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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Esper breaks with Trump on use of military

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Mark Esper on Wednesday said he does not support the use of active-duty troops to quash the violence that has stemmed from protests in many U.S. cities over police brutality and racism.

“The option to use active-duty forces in a law enforcement role should only be used as a matter of last resort and only in the most urgent and dire of situations. We are not in one of those situations now,” Esper said during a Pentagon news briefing. “I do not support invoking the Insurrection Act.”

Esper’s statement came as he faced mounting criticism over his role Monday alongside President Donald Trump, who demanded governors take a strong stance against violent demonstrators and vowed to use the military to crack down on the protests if they did not. In comments to those state leaders and later in a Rose Garden address to the nation, Trump hinted at invoking the

Insurrection Act, a rarely used statute that would allow him to deploy federal troops to conduct certain domestic law enforcement duties.

At Trump’s request, Esper ordered the short-notice deployment this week of some 1,600 active-duty troops to the Washington, D.C., area. Officials said those forces remain at military installations outside the city, where Pentagon officials hope they will stay until civil unrest in the area calms.

Esper has faced criticism in recent days — including from several former top military officials and Democratic lawmakers — for his assertion to the governors that they must “dominate the battle space,” in reference to American streets where violence had broken out. The defense secretary was also criticized for his appearance in an apparently politically motivated photo opportunity alongside Trump later that day.

In his Wednesday morning news briefing, Esper told reporters that he takes his charge seriously to maintain the apolitical nature of the Defense

Department. He said he did not know the photo opportunity would be staged when he joined Trump and other top administration officials — including Army Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff — on the walk from the White House to nearby St. John’s Church, where the president posed for photographs with a bible in his hand after protesters had been cleared from the area by force.

“I did know we were going to the church,” said Esper, who added he also planned to visit with National Guard troops on the way. “I was not aware a photo op was happening.

“Look, I do everything I can to try to stay apolitical and to try to stay out of situations that may appear political. Sometimes I am successful at doing that and sometimes I’m not as successful. But my aim is to keep the department out of politics, to stay apolitical.”

Of his use of the term “battle space” in the call with governors, which was leaked to the media, Esper said “in retrospect” he should not have used

the term. He told reporters that it was simply a “part of our military lexicon” to describe an area of operations.

“It’s not a phrase focused on people, and certainly not on our fellow Americans,” he said.

Among those critical of Esper’s use of those words were a former Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman and a former U.S. Special Operations Command chief.

In separate posts on Twitter, retired Army Gens. Martin Dempsey and Tony Thomas expressed their dismay at the defense secretary’s wording.

“The ‘battle space’ of America??? Not what America needs to hear ... ever, unless we are invaded by an adversary or experience a constitutional failure ... i.e. a civil war ...” wrote Thomas, who served as SOCOM commander from 2016 until retiring last year.

Dempsey, who served as the nation’s top general from 2011 to 2015, wrote: “America is not a battleground. Our fellow citizens are not the enemy.”

Some USS Carter Hall crew members positive for virus

By WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

Some crew members from the dock landing ship USS Carter Hall have been in isolation since late last month after testing positive for the coronavirus.

“From my understanding, they’re all doing well, some minorly symptomatic,” Navy spokesperson Lt. Cmdr. Amelia Umayam said Tuesday.

She declined to specify the exact number of crew members who tested positive May 23, citing Defense Department policy

restricting disclosure.

The ship is docked at Joint Expeditionary Port Little Creek-Fort Story, Va. The 610-foot-long ship is used to transport and launch amphibious craft during an assault or for delivery of humanitarian assistance during natural disasters.

“Traditionally, as we enter hurricane season between June and November here on the East Coast, we identify an East Coast amphibious ship to be ready should something occur and we have to provide an asset for various type situations,” she said.

“That’s essentially the reason why the Carter Hall crew was tested, and that’s how the positive test results came about.”

The Navy did not publicize the discovery of the coronavirus aboard the Carter Hall, which was first reported Monday by the Navy Times.

The Navy reported 816 active COVID-19 cases among all its active-duty personnel as of Tuesday, with two hospitalized. One sailor who had been assigned to the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt died in April in Guam.

Two other Navy ships have had publicly known outbreaks of COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus.

