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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Senate to call Trump's base name bluff

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The Senate will stand its ground on ordering the Pentagon to rename bases honoring Confederate generals, despite the White House's threat to veto parallel legislation in the House.

The directive, which is part of both the Senate and House versions of a \$740 billion military spending bill, topped a list of objections the White House made to the House's legislation Tuesday, arguing it was an "effort to erase from the history of the Nation those who do not meet an ever-shifting standard of conduct." A few hours later, the House passed its version of the defense bill anyway, by a veto-proof majority.

There are 10 Army posts named for Confederate generals. While the House's bill seeks to push the Pentagon

to make the name changes within a year, the Senate's bill — which is still under consideration — extends the deadline to three years.

The White House objection made no mention of the timetable. It rejected the notion of any such mandate.

The Senate has yet to pass its version of the defense bill. But on Wednesday, it voted to end the debate period for amendments without accommodating a measure from Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., that sought to strip the legislation's requirement to rename the bases and replace it with a pledge to study the matter instead.

It is unlikely that Hawley's amendment would have secured enough votes to pass, as there is bipartisan support in the Senate for insisting that the Pentagon make the ordered name changes. Yet it is

noteworthy that Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman James M. Inhofe, R-Okla., who has voiced support for preserving the base names, did not try to force the issue.

It is exceedingly possible that the final defense bill — which the House and Senate will have to negotiate over the next several weeks — will include some form of a mandate to strip the Confederate names from military bases, setting up a potential showdown between Congress and the White House.

On other matters, however, it is not yet clear whether Congress will similarly try to call the White House's veto bluff.

The House's bill includes a bipartisan-approved provision to restrict the president's ability to withdraw 9,500 U.S. troops stationed in Germany, as President Donald Trump stated last month that he would

do. But the Senate ended debate on amendments Wednesday without voting on a similar bipartisan proposal from Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, that had also earned the support of Sens. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., and Marco Rubio, R-Fla., both influential GOP voices on foreign policy.

Romney was one of only 13 senators to vote against ending debate on amendments Wednesday, in protest of his amendment not getting a vote — though he said in a statement that he would vote for final passage of the defense bill.

It is still possible that the provision could appear in the final compromise defense bill, however. Inhofe and Senate Armed Services Committee ranking minority-party member Jack Reed, D-R.I., have expressed personal opposition to the planned troop withdrawal.

Infection rates soar in Gulf nations hosting US troops

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The tiny sheikhdoms that host the U.S. 5th Fleet and Al Udeid Air Base have the world's highest per capita rates of coronavirus infections, according to new studies.

In the two neighboring Mideast countries, COVID-19 epidemics initially swept undetected through camps housing healthy and young foreign laborers, the studies show.

In addition, the studies found that a high percentage of cases were asymptomatic. In Qatar, nearly 60% of those testing positive showed no symptoms at all, calling into question the usefulness of mass temperature checks meant to stop the infected from mingling with others. In Bahrain, authorities put the asymptomatic figure even higher, at 68%.

These results reflect both the wider problems faced by Gulf Arab countries

reliant on cheap foreign labor and their relative success in tracking their COVID-19 epidemics, given their oil wealth and authoritarian governments.

Bahrain hosts the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet while Qatar hosts the forward headquarters of the U.S. military's Central Command at its sprawling Al Udeid Air Base.

Those U.S. bases and others in the region took measures to stop the spread of the virus, such as requiring deploying troops to be quarantined for 14 days beforehand and during their travels. Bases canceled events, shuttered shops, eateries and other morale facilities, mandated face coverings, and adjusted staffing and shift schedules to increase social distancing, military officials said earlier this year.

In Bahrain and Qatar, aggressive testing boosted the number of confirmed cases as health officials targeted vulnerable labor camps and neighborhoods, where migrant

workers from Asia sleep, eat and live up to a dozen people per room.

"This is why globally we failed to control, I think, the infection because simply the response has been focused on trying to find cases and isolate them and quarantine their contacts," said Laith Abu-Raddad, a disease researcher at Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar. "Now, if most people getting the infection are actually spreading the infection without even knowing it, this really does not actually work."

Qatar, with a population of 2.8 million people, has reported more than 107,000 cases of the coronavirus and 163 deaths. Bahrain, with a population of 1.6 million, has reported more than 37,000 cases and 130 deaths.

Strikingly, the mortality rate in the two countries remains low, with Qatar at 0.15% and Bahrain at 0.34%. The U.S. mortality rate is around 3.6%.

Government hit on Taliban also kills Afghan civilians

BY J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — An airstrike by government forces in western Afghanistan killed at least eight, including civilians, in an action condemned by America's top peace envoy to the country.

Witnesses among hundreds gathered in Herat on Wednesday to welcome a former Taliban fighter freed from prison said women and children were among the dead, The Associated Press reported Thursday.

The attack targeted Taliban leaders but civilians were among at least eight killed and 16 wounded, Ali Ahmad Faqir Yar, governor of Herat's Adrasakan district, told Stars and Stripes. Witnesses estimated the death toll at 14, the AP reported.

