We may not have sports in the fall," Warren told the Big Ten Network. "We may not have a college football season in the Big Ten."

"So we just wanted to make sure that this was the next logical step to always rely on our medical experts to keep our student-athletes at the center of all of our decisions and make sure that they are as healthy as they possibly can be from a mental, a physical, an emotional health and wellness standpoint."

There has been deep unease that the pandemic will deal a blow to fall sports after wiping out hundreds of games, including March Madness, this past spring. More than a dozen schools have reported positive tests for the virus among ath-

letes in the past month but the bad news picked up this week as the Ivy League canceled all fall sports and Stanford announced it was cutting 11 varsity sports.

The Big Ten decision is the biggest yet because Bowl Subdivision football games — more than 40 of them, all moneymakers in different ways — were simply erased. And the move didn't wash away fears the entire fall season could be in jeopardy.

"I am really concerned, that is the question of the day," Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith said on a conference call after the announcement. "I was cautiously optimistic. I'm not even there now."

Besides football, the sports affected include men's and women's cross country, field hockey, men's and women's soccer, and women's volleyball.

"By limiting competition to other Big Ten institutions, the conference will have the greatest flexibility to adjust its own operations throughout the season and make quick decisions in real-time based on the most current evolving medical advice and the fluid nature of the pandemic," the Big Ten said.

The other big conferences, the SEC, ACC, Big 12 and Pac-12, have all indicated they intend to play fall sports.

NBA practices begin inside Disney bubble

Associated Press

Nikola Vucevic had to raise his voice a bit to answer a question. He had just walked off the court after the first Orlando Magic practice of the restart, and some of his teammates remained on the floor while engaged in a loud and enthusiastic shooting contest.

After four months, basketball was truly back.

Full-scale practices inside the NBA bubble at the Disney complex started Thursday, with the Magic — the first team to get into the campus earlier this week — becoming the first team formally back on the floor. By the close of business Thursday, all 22 teams participating in the restart were to be checked into their hotel and beginning their isolation from the rest of the world for what will

be several weeks at least. And by Saturday, all teams should have practiced at least once.

"It's great to be back after four months," Vucevic said. "We all missed it."

The last eight teams were coming in Thursday, the Los Angeles Lakers and Philadelphia 76ers among them. Lakers forward LeBron James lamented saying farewell to his family, and 76ers forward Joel Embiid — who raised some eyebrows this week when he said he was "not a big fan of the idea" of restarting the season in a bubble — showed up for his team's flight in what appeared to be a full hazmat suit.

"Just left the crib to head to the bubble. ... Hated to leave the #JamesGang," James posted on Twitter.

Another last-day arrival at the Disney campus was the

reigning NBA champion Toronto Raptors, who boarded buses for the two-hour drive from Naples, Fla. — they've been there for about two weeks, training at Florida Gulf Coast University in Fort Myers — for the trip to the bubble. The buses were specially wrapped for the occasion, with the Raptors' logo and the words "Black Lives Matter" displayed on the sides.

Brooklyn, Utah, Washington and Phoenix all were down to practice Thursday, along with the Magic. Denver was originally scheduled to, then pushed back its opening session to Friday. By Saturday, practices will be constant — 22 teams working out at various times in a window spanning 13½ hours across seven different facilities.

Exhibition games begin July 22. Games restart again for real on July 30.

Sports briefs

Morikawa takes one-shot lead in Ohio

Associated Press

DUBLIN, Ohio — After 22 consecutive cuts made to start his PGA Tour career, three short of the standard set by Tiger Woods, Collin Morikawa finally had a forced weekend off two weeks ago.

Morikawa bounced back Thursday in the Workday Charity Open at Muirfield Village with a 7-under 65 for a one-shot lead over Adam Hadwin.

Hadwin had five birdies over his last eight holes for a 66.

Cindric picks up first victory of season

SPARTA, Ky. — Austin Cindric won the first of two NASCAR Xfinity Series races at

Kentucky, charging past Chase Briscoe on an overtime restart Thursday night for his first victory of the season and first of his career on an oval.

Cindric took charge on a series of restarts in Team Penske's No. 22 Ford. On the last one, he went around Briscoe on the outside and pulled away before a scary last-lap wreck ended the race.