The guided missile destroyer USS Kidd has been docked in San Diego since April 28 after an outbreak of COVID-19 infected at least 80 of the ship’s 330 crew members.

A fighter squadron of more than 100 members was pulled from the carrier USS Gerald R. Ford just as it was poised to get underway late last month after one of them tested positive for the virus.

US, S. Korea reach deal to fund local base employees

BY KIM GAMEL
AND YOO KYONG CHANG
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — The United States and South Korea agreed to a \$200 million stop-gap measure allowing more than 4,000 local base employees to return to work after months of unpaid leave, despite the allies' failure to reach a broader defense cost-sharing deal.

The Pentagon said Wednesday that it has accepted Seoul's proposal to fund the labor costs for all South Korean employees of U.S. Forces Korea through the end of this year amid stalled talks on reaching a new contract known as the Special Measures Agreement.

"This decision effectively ends the partial furlough," USFK commander Gen. Robert Abrams said in a separate statement. "We expect our entire workforce to return back to USFK within the next few weeks."

The South Korean government, which has long suggested that the two sides settle the labor issue first, welcomed the

decision. "South Korea and the U.S. will make efforts to seal a defense cost-sharing deal as soon as possible," the foreign ministry said.

The previous Special Measures Agreement expired Dec. 31 as the longtime allies deadlocked over U.S. demands that South Korea sharply increase the amount it pays to offset the costs for stationing some 28,500 American troops in the country.

USFK used programmed funds to keep South Korean employees at work for the first three months of the year but said those ran out on March 31, forcing the unprecedented furlough of half its local workforce.

Pak Song Chin, 54, who worked at the motor pool on Camp Humphreys, said he and many other furloughed workers found themselves ineligible for government loans and have been trying to make a living with part-time jobs.

"We have been going through a pretty tough time," he said in a telephone interview. "We're ready to get back to work."

Cho Mi Kyong, a 45-year-old

dining facility worker, agreed, saying the furlough has caused much emotional distress and financial hardship.

"Many of us were living hand to mouth even before we were furloughed," she said. "Now we're happy to hear this news today."

The Pentagon had provided additional funds to maintain about 4,500 employees deemed essential for "life, health, safety and minimum readiness," as well as critical logistics contracts.

However, the furlough raised concerns about the military's ability to maintain fighting capabilities and the delivery of services, which already had been hampered by restrictions to prevent the coronavirus' spread.

"We all fully understood the impacts the partial furlough had on readiness and our ability to provide a robust combined defense posture, as well as the essential role our Korean National employees provide to the (South Korean)-U.S. alliance," Abrams said, acknowledging it's a temporary measure.

Accompanied tours to Qatar, Bahrain to be phased out

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

U.S. military personnel assigned to locations in Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula will transition to 12-month, unaccompanied tours over the next couple of years, the Pentagon announced Tuesday.

The change potentially pertains to military personnel under Combatant Command Title 10 authority who are on permanent duty assignment to Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen and Iraq, the Defense Department said in a news release.

However, only Bahrain and Qatar host military families under the Title 10 authority.

The policy change came as a result of DOD's "continuous reassessment of personnel policies worldwide, not just in the Middle East," it said in a factsheet accompanying the announcement.

"It is intended to ensure the operational readiness and deployment flexibility of U.S. forces' mission support to operations in the region," the factsheet said. "A gradual drawdown of personnel will ensure mission-critical elements of the force continue to execute training and operations in the region with little disruption."

The change will not affect the number or readiness of U.S. forces in the region, and is in "no way connected" to the coronavirus pandemic in the region or the United States, the Pentagon said.

The gradual drawdown of dependents will happen over two years as military members rotate out of the region. The change will be fully implemented by Aug. 31, 2022, the news release said. Families already in the two countries are authorized to serve out the remainder of their tours.

Women to integrate into Army's all-male teams

BY NANCY MONTGOMERY
Stars and Stripes

The Army will place enlisted female infantry and armor soldiers into its last nine all-male brigade combat teams after changing rules that required multiple women in unit leadership.

The service will integrate women into the BCTs over the rest of the year, Maj. Melissa Comiskey, chief of command policy for the Army's personnel office, said in a statement. Two other BCTs integrated women into their companies earlier

this year, she said.

The moves come after the Army changed "leaders first" rules enacted three years ago that required infantry and armor companies to have two female officers, or noncommissioned officers of the same job specialty, in each company that accepted junior enlisted women straight from initial-entry training.