Government intelligence indicated that the freed prisoner,

Ghulam Nabi, planned to organize attacks, Yar said.

The release was part of a prisoner exchange agreed to by the government and the Taliban following the U.S.-Taliban peace deal signed in February.

U.S. Forces-Afghanistan didn't conduct the airstrikes, the command said Thursday.

Witness Abdul Khaliq, whose brother Abdullah was in a hospital in Herat with injuries from the attack, told AP that "these victims are not Taliban. They just wanted to meet a relative returning home."

Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. architect of the peace deal, denounced the airstrike in a series of tweets Thursday. "Photos and eyewitness accounts suggest many civilians including children are among the victims of an Afghan airstrike," Khalilzad wrote. "We condemn the attack and support an investigation."

Midshipman found guilty of sex assault

Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — A naval academy midshipman was found guilty of sexually violating three female classmates in 2018 and 2019.

Midshipman 3rd Class Nixon Keago was found guilty Wednesday of two counts of sexual assault, attempted sexual assault, burglary and obstruction of justice, The Capital Gazette reported.

Prosecutor Lt. Cmdr. Paul LaPlante said Keago broke into the rooms of three female midshipmen while they were intoxicated and asleep. One of the women is now an ensign.

LaPlante said Keago found midshipmen who he could control and when they woke up, Keago manipulated them into

lying for him.

"He found midshipmen who were vulnerable," LaPlante said.

While Keago was on active duty in February 2018 and October 2018, he went into two midshipmen's room and had sex with them while they slept, according to court documents.

Keago attempted to have sex with another midshipman in May 2019, court documents said.

Keago's attorney, Lt. Dan Phipps, said his client deserved better because the investigation was fueled by rumors and incompetency. Phipps said the rumors tarnished Keago's reputation and the rumors also led the second and third victim to come forward with allegations.

House to review handling of female soldier's slaying

BY ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

The killing of Army Spc. Vanessa Guillen will be examined next week during a House hearing designed to review sexual harassment and assault in the military and what led to the disappearance and death of the soldier at Fort Hood, Texas.

Members of the House Armed Services Committee's subpanel on military personnel will focus the July 29 hearing on the sexual harassment that Guillen's family has said she faced before her disappearance in April and "will review the lack of reporting of sexual harassment" in the Defense Department due to a "fear of retaliation and history of cover-up," according to a news release from Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., chairwoman of the subpanel.

"The Guillen family and Congress demand and deserve a full account of what the Army

knew, when they knew it, and what could have been done to avoid this tragedy," Speier said in a prepared statement. "We must do everything possible so that Vanessa's death will not be in vain. Though she may no longer be with us physically, her legacy and spirit can and will live on as the catalyst for change that all of our service members need and deserve."

Guillen, a 20-year-old small-arms repairer assigned to the 3rd Cavalry Regiment, went missing April 22 and her remains were found more than two months later buried alongside a river miles from the base. A fellow soldier from her unit, Spc. Aaron Robinson, hit her with a hammer and killed her in an arms room on base, according to court documents. Robinson shot and killed himself June 30 when confronted by civilian law enforcement in Killeen, the town just outside Fort Hood.

Guillen's sister has said the soldier was too afraid to report the harassment, but Army investigators have wavered on confirming the allegations. For the entirety of the two-month search for Guillen, investigators said they interviewed hundreds of people but they could not corroborate the allegations. Following identification of Guillen's remains earlier this month, investigators told The Washington Post that she might have faced harassment, but it was not sexual in nature.

Guillen's story inspired hundreds of veterans to share their own experiences on social media using the hashtag #IamVanessaGuillen. Many of the stories included similar fears of reporting, which has led members of Congress to call for a variety of measures to review and improve the system.

"The death of Spc. Vanessa Guillen is a national tragedy that has triggered rightful

outrage but also galvanized Americans across the country in demanding that the military finally be held to account for its history of sexual harassment and assault. This toxic environment means our women service members must be constantly on guard against enemies inside and outside their ranks," Speier said.

The hearing also will examine the results of an inspection by the Army Forces Command Inspector General of Fort Hood's Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention Program, known as SHARP.

Col. Patrick Wemple, the Army Forces Command's inspector general, will testify, according to the news release. He was part of the seven-person team that spent four days at Fort Hood conducting the inspection, said Paul Boyce, spokesman for Army Forces Command.

Trump to deploy federal agents to more cities

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump announced he will send federal agents to Chicago and Albuquerque, N.M., to help combat rising crime, expanding the administration's intervention into local enforcement as he runs for reelection under a "law and order" mantle.

Using the same alarmist language he has employed to describe illegal immigration, Trump painted Democrat-led cities as out of control and lashed out at the "radical left," which he blamed for rising violence in some cities, even though criminal justice experts say it defies easy explanation.