Jaguars significantly reducing fan capacity

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — The Jacksonville Jaguars announced plans Friday to play home games in front of a significantly reduced capacity, with fans in attendance required to

wear face coverings.

The team released details in an email to season-ticket holders, saying it expects about 25% capacity at TIAA Bank Field in 2020. The stadium's capacity is listed at over 67,000.

Giants catcher Posey skipping season

SAN FRANCISCO — Giants star catcher Buster Posey became the latest big-name player to skip this season because of concerns over the coronavirus pandemic, announcing his decision Friday.

The 2012 NL MVP and three-time World Series champ joined Dodgers pitcher David Price, Washington first base-

man Ryan Zimmerman, Colorado's Ian Desmond, Arizona pitcher Mike Leake and other in deciding not to take part in the 60-game season this year.

Ruff hired as Devils head coach

Lindy Ruff impressed the New Jersey Devils with his experience from decades of coaching. Tom Fitzgerald wowed ownership with his moves in a few short months as general manager.

The Devils on Thursday hired Ruff as coach and removed Fitzgerald's interim tag to give him the full-time GM job. It's the 60-year-old Ruff's third head job in the NHL.

MLS roundup

Revolution top Impact as Nashville SC withdraws

Associated Press

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. — Gustavo Bou scored in the 56th minute to give the New England Revolution a 1-0 victory over the Montreal Impact in the MLS is Back tournament Thursday night.

Bou maneuvered atop the penalty area before a blast that goalkeeper Clement Diop couldn't stop in the match played without fans at ESPN's Wide World of Sports complex at Walt Disney World.

Revolution goalkeeper Matt Turner preserved the victory in stoppage time with a big save on Ballou Tabla's curling shot from distance.

The game came as expansion Nashville SC was forced to withdraw from the tournament earlier Thursday after nine players tested positive for coronavirus. Nashville joined FC Dallas, which also withdrew after 10 players and a coach tested positive. The remaining 24 teams at the World Cup-style

tournament are being sequestered at two Disney resorts.

Bou peppered Diop with shots in the final minutes of the opening half but couldn't finish and the teams were scoreless at the break.

Impact coach Thierry Henry, wearing a Black Lives Matter T-shirt, kneeled for the first 8 minutes and 46 seconds of the game in honor of George Floyd.

The two teams met Feb. 29 to open the season, with Montreal winning 2-1 on Max Urruti's goal in the 80th minute. It was Henry's first game as coach of the Impact.

Montreal also played to a 2-2 draw with Dallas on the road before the league was shut down because of coronavirus on March 12.

The Revolution were winless to start the season after the loss to the Impact and a draw at home against the Chicago Fire.

The group stage opened Wednesday night with Orlando City's 2-1 victory over Inter

Miami. The preliminary round will be played over 16 consecutive days with the results counting toward the regular season.

Union 1, NYCFC 0: Alejandro Bedoya scored in the 63rd minute to lift Philadelphia over New York City FC.

NYCFC goalkeeper Sean Johnson dove and got a hand on the ball but couldn't keep Bedoya's left-footed strike out of the net after a scoreless first half.

Goalkeeper Andre Blake preserved Philadelphia's first win of the season in the 86th minute when he dove to push away Brazilian forward Heber's shot from the left side of the box.

Teams are divided into six groups for the opening stage of the World Cup-style tournament, with results counting toward the regular season.

NYCFC finished atop the Eastern Conference last season. The team returned much of its roster, including midfielder Maxi Moralez, who led the league in assists last season

with 20. Heber had 15 goals in 22 appearances with the team last season.

NYCFC lost both of its games played before the season was shut down on March 12. The team has yet to score a goal this season.

The Union, which had a loss and a draw to start the season, finished third in the East last year. Forward Kacper Przybylko, who led the Union with 15 goals last season, started.

Players for the Union wore jerseys with the names of people killed by police. Ray Gaddis wore the name Taylor for Breonna Taylor, a Black emergency medical technician who died after being shot eight times by Louisville, Ky., officers serving a narcotics search warrant in her apartment. Goalkeeper Blake wore Floyd, for George Floyd, a handcuffed Black man who died after a white Minneapolis police officer pressed his knee against Floyd's neck for nearly eight minutes.