A few female officers and NCOs chose to change their specialties and attend infantry or armor training, becoming the first leaders assigned to companies.

But the "inventory of infantry and armor women leaders is not as high as we have junior soldiers," Comiskey said in the statement. "And their training pipeline is longer."

The rule was relaxed last year to require one female infantry or armor leader in each company, along with another woman of any job specialty, such as a supply sergeant or signal NCO.

Now only one female officer or NCO will be required to be in companies that accept junior enlisted women, according to the statement.

More leaders condemn bigotry, violence

By JOSEPH DITZLER

Stars and Stripes

Air Force Chief of Staff David Goldfein on social media Tuesday endorsed a message of frustration the previous day by his service's top enlisted leader and promised action against bigotry and inequality in the service.

"It is time for every one of us to strive for understanding and a culture of inclusiveness and belonging across our Air Force," he wrote in a message posted on his Facebook page and Twitter account.

Goldfein also posted a 6-minute video "conversation" with Command Master Sgt. of the Air Force Kaleth O. Wright on both platforms.

Referring to a week of protest, riots and violence in U.S. cities following the killing in Minneapolis of a black man, George Floyd, by a police officer, Goldfein asked Wright his thoughts as he watched events unfold.

"So, I've been really outraged," Wright responded, "for not just the last week but it drew up a lot of rage and a lot of anger from the past because I've just watched this over and over again."

Wright in the video explained that he sees in Floyd's killing a potential fate for himself and his two sons.

"This has been a tough week for me, just kind of thinking about this," he told Goldfein. "My greatest fear is not for myself, it's that I wake up one day and one of our air-

men will be George Floyd or Tamir Rice or Philando Castile."

Rice, a 12-year-old boy, was shot to death by a police officer in Cleveland in November 2014; Castile was killed by a police officer in Minnesota during a July 2016 traffic stop.

In his written remarks, Goldfein said every American "should be outraged" that the police conduct in Minneapolis can still take place. He also shared Wright's message the previous day.

"To the Airmen who are mourning, angry or weary of the battle against racial prejudice, discrimination, bias and systemic discrimination, Chief Wright and I recognize your pain," the chief of staff wrote.

Nation's streets calmer after days of demonstrations

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — The nation's streets were calmer than they have been in days since the killing of George Floyd set off sometimes violent demonstrations over police brutality and injustice against African Americans.

Earlier curfews and efforts by protesters to contain the lawlessness were credited Wednesday morning with preventing more widespread damage to businesses in New York and other cities overnight.

At least 12 deaths have been reported, though the circumstances in many cases are still being sorted out.

In Washington, where authorities ordered people off streets before sundown, thousands of demonstrators massed a

block from the White House on Tuesday evening, following a crackdown a day earlier when officers drove peaceful protesters away from Lafayette Park to clear the way for President Donald Trump to do a photo op with a Bible at a church. A black chain-link fence was put up to block access to the park.

"Last night pushed me way over the edge," said Jessica DeMaio, 40, of Washington, who attended a Floyd protest for the first time. "Being here is better than being at home feeling helpless."

Pastors at the church prayed with demonstrators and handed out water bottles. The crowd remained in place after the city's 7 p.m. curfew passed, defying warnings that the response from law enforcement could be even more forceful. But the people were

peaceful, even polite.

At one point, the crowd booed when a protester climbed a light post and took down a street sign. A chant went up: "Peaceful protest!"

Pope Francis called for national reconciliation and peace, saying he has "witnessed with great concern the disturbing social unrest" in the U.S.

"My friends, we cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life," he said.

Trump has pushed the nation's governors to take a hard line against the violence, tweeting on Tuesday that "lowlifes and losers" were taking over New York's streets. He again tweeted Wednesday: "LAW & ORDER!"

London protesters decry racial abuses, police violence

Associated Press

LONDON — Thousands of people demonstrated in London on Wednesday against police violence and racial injustice following the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, which has set off days of unrest in the United States.

Chanting "Black lives matter," thousands gathered in Hyde Park, central London's biggest open space and a traditional protest venue. Many of them passed through bar-

riers at the park and marched through the streets, blocking traffic.

There were no signs of violence, although some sprayed graffiti on walls.