"In recent weeks there has been a radi-

cal movement to defund, dismantle and dissolve our police department," Trump said Wednesday at a White House event, blaming the movement for "a shocking explosion of shootings, killings, murders and heinous crimes of violence."

"This bloodshed must end," he said. "This bloodshed will end."

The decision to dispatch federal agents to American cities is playing out at a hyperpoliticized moment when Trump is grasping for a new reelection strategy after the coronavirus upended the economy, dismantling what his campaign had seen as his ticket to a second term. With less than four months until Election Day, Trump has been warning that violence will

worsen if his Democratic rival Joe Biden is elected in November and Democrats have a chance to make the police reforms they have endorsed after the killing of George Floyd and nationwide protests demanding racial justice.

Crime began surging in some cities like Chicago, New York and Philadelphia when stay-at-home orders lifted. Criminal justice experts seeking answers have pointed to the unprecedented moment: a pandemic that has killed over 140,000 Americans, historic unemployment, a mass reckoning over race and police brutality, intense stress and even the weather. Compared with other years, crime in 2020 is down overall.

Mayor of Portland is tear gassed by federal agents

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — The mayor of Portland, Ore., was tear gassed by the U.S. government late Wednesday as he stood at a fence guarding a federal courthouse during another night of protest against the presence of federal agents sent by President Donald Trump to quell unrest in the city.

Mayor Ted Wheeler, a Democrat, said it was the first time he'd been tear gassed and appeared slightly dazed and coughed as he put on a pair of goggles someone handed him and drank water. He didn't

leave his spot at the front, however, and continued to take gas. Around Wheeler, the protest raged, with demonstrators lighting a large fire in the space between the fence and the Mark O. Hatfield Federal Courthouse and the pop-pop of federal agents deploying tear gas and stun grenades into the crowd.

It wasn't immediately clear if the federal agents knew Wheeler was in the crowd when they used the tear gas.

Earlier in the night, Wheeler was mostly jeered as he tried to rally demonstrators who have

clashed nightly with federal agents but was briefly applauded when he shouted "Black Lives Matter" and pumped his fist in the air. The mayor has opposed federal agents' presence in Oregon's largest city, but he has faced harsh criticism from many sides and his presence wasn't welcomed by many, who yelled and swore at him.

"I want to thank the thousands of you who have come out to oppose the Trump administration's occupation of this city," Wheeler told hundreds of people gathered downtown near the federal courthouse.

"The reason this is important is it is not just happening in Portland ... we're on the front line here in Portland."

Some Portland residents, including City Council members, have accused Wheeler of not reining in local police, who have used tear gas multiple times before federal agents arrived early this month in response to nearly two months of nightly protests since George Floyd was killed. Others, including business leaders, have condemned Wheeler for not bringing the situation under control before the agents showed up.

Lawmakers blast VA's sexual harassment response

BY NIKKI WENTLING

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — House lawmakers blasted the Department of Veterans Affairs on Wednesday after officials estimated it would take years to fix the way the VA handles allegations of sexual harassment among its workforce.

The Government Accountability Office reported last week that an estimated 14% of male employees and 26% of female employees experienced sexual harassment from 2014 to 2016 — a "relatively high" percentage among federal agencies. The department has "inconsistent and incomplete" policies to prevent and address harassment, the GAO found, and the VA isn't collecting enough data about allegations.

Required training for VA employees lacks information about identifying and addressing sexual harassment.

The Women Veterans Task Force and the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations — part of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs — held a joint hearing Wednesday to question VA officials about the findings.

"It's a bit depressing. When I joined the committee in 2013, this was one of the very first issues we addressed. Change has been slow coming to the VA," said Rep. Ann Kuster, D-N.H. "Here's the bottom line: People who go into public service to care for our veterans deserve so much better. The VA simply cannot serve our veterans effectively when staff and patients are victimized at such a pervasive rate."

Rep. Mark Takano, D-Calif., chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, said some of the findings echoed a similar report by the GAO in 1993 — 27 years ago.

Similar to the 1993 report, the GAO found that VA headquarters doesn't collect data about sexual assault allegations and "is not aware" of the number of complaints across the agency.

"I'm growing impatient with this," Takano said.

Takano, Kuster and seven other lawmakers — Democrats and Republicans — sent a letter to VA Secretary Robert Wilkie after the GAO's latest report. They asked that he implement the GAO's recommendations without delay.

Jobless claims up for first time since March

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The viral pandemic's resurgence caused the number of Americans seeking unemployment benefits to rise last week for the first time in nearly four months, evidence of the deepening economic pain the outbreak is causing.

The increase in weekly jobless claims to 1.4 million served to underscore the outsize role the unemployment insurance system is playing among the nation's safety net programs — just when a \$600 weekly federal aid payment for the jobless is set to expire at the end of this week.

All told, the Labor Department said Thursday that the total number of people receiving jobless benefits fell 1.1 million to 16.2 million. That was a hopeful sign that even as layoffs remain persistently high, some companies are still recalling workers.