Some protesters converged on Parliament and the nearby office of Prime Minister Boris Johnson at 10 Downing St. Others headed south of the River Thames.

"Star Wars" actor John Boyega, who was born in Britain to Nigerian parents and grew up

in south London's Peckham neighborhood, pleaded tearfully for demonstrators to stay peaceful.

"Because they want us to mess up, they want us to be disorganized, but not today," he said.

Boyega recalled the case of Stephen Lawrence, an 18-year-old black man from southeast London who was stabbed to death in 1993 as he waited for a bus. The case against his attackers collapsed in 1996, and

a government report cited institutional racism on the part of the London police force as a key factor in its failure to thoroughly investigate the killing.

"Black lives have always mattered," Boyega said. "We have always been important. We have always meant something. We have always succeeded regardless and now is the time. I ain't waiting."

Police appeared to keep a low profile during the demonstration and the ensuing marches.

Trump seeks new state for GOP convention

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — President Donald Trump said he is seeking a new state to host this summer's Republican National Convention after North Carolina refused to guarantee the event could be held in Charlotte without public health restrictions to contain the coronavirus pandemic.

Trump announced the news via tweet Tuesday night, complaining that Gov. Roy Cooper, D-N.C., and other officials were not "allowing us to occupy the arena as originally anticipated and promised."

"Because of @NC_Governor, we are now forced to seek another State to host the 2020 Republican National Convention," he wrote.

Some convention business probably will take place in Charlotte, due to existing obligations. But Trump will not accept renomination in the city, according to one RNC official, who was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Trump and the RNC had demanded that the August convention be allowed to move forward with a full crowd and that participants not have to wear face coverings. Those demands raised concerns in a state that is facing an upward trend in its coronavirus cases, with about 29,900 cumulative cases and 900 deaths as of Tuesday. About 700 COVID-19 patients are hospitalized, and Charlotte's Mecklenburg County has

been a hot spot, with nearly 100 deaths.

"We have been committed to a safe RNC convention in North Carolina and it's unfortunate they never agreed to scale down and make changes to keep people safe," Cooper tweeted in response to Trump's announcement. "Protecting public health and safety during this pandemic is a priority."

A traditional GOP convention brings together roughly 2,500 delegates, the same number of alternate delegates and many times more guests, journalists and security personnel. Officials in both parties have been preparing contingency plans for months given the uncertainty and dangers posed by the virus and evolving restrictions on large gatherings.

Tourist towns face a decisive summer amid restrictions

Associated Press

CANNON BEACH, Ore. — As the coronavirus raced across America, this quaint seaside town did what would normally be unthinkable for a tourist destination.

Spooked by a deluge of visitors, the tiny Oregon community shooed people from its expansive beaches and shut down hundreds of hotels and vacation rentals overnight. Signs went up announcing that the vacation getaway 80 miles from Portland known for towering coastal rock formations was closed to tourists — no exceptions.

"It was unprecedented," said Patrick Nofield, whose hospitality company Escape Lodging owns four hotels in Cannon Beach and abruptly laid off more than 400 employees in March. "We really went into survival mode."

Now, with summer looming and coronavirus restrictions lifting, the choices fac-

ing Cannon Beach are emblematic of those confronting thousands of other small, tourist-dependent towns nationwide that are struggling to balance their residents' fears of contagion with economic survival. It's a make-or-break summer in these vacation spots — and the future is still terrifyingly unclear.

"How do you regulate people inundating your town on a day-to-day basis?" Nofield said. "One of the great things about Oregon is our beaches are free to all. We don't want to take away people's rights, but how do we manage it and still stay safe? That's the thing."

Answering that question is especially critical for small, rural towns like Cannon Beach, which are too far from major cities to benefit from their economies and remote enough that they worry about medical care should infections spike again.

Clatsop County, which is home to Cannon Beach and other small coastal towns, has just 45 confirmed cases of the coronavirus so far. But Portland — Oregon's largest city — is less than two hours away and saw its hospitals overwhelmed with COVID-19 patients during the pandemic's peak. Hundreds of tourists also come to Cannon Beach from Seattle, where the virus first took hold in the U.S.

The nation has reported more than 106,000 coronavirus deaths, nearly a third of the worldwide total of over 378,000, according to a tally kept by Johns Hopkins University.

The annual influx of visitors is a concern for this tight-knit community, best known for the iconic coastal formation Haystack Rock and where a large percentage of its 1,700 year-round residents are older and more susceptible to COVID-19.

Wuhan tests 10M people for virus, finds few infections

Associated Press

BEIJING — The Chinese city of Wuhan, where the coronavirus was first detected late last year, has tested nearly 10 million people in an unprecedented 19-day campaign to check an entire city.

It identified just 300 positive cases, all of whom had no symptoms. The city found no infections among 1,174 close contacts of the people who tested positive, suggesting they were not spreading it easily to others.

That is a potentially encouraging development because of widespread concern that infected people without symptoms

could be silent spreaders of the disease.

"It not only makes the people of Wuhan feel at ease, it also increases people's confidence in all of China," Feng Zijian, vice director of China's Center for Disease Control and Prevention, told state broadcaster CCTV.

There is no definitive answer yet on the level of risk posed by asymptomatic cases, with anecdotal evidence and studies to date producing conflicting answers.

Wuhan was by far the hardest hit city in China, accounting for more than 80% of the country's deaths, according to government figures.

A city official announced Tuesday that the city completed 9.9 million tests from May 14 to June 1. If those tested previously are included, virtually everyone above the age of 5 in the city of 11 million people has been tested, said Li Lanjuan, a member of a National Health Commission expert team.

The campaign was launched after a small cluster of cases was found in a residential compound, sparking concern about a possible second wave of infections as Wuhan emerged from a 2½ month lockdown.

The rapid testing of so many people was made possible in part through batch testing, Xinhua reported.

Biden closer to nomination after primaries

Associated Press

Joe Biden is on the cusp of formally securing the Democratic presidential nomination after winning hundreds more delegates in primary contests that tested the nation's ability to run elections while balancing a pandemic and sweeping social unrest.

Biden could lock down the nomination within the next week as West Virginia and Georgia hold primaries.

On Tuesday, voters across America were forced to navigate curfews, health concerns and National Guard troops — waiting in line hours after polls closed in some cases — after election officials dramatically reduced the number of in-person voting sites to minimize the spread of the coronavirus outbreak.

Biden and President Donald Trump easily swept their respective primary contests

that ranged from Maryland to Montana and featured the night's biggest prize: Pennsylvania. The two men are certain to face each other on the presidential ballot in November, yet party rules require them first to accumulate a majority of delegates in the monthslong state-by-state primary season.

Trump secured the Republican presidential nomination in March.

Pennsylvania, which offered Tuesday's largest trove of delegates, also represented a significant test case for Republicans and Democrats working to strengthen their operations in a premier general election battleground.

Voters were forced to brave long lines in "militarized zones" because officials consolidated the vast majority of polling places in Philadelphia to minimize health risks, according to Erin Kramer, executive direc-

tor of One Pennsylvania. She noted that some polling places in African American communities are in police stations.

"Having to stand in line while police officers are entering and exiting the building on police business is not exactly how people want to spend their Election Day," Kramer said.

Biden was in Philadelphia earlier Tuesday to deliver remarks about the civil unrest that has erupted across the nation after the police killing of George Floyd. He didn't talk about the primary, instead focusing his attention on Trump, whom Biden blasted as "more interested in power than in principle."

Party unity was an afterthought this week, however, as more immediate health and safety concerns dominated the national conversation. The coronavirus death toll has surged past 100,000 nationwide,

and thousands of new cases are reported each day.

At the same time, several major cities, particularly Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia among those voting Tuesday, struggled to contain protests and related looting that led to thousands of arrests.

Some voters said that Trump's increasingly tough tone toward protesters inspired them to participate in the democratic process. Nicholas Autiello, who works in finance in Rhode Island, said that he was disturbed by police driving back peaceful demonstrators near the White House on Monday.

"Last night, we have a president who is acting like a dictator," Autiello said. "So being able to come out here this morning and fill in a circle next to a name for someone who I know will restore honor and decency to the presidency was so important."

Germany wants extremists out of military faster

Associated Press

BERLIN — The German government has agreed on a bill that would speed up the dismissal of soldiers involved in extremism or serious crimes.