Last week's pace of unemployment applications — the

18th straight time it's topped 1 million — was up from 1.3 million the previous week. Before the pandemic, applications had never exceeded 700,000. An additional 975,000 applied last week for jobless aid under a separate program that has made self-employed and gig workers eligible for the first time. That figure isn't adjusted for seasonal trends.

The stubbornly high number of layoffs reflects a pandemic that is causing both confirmed infections and deaths to creep up nationally. Laboratories are buckling under a surge of coronavirus tests, creating processing delays that experts have said are undercutting the pandemic response. With the U.S. tally of confirmed infections nearing 4 million and deaths topping 140,000, some workers are being kept off the job while awaiting test results.

Analysts have said the economy can't improve until health authorities can control the spread of the virus, a need that

is complicating the reopening of businesses and schools.

Last week, applications for unemployment benefits declined in many states that have been hard hit by the virus, including Texas, Florida, Georgia and Arizona. Jobless claims rose in Louisiana, which is also suffering an outbreak, and in California and Tennessee.

The resurgence of confirmed viral cases across the country has forced some businesses to close a second time or to impose tighter restrictions on customers in response to state mandates. The resulting pullback in business activity has hindered job growth and likely forced additional layoffs.

The federal government's \$600 weekly benefit for laid-off workers — which is in addition to whatever jobless aid a state provides — is the last major source of economic help from the \$2 trillion relief package that Congress approved in March. A small business lending program and one-time

\$1,200 payment have largely run their course.

With confirmed cases of the coronavirus having risen in 46 states compared with two weeks ago, economists have said they're increasingly worried that any recovery is now in jeopardy. Twenty-two states have paused or reversed the re-opening of businesses, according to economists at Bank of America.

Real-time measures of the economy suggest that companies are pulling back on hiring and that more small businesses are closing permanently. Credit card spending has been stuck at about 10% below year-ago levels for nearly a month, according to JPMorgan Chase, after having risen steadily from mid-April to mid-June.

And a weekly survey by the Census Bureau found that the number of people with jobs dropped 6.7 million in mid-July compared last month, a sign that employers imposed layoffs, suspended hiring or both.

White House drops payroll tax cut as GOP preps aid

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The White House reluctantly dropped its bid to cut Social Security payroll taxes Thursday as Republicans prepared to unveil a \$1 trillion COVID-19 rescue package, yielding to opposition to the idea among top Senate allies.

"It won't be in the base bill," said Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, speaking on CNBC about the payroll tax cut, killing the idea for now. The cut in the tax that finances Social Security and Medicare has been a major demand of President Donald Trump.

"The president is very focused on getting money quickly to workers right now, and the payroll tax takes time," Mnuchin said at the Capitol. Only Sunday, Trump said in a Fox News interview that "I

would consider not signing it if we don't have a payroll tax cut."

The long-delayed legislation comes amid alarming developments on the virus crisis. It was originally to be released Thursday morning by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, but the Kentucky Republican instead hosted an unscheduled meeting with Mnuchin and White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows and delayed the planned release of his proposal.

Given the hold-up, Mnuchin and Meadows floated the idea of breaking off a smaller bill that would be limited to maintaining jobless benefits that would otherwise expire and speeding aid to schools. Democrats immediately panned that idea, saying it would strand other important elements like aid to state and local governments.

DODEA parents must decide on online or in-school classes

BY NANCY MONTGOMERY
AND DAVE ORNAUER

Stars and Stripes

Military parents based in Europe and the Pacific must decide by Tuesday whether to send their children back into Defense Department classrooms or commit to online instruction, school officials said in separate town hall meetings this week.

But they will ultimately have to make the decision before knowing how large classes will be or how they'll be configured in light of the coronavirus pandemic, even though that information would likely end up being a key factor in the choice they make.

"The setup of the classrooms will be dependent on the number who opt for online instruction," Charles Kelker, Department of Defense Edu-

cation Activity Europe chief of staff, said at the Europe virtual meeting Wednesday.

Parents who prefer a virtual school program must agree to enroll their children for one full semester, with an option for the entire year. Online classes start Aug. 24.

Exceptions will be made for families who arrive at their new duty stations after the start of school, DODEA Virtual High School Principal Terri Marshall said during the Pacific meeting Thursday on Facebook Live.

DODEA officials in Europe did not respond directly when asked if parents who send their children back to class will be able to switch to the virtual program if they change their minds.

"We're asking for a commitment," Marshall said at the Europe meeting.

US labs struggle with wave of virus tests

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Laboratories across the U.S. are buckling under a surge of coronavirus tests, creating long processing delays that experts say are undercutting the pandemic response.

With the U.S. tally of confirmed infections at nearly 4 million Wednesday and new cases surging, the bottlenecks are creating problems for workers kept off the job while awaiting results, nursing homes struggling to keep the virus out and for the labs themselves as they deal with a crushing workload.

Some labs are taking weeks to return COVID-19 results, exacerbating fears that people without symptoms could be spreading the virus if they don't isolate while they wait.