Current military rules mean that soldiers who have served for more than four years can only be kicked out after they

have been convicted of a crime or removed as part of a court-ordered disciplinary procedure. In practice, this can mean that soldiers remain in the military for years until they are removed.

The bill proposed Wednesday by Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer allows the military to swiftly expel

soldiers if their continued presence would "seriously threaten the military order or the reputation of the Bundeswehr" and they have served fewer than eight years.

German officials have expressed alarm over the recent discovery of far-right extremists in the military, including

a member of the special forces unit KSK who had hoarded weapons, ammunition and explosives at home. Last month, the head of the unit, Brig. Gen. Markus Kreitmayr, told soldiers that he wouldn't tolerate extremism in the ranks.

The bill still needs to be passed by parliament.

100K evacuated in India as cyclone hits near Mumbai

Associated Press

MUMBAI, India — The first cyclone in more than a century to hit India's financial capital of Mumbai appeared to have largely spared the metropolis Wednesday.

No deaths or major damages were reported as workers began clearing fallen trees and other debris from affected areas along India's western coastline.

In the state capital, Mumbai, home to Bollywood, India's largest stock exchange and more than 18 million residents, high winds whipped skyscrapers and ripped apart shanties near the beach.

About 10,000 city residents were evacuated from their homes, municipal officials said. With powerful storms a rarity, there were no cyclone shelters, and many of the city's large and sturdy buildings have already

been converted into coronavirus isolation or treatment facilities, National Disaster Response Force spokesman Krishan Kumar said.

In the hours before the storm, drivers and peddlers deserted Mumbai's iconic Marine Drive, fishermen yanked their nets out of the wavy Arabian Sea and police shooed people away from beaches.

About 100,000 people were evacuated from low-lying areas

in Maharashtra and neighboring Gujarat. Both states, already among the hardest hit by the coronavirus pandemic, activated their disaster response teams, fearing extensive flooding.

Nisarga brought heavy rain and sustained winds of 62 to 68 miles per hour through Wednesday afternoon after slamming ashore near the city of Alibag, about 60 miles south of Mumbai, officials said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman finds gators fighting by her home

FL FORT MYERS — A woman going to get her morning coffee was jolted awake with pounding on her front door that she later discovered to be two alligators fighting in front of her home.

The video of the encounter in Fort Myers was posted on Facebook by Susan Geshel. When she first saw the reptiles, Geshel told The Fort Myers News-Press that one of the alligators had his snout pinned on her door while the other was stationed at a distance with its snout wide open.

After about 20 minutes by her house, the alligators went in separate directions.

Report: Gallons of raw sewage leaked into river

MS JACKSON — Nearly half a billion gallons of raw sewage leaked into the Pearl River in the first three months of 2020, according to a quarterly report released by the city of Jackson.

Now, an organization focused on clean water is urging city and state leaders to issue a new advisory on the contents of the water, news outlets reported.

The Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality issued a water content advisory last year, which is still online. But, Pearl Riverkeeper executive director Abby Braman said the public should be reminded.

Official: Time to end Confederate holiday

AL MONTGOMERY — An Alabama congresswoman said it is time to end a state holiday celebrating the president of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis.

Congresswoman Terri

Sewell's comments, made on social media, came amid protests in Alabama and elsewhere over the death of an African American man, George Floyd, at the hands of police in Minneapolis.

Alabama has three state holidays celebrating the old Confederacy. Davis' birthday is marked in June, and the state simultaneously celebrates Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee with civil rights icon Martin Luther King Jr. in February. The state also marks Confederate Memorial Day in April.

Medical marijuana sales keep smashing records

OK OKLAHOMA CITY — Sales of medical marijuana in Oklahoma topped \$73 million last month, the highest monthly total yet, the Oklahoma Tax Commission reported.

The data shows May sales generated more than \$11.6 million in tax revenue, including \$6.5 million in state and local taxes and another \$5.1 million from the marijuana excise tax.

The medical marijuana business has been booming in Oklahoma since voters approved a citizen-led initiative petition in 2018 that made it easy and relatively inexpensive for patients, dispensaries and growers to obtain a license.

Once-massive brush fire now mostly contained

AZ CAVE CREEK — A brush fire in the town of Cave Creek that grew to 1.4 square miles now is mostly contained and evacuation orders were lifted, authorities said.

Arizona State Forestry officials said the fire was believed to be human-caused, and some 500 homes were evacuated involving about 1,000 residents.

Authorities said the brush fire destroyed 20 structures in-

cluding eight homes.

State Forestry officials said the fire was fueled by triple-digit temperatures, dry vegetation and wind gusts.

ACLU sues city over arrest of girl, 13

RI PROVIDENCE — The American Civil Liberties Union of Rhode Island sued the city of Pawtucket and two city school officials over the arrest last year of a 13-year-old girl after a scuffle with another student.

The girl's constitutional and statutory rights were violated when she was arrested an hour after the scuffle last June by a school resource officer with the consent of the Goff Middle School principal, the ACLU said in a statement.

The girl, an honors student with no prior disciplinary issues, was handcuffed, taken to the police station, and kept in a cell for close to an hour before being released to her mother, the ACLU said. A disorderly conduct charge was eventually dropped.

The federal suit seeks punitive damages.

With snow gone, highway opens for summer

WY JACKSON — The Beartooth Highway connecting Yellowstone National Park with Red Lodge, Mont., has opened for the season, officials said.

The Wyoming section was cleared for summer travel May 29, connecting with the opened Montana portion of the road, The Jackson Hole News & Guide reported.

The 68-mile road beginning at the park's northeast entrance is typically closed from October through April or May as a result of snow.

The Montana Department

of Transportation cleared the Montana side by May 22 only to temporarily close it due to blizzard conditions at the summit that deposited new snow.

Semi-automatic guns stolen from pawn shop

MO AFFTON — St. Louis County police are investigating the theft of nearly three dozen guns from a pawn shop, all of them semi-automatic weapons.

Officers responded to an alarm at Southside Pawn and Jewelry in Affton and found that windows had been shattered.

Police spokesman Benjamin Granda said that the business operators determined that 34 firearms were stolen — 32 semi-automatic handguns and two semi-automatic rifles.

At least six vehicles were involved in the burglary, with at least 10 suspects, Granda said. No arrests have been made.

Fire damages building at historic plantation

NC DURHAM — A nearly morning fire damaged a building at Stagville, a state historic site that includes remnants of one of the largest plantations in North Carolina.

The site is part of the former Bennehan-Cameron family plantation. It offers educational programs about the lives and work of the approximately 900 enslaved people who worked the land there, according to the official website.

According to the site's Facebook page, Stagville has reopened to the public for tours of the grounds and outdoor spaces. The buildings — including original slave quarters, a massive barn and a Bennehan family house — remain closed to the public.

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NFL: Camps will be at home facilities

Associated Press

All 32 NFL teams have been told by Commissioner Roger Goodell to hold training camps at their home facilities this summer because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most NFL teams stay at their training complexes year-round, but Dallas, Pittsburgh, Kansas City, Buffalo, Indianapolis, Carolina, Washington and the Los Angeles Rams are among those that stage portions of training camp elsewhere.

“The league’s decision was made based on the medical assessment of current risk factors and in consideration for the health and safety of players and football staffs,” the Colts said in a release.

Goodell also ordered no joint practices for teams, something that had become increasingly popular in recent summers.

“We believe that each of these steps will enhance our ability to protect the health and safety of players and your football staffs and are consistent with a sound approach to risk management in the current environment,” Goodell said in the memo sent to teams.

The Cowboys and Steelers are scheduled for the Hall of Fame game in Canton, Ohio, on Aug. 6 and will be the first two teams to report in late July. Dallas usually trains in Oxnard, Calif., and Pittsburgh in nearby Latrobe, Pa.

The Cowboys have never held their entire preseason at home. The Steelers have trained at St. Vincent College in Latrobe for more than a half-century.

The league has canceled all in-person workouts at team facilities, which only in the past two weeks have begun opening

on a limited basis. No coaches nor players other than those undergoing medical treatment and rehabilitation have been allowed in those facilities.

Soon, the NFL is hopeful of having club complexes fully open, but under strict medical guidelines including social distancing protocols.

One team in something of a limbo: the Raiders. Their move to Las Vegas has been complicated by the pandemic, of course. They had been working out of their Oakland-area complex in Alameda, and had been planning to hold training camp as usual in Napa, about one hour north of the Bay Area. But they could decide to move it to their new facility in Henderson, Nev.