"There's been this obsession with, 'How many tests are we doing per day?'" said Dr. Tom Frieden, former director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "The question is how many tests are being done with results coming back within a day, where the individual tested is promptly isolated and their contacts are promptly warned."

Frieden and other public health experts have called on states to publicly report testing turnaround times, calling it an essential metric to measure progress against the virus.

Alaska

JUNEAU — The mayor of Anchorage is limiting gathering sizes and the number of people allowed in bars, restaurants and entertainment venues in response to rising coronavirus cases.

The order, by Mayor Ethan Berkowitz, takes effect Friday and says that due to a "resurgence" in cases there is a need for increased restrictions on public interactions "to preserve health and save lives in our community."

Of the 92 new resident cases statewide reported by the Alaska health department

Wednesday, 42 were from the Municipality of Anchorage, which also includes Chugiak and Eagle River.

"We are experiencing exponential growth at this time," Anchorage Health Department Director Natasha Pineda said Wednesday, noting in part the average daily rate of cases based on a seven-day average. She said there is widespread community transmission.

Arizona

PHOENIX — Arizona's school districts should be empowered to reopen campuses for the new school year based on public health data instead of committing now to specific reopening dates, the state's top education official said.

Superintendent of Public Instruction Kathy Hoffman said Tuesday evening that she outlined her priorities to Gov. Doug Ducey, who is expected to announce the next steps for school reopenings this week.

Ducey, a Republican, previously delayed the start of the school year until at least Aug. 17, weeks after most Arizona schools typically reopen following the summer break.

Ducey's spokesman, Patrick Ptak, said Wednesday that he is continuing to work closely with Hoffman, school superintendents around the state, education leaders and the Legislature on a school reopening plan that provides certainty.

California

SACRAMENTO — California will spend \$315 million more to buy hundreds of millions of protective masks as the coronavirus continues to ravage the state, Gov. Gavin Newsom announced Wednesday.

A new contract with Chinese manufacturer BYD will provide the state 120 million tight-fitting N95 respirator masks and 300 million looser-fitting surgical masks. California's initial \$1 billion deal with the company was signed in April.

The state will soon launch a competitive bidding process

to try to get even more protective masks at lower prices and is encouraging manufacturers within the state to make equipment, Newsom said.

"We decided to think outside the box, we did something big and bold," he said during a news conference at a Sacramento warehouse where masks and other protective equipment are stored.

Maine

LEWISTON — Bates College is considering putting up students in local hotels as it tries to figure out where to safely house students in a pandemic.

The Maine college told students recently it is "working quickly to add to our existing housing resources" to ensure everyone has a place to stay.

"We need to make sure we can house our new and returning students," spokeswoman Mary Pols told the Sun Journal. The college also needs extra beds for students who may fall ill.

Adding to the difficulty: It's unclear how many of its 1,800 students are going to show up at its Lewiston campus starting in about a month.

More than 3,700 Mainers have tested positive for the coronavirus that causes COVID-19, and the number of deaths stood at 118.

Maryland

BALTIMORE — The mayor of Baltimore has ordered restaurants and bars in the city to temporarily suspend indoor dining due to a spike in coronavirus cases.

The new restrictions announced Wednesday by Mayor Bernard C. "Jack" Young will require eateries in the city to close for at least two weeks starting at 5 p.m. on Friday, news outlets reported. Bars and restaurants will still be able to serve customers outdoors and offer other options including takeout and delivery, The Baltimore Sun reported.

The announcement comes two days after officials from

the city and other counties in Maryland sent a letter to the state's health department asking for a statewide halt on indoor dining, the newspaper reported. The state had eased the restrictions last month.

North Carolina

RALEIGH — The North Carolina NAACP has asked a judge to bar the use of a touchscreen voting machine in several counties due to what it says are heightened risks associated with using them during the coronavirus pandemic.

The request made to a Wake County judge Wednesday says the ExpressVote machines create "unique and substantial risks to the lives and health of voters" because they will be touched by many people, The Charlotte Observer quotes the request as saying.

There are other options for voting, including switching to paper ballots or buying machines that don't require voters to touch screens, Courtney Hostetler, an attorney for the group, told the newspaper Wednesday.

Texas

AUSTIN — Texas reported a new daily high number of deaths Wednesday from the illness caused by the new coronavirus, even as the state reported a slight decrease in the number of people who have tested positive.

The Department of State Health Services reported a Wednesday COVID-19 death toll hit a record 197, beating the previous daily high of 174 deaths set Friday. That brought the official coronavirus death toll in Texas to at least 4,348 total as of Wednesday.

The state reported the number of new confirmed cases reached at least 9,879, which is slightly off the string of 10,000-case days over the past week. That brought the overall caseload to at least 351,618 since the state began tracking began the outbreak in early March.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man accused of hourlong crime spree

SD RAPID CITY — A Rapid City man is accused of stealing two pickup trucks, breaking into three homes and stabbing, assaulting or threatening five people during a nearly hourlong crime spree.