The Bills have gone to St. John Fisher College outside of Rochester, N.Y., since 2000,

though they have decreased the time they’ve spent away for camp in recent years under coach Sean McDermott.

The Bills have expanded practice facilities at and around their headquarters, and last year unveiled a new training facility/weight room featuring state-of-the-art equipment and costing about \$18 million as an addition to their headquarters.

Carolina has spent all 25 previous training camps at Wofford College in Spartanburg, S.C., about 90 minutes from Charlotte. Wofford was former owner Jerry Richardson’s alma mater.

One team that usually traveled for training camp, the Bears, previously announced they would not be going to Olivet Nazarene University in Bourbonnais, Ill., where they spent the past 18 years.

Pressure will force league to play games

Associated Press

Call it support. Call it pressure. However you describe it, the NFL is going to get it regarding playing games on schedule.

And barring a setback in the reopening of America during the coronavirus pandemic, the show will go on.

Wisely, the NFL has taken baby steps toward some sort of normalcy. It has moved slowly in allowing a small number of team personnel to return to club facilities. It essentially has barred travel by team and league personnel, while able to remotely conduct the business of the sport: free agency, the draft, owners meetings.

Conducting offseason workout programs virtually isn’t ideal, but it’s been worthwhile.

The NFL’s medical staff, in conjunction with health officials across the nation, has taken a safety-first approach that, so far, has served the league well.

“I think the basis of it is medical and what the medical community is telling us,” says Troy Vincent, the league’s executive vice president of football operations. “We’ve got to get this right. And we are coming out of phase one and going into phase two, and we have to show the general public and the players that our protocols and our proce-

dures, we can’t miss, we can’t fail.

“We are really taking a responsible approach on a daily basis; it is changing daily. I would say that was the route of why the pause, because we are still learning, and we must get it right.”

But the big questions are coming. From broadcast partners. From municipal governments and even higher. From sponsors. From players. From fans.

And yes, from within, particularly from some owners who, like it or not, are bottom-line guys.

As contingency plans are made for playing in empty stadiums, or pushing back the schedule — and the Super Bowl, perhaps even beyond February — or even for games at neutral sites, rest assured the NFL has no plans to not play.

Major League Baseball’s season and staging the Stanley Cup playoffs remain uncertain endeavors, mired in either monetary discontent or logistical morasses. At least the NFL has had time on its side so far, but a Sept. 10 launch for the regular season isn’t that far away.

The television networks couldn’t be more invested in getting pro football onto their airwaves.

Live sports programming is now being looked at almost as essential rather than

simply as entertainment. That’s where the NFL is king — and nothing else in sports comes close.

Same thing on local levels, where team radio deals are particularly lucrative, and advertisers reach a segmented audience they covet.

With much of the nation reopening businesses that benefit from the NFL playing in their communities, there will be increasing anxiety in those municipalities that those games occur.

Even if fans are barred or limited in stadiums, sports bars and restaurants that cater to the fans could be open, hopefully obeying social distancing protocols.

Those fans, and particularly the ones who engage in fantasy football or bet directly on games, figure to be the most supportive group of all to have the NFL stick to its plans as much as reasonably possible.

While players must insist on the healthiest environment for a return to practicing and, eventually, to playing, it’s difficult to believe a vast majority of them even consider the possibility of no 2020 season. NFL careers are shorter than in any other team sport, and spending basically 20 months away from on-field action for so many could be devastating.

Source: NBA shows players restart plan

Associated Press

The NBA has told the National Basketball Players Association that it will present a 22-team plan for restarting the season to the league's board of governors on Thursday, a person with knowledge of the situation said.

The teams that will be going to the ESPN Wide World Of Sports complex on the Disney campus near Orlando, Fla. would play eight games to determine playoff seeding starting around July 31 before the postseason begins, according to the person who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity on Wednesday because the league has not released its proposal publicly.

The plan, if approved, would have 13 Western Conference teams and nine Eastern Conference teams going to Disney and the cutoff being that teams must be within six games of a playoff spot at this point. Playoffs would start in August, and the NBA Finals will likely stretch into October, the person said.

The Milwaukee Bucks, Los Angeles Lakers, Toronto Raptors and Boston Celtics already have clinched playoff spots — and, if

only eight games are left, that would mean the Miami Heat, Indiana Pacers, Philadelphia 76ers, Los