Billy Robertson, 33, was arrested Tuesday after driving toward an officer who fired multiple shots at him, but did not hit him, police said.

According to officials, Robertson was involved in a disturbance at one home about 4 a.m. where he stole a pickup truck. He then broke into another home, pulled out a knife and threatened to kill the homeowner before fleeing to another house where he struggled with the homeowner before stabbing him, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Robertson stole a second pickup at another house and dragged the homeowner who tried pulling him from the truck, police said.

Police: Fugitive in tow truck kills passenger

MD BROOKLYN PARK — A man who tried to flee from police in a tow truck was captured after fatally running over his passenger, authorities in Maryland said.

Anne Arundel County's fugitive apprehension team surrounded the man Tuesday while he was driving a tow truck with a woman in the passenger seat, police spokeswoman Sgt. Jacklyn Davis said.

The man reversed the truck toward a detective, who fired a single shot but didn't strike anyone, and tried to drive away as the passenger jumped or was thrown from the truck, Davis

said. The woman was struck by the back end of the truck and was pronounced dead at the scene.

Fire Marshal: Church fire was act of arson

DE GLASGOW — A fire inside the sanctuary of a Delaware church was started by an act of arson, authorities said.

State Fire Marshal Chief Deputy Robert Fox said multiple fires were started Monday night inside Reach Church, in Glasgow, news outlets reported. Fox said the fire was caused by an "unknown subject igniting combustible material."

Firefighters arrived at the church around 11 p.m. Monday and had to cut holes in the church's steeple to ventilate the building. No one was injured. The fire caused approximately \$250,000 in damages.

The Rev. Chuck L. Betters said the church was planning to reopen for in-person services on Aug. 2, months after hosting outdoor and online services due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Postal clerk charged in ID theft scheme

FL TAMPA — A Florida postal clerk stole mail and passport applications as part of an identify theft scheme, federal prosecutors said.

Jasmine Wynne, 30, of Ruskin, was arrested Monday, according to court records. A federal grand jury in Tampa returned an indictment last week with one count of conspiracy to commit bank fraud, five counts of aggravated identity theft and one count of theft of a postal key.

While working at a U.S. Postal Service location in St. Petersburg, Wynne conspired with others to defraud federally insured financial institutions,

according to the indictment. Wynne opened mail to photograph personal information and did the same with U.S. passport applications, officials said. She then forwarded the photographs to others for use in a bank fraud scheme, investigators said.

Auction set for former missile compound

ND FAIRDALE — A property listing in northern North Dakota has an intriguing advertisement. The 50-acre property near Fairdale in Walsh County is listed as a "unique opportunity to own a bit of Cold War history."

The listing is a former top secret defense missile site that will be auctioned in August.

The Fairdale listing says the site features a command bunker and 14 Sprint Missile launch tubes. It includes three parcels surrounded by dual fences that "provide that extra privacy, security and protection when needed," KVLV-TV reported.

Pifer's Auctioneers will sell the compound on Aug. 11 at the Ramada in Bismarck. An initial bid price is not listed.

Korean War vet, 87, graduates high school

MI JACKSON — A Korean War veteran who dropped out of high school during his junior year in 1952 to join the U.S. Air Force and became a pilot during the war has finally received his high school diploma at age 87.

Ed Sanders was able to get his Jackson High School diploma through a state of Michigan act that allows school boards to award diplomas to veterans who left high school to serve in World War II, the Korean War or Vietnam War.

"I never dreamed I would be able to graduate," Sanders told MLive.com. "I'm so thankful for that."

Police: LSD was left outside police offices

NY CANTON — Four packets containing LSD were found attached to the doors of town and county law enforcement offices in upstate New York, police said.

The St. Lawrence County sheriff's office said the gold foil packets were found Sunday morning on police buildings in Norfolk, Norwood and Potsdam, as well as on the public safety building in Canton.

A printed label on the packets, all of which appear identical, reads, "Take a trip beyond the pigpen." The St. Lawrence Sheriff's Department said officers had field tested the packets' contents and found that they contained LSD.

Police said they are still looking for suspects.

Officials: Lightning near coaster injures 6

NC BANNER ELK — Six people were hospitalized for injuries they sustained when lightning struck near a roller coaster in North Carolina, authorities said.

They were injured Tuesday while sitting under a tree at Wilderness Run Alpine Coaster, the business said in a Facebook post. Lightning struck the tree, cracked the pavement and knocked several people to the ground, the Avery County Sheriff's Office told WBTV-TV.

They were taken to the hospital with non-life-threatening injuries, the sheriff's office said. The roller coaster was not operating at the time of the incident.

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Angels' Trout says he'll play short season

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Mike Trout is confident enough in baseball's safety rules to stay on the field during the coronavirus pandemic.

Trout has decided to play for the Los Angeles Angels in the shortened baseball season, although his year will be paused in a few weeks by the birth of his first child. The three-time AL MVP confirmed his decision Wednesday before the Angels' final exhibition game against the San Diego Padres at Angel Stadium.

Trout expressed uncertainty this month about the safety of this unique major league campaign, saying he wouldn't risk his growing family's health to participate. After three weeks of experience with the regulations put in place by the Angels and Major League Baseball, Trout said he is cautiously optimistic about baseball's ability to hold a season safely.

"I'm playing," Trout said on a video conference call. "It's definitely been great so far."

Trout will be in the lineup when the Angels open the season Friday in Oakland, but he won't be joined by Anthony Rendon. The Angels' new \$245 million third baseman will miss opening day and perhaps a few more games with an oblique muscle injury, manager Joe Maddon said Wednesday night.

Two weeks ago, Trout was still "up in the air" about whether to play at all this season. He has been encouraged by the low number of positive tests around baseball, along with his fellow players' willingness to follow safety regulations.

"Guys have been respectful of others," Trout said. "Everybody is taking responsibility to wear a mask and do social distancing and just be safe, and we're seeing that. The results are there. Just got to pick it up and stay on it when we're on the road. ... We're going to different cities where it's really bad right now. It's going to be tough. As of right now, everything is great."

Distancing could be difficult around MLB's home plates

Associated Press

Just like his strong arm and limber legs, Joe Girardi made good use of his mouth over 15 seasons as a big league catcher. So much so that slugger Chili Davis once told him to shut it.

"He was like, 'You're bothering me, I'm trying to hit,'" recalled Girardi, now the manager of the Philadelphia Phillies. "I said, 'Well, I'm trying to bother you, Chili.'"

Girardi doesn't think that kind of chatter will happen as much this season amid the coronavirus pandemic.

There's some concern that home plate could become a hot spot for transmission as baseball attempts to play a shortened 60-game season that began Thursday.

Social distancing elsewhere around the diamond is fairly easy. But with the batter, catcher and umpire gathered within a few feet of each other around home plate, it might not be possible for all parties to follow government guidance to avoid 10 to 15 minutes of close exposure to others.

"It's been a little weird. Just from being back there for so long, you get used to having people around," Arizona Diamondbacks catcher Carson Kelly said. "But now you get

some second thoughts. 'Oh wait, should I be this close to this guy?' We've got a job to do but at the same time we need to be safe."

Like with so much in everyday life during the pandemic, the interactions at home — whether cordial exchanges or distracting chatter — will feel far from normal for the trio around that 17-inch-wide plate.

"This is something everybody's talking about, everybody's trying to figure out," Texas Rangers catcher Robinson Chirinos said. "But in the end hopefully we can do our part and be safe at the plate, because of having those three guys right there so close."

Chirinos plans to wear a face covering under his catcher's mask, but knows that it will have "to be on and off just because I still need to be vocal out there being a catcher," and make sure pitchers and fielders can hear and understand what he is saying.

Just by the nature of their responsibility to call balls and strikes, umpires are directly behind catchers and peering over catchers' shoulders. Within that close contact it's not uncommon — at least not in the past — for umpires to put their hands on crouching catchers. There is also the back-and-forth

talk between them at times about those calls, though that is rarely face-to-face.

Some plate umpires are expected to wear their own face coverings. In addition, umpires have been given plastic shields to go over the bottom of their masks. That could reduce contact and droplets, but there might be some concern about those shields fogging up.

About 10 Major League Baseball umpires have opted out of working games this season because of concerns about the coronavirus.

Umpires are being tested regularly for the coronavirus, like players, managers, coaches and other essential staff members have to be so they can be on the field.

Kurt Suzuki, catcher for the World Series champion Washington Nationals, said it would be "really tough" for him to wear a medical mask when behind the plate, although he would like to do that.

"But we have good protocols, good testing. Everybody who's here shows up negative, so that's kind of where we're at right now," Suzuki said. "We're all in this together. We have to follow the rules if we want to make this work."

Betts, Dodgers agree on huge deal

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Even before Mookie Betts played his first game in Dodger Blue, the superstar outfielder decided his future is in Los Angeles.

Betts and the Dodgers have struck baseball's first big-money deal since the coronavirus pandemic decimated the sport's economics, with Betts agreeing Wednesday to a \$365 million, 12-year contract through 2032 on the eve of opening day.

The massive agreement removes the top offensive player from next offseason's free-agent class and puts the longtime Boston Red Sox slugger in the middle of LA's lineup for what he thinks will

be the rest of his career. The Dodgers only acquired Betts in a trade Feb. 10, but he eagerly bypassed the uncertainties of free agency for a secure future with an organization that already feels like home.

"I just love being here," Betts said in a video conference call from Dodger Stadium, where he will make his Dodgers debut Thursday against San Francisco. "I love everything about here. I'm here to win some rings and bring championships back to LA. That's all I'm focused on."

Betts' new deal is baseball's second-largest in total dollars behind the \$426.5 million, 12-year contract for Los Angeles Angels outfielder Mike Trout covering 2019-30.

NHL shuts down injury disclosures

Associated Press

Jakub Voracek thinks it's none of your business.

When the Philadelphia Flyers winger missed practice over the weekend, no injury, illness or other reason was given. That is the NHL's mandatory rule during the pandemic, adding another layer of secrecy to a sport already infamous for disclosing — at most — vague “upper body” and “lower body” injuries.

“I know we are in a different situation than normal people, but on the other hand, it's our health,” Voracek said. “We deserve to have some privacy as well, especially in times like that.”

“Unfit to participate” has become the new catch-all term since training camps opened July 13 ahead of the Aug. 1 resumption of the season. The league has prohibited teams from disclosing whether a player is injured, ill, potentially exposed to the coronavirus or simply waiting for a test result.

Saying nothing leads to speculation when prominent players like Pittsburgh captain Sidney Crosby or Chicago goaltender Corey Crawford are missing from practice. But it's not going to change. Deputy NHL Commissioner Bill Daly said that other than leaguewide testing results, individual player status won't be revealed “for purposes of making the system work.”

“I think there's positives to it and negatives,” Chicago coach Jeremy Colliton said Tuesday. “Instead of having to guess or make a statement that turns out not to be true, it's just like, ‘He's not available.’ And that's how it is.”

Major League Baseball has a similar policy for medical privacy during its 60-game regular season, even when players are put on the injured list.

No such list exists for the NHL as it goes directly into a 24-team playoff, and there is currently no plan to advise gamblers, daily fantasy players or fans of a player's availability — even without reason — on game day. Of course, not disclosing injuries in

the NHL playoffs is just a rite of spring or, in this case, summer and fall.

“I'm fine with it,” said Dan Hamhuis, a 37-year-old Nashville defenseman. “It's never been a big deal for me to know what the other team's injuries are. If they mention a certain body part of a player, it's not like we're going to go attack that. We're playing against them anyway. Privacy's nice to have when you're dealing with different health issues, especially this time with the coronavirus.”

The league's hope is the virus won't infiltrate its two quarantined hubs in Toronto and Edmonton, Alberta, where all games will be held. One of the biggest concerns shared by players, coaches and executives is just getting through two weeks of training camp with players going home to their families from the rink.

Players, coaches and staff are tested every other day now, and that will be increased to daily once they get to Toronto or Edmonton.

NCAA oversight committee asks board for time

Associated Press

The NCAA football oversight committee is asking the association's Board of Governors to avoid making a decision soon on whether to conduct fall championships as college sports tries to find a path to play through the pandemic.

A letter dated July 21 was sent by committee chairman Shane Lyons, the West Virginia athletic director, to the board before it meets Friday. The letter was obtained Wednesday by The Associated Press and first reported on by Yahoo Sports.

“We acknowledge that the path forward will be challenging, and that the virus may ultimately dictate outcomes,” the letter says. “We are simply requesting that the Board of Governors not make an immediate decision on the outcome of fall championships, so that conferences and schools may have ample latitude to continue to evaluate the viability of playing football this fall.”

College sports leaders have warned if conditions across the

country did not improve, football and other fall sports will be in jeopardy.

“I get asked every day if college sports will return this fall. The consensus opinion among our health advisers is significant change must occur for that to happen,” NCAA President Mark Emmert said Wednesday while testifying during a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing mainly focused on how to allow college athletes to earn money from their names, images and likenesses.

The board is the NCAA's highest-ranking governing body, comprised mostly of university presidents representing all three divisions of its nearly 1,300 member schools. Its next official meeting is scheduled for Aug. 4 and Friday's session is ad hoc.

The board has the power to call off NCAA championship events in fall sports such as soccer, women's volleyball and lower-division football, including the second tier of Division I known as the Championship

Subdivision.

Five FCS conferences have already postponed their football seasons, though among them the Ivy League, Southwestern Athletic Conference and Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference do not participate in the playoffs.

The NCAA has no authority to postpone or cancel specific seasons, a decision that would be up to individual schools or their conferences. But canceling or postponing NCAA championships could increase pressure for conferences to call off sports — including at the top-tier of college football, where Bowl Subdivision conferences are weighing options.

“While experience has shown that the impact of the virus can shift dramatically from week to week, the committee strongly believes that a patient approach to evaluating the possibility of conducting 2020 fall championships will provide the remaining conferences and schools the best opportunity to make deliberate decisions about con-

ducting practices and competition this fall,” the oversight committee wrote.

The FBS conferences control major college football's post-season, with dozens of bowl games and the four-team College Football Playoff to determine a champion. The NCAA has no role.

The FBS season is scheduled to start around the Labor Day weekend. The prospects of that seem to be dimming after COVID-19 cases surged over the last three weeks in many states.

At the hearing, Emmert also said he is “categorically opposed” to liability waivers some schools have had athletes sign as the return to campus to prepare for their sports seasons.

“It is an inappropriate thing for schools to be doing,” he said.

The Big Ten and Pac-12 have already announced they will play only conference games this season as a way to manage anticipated disruptions from the spread of COVID-19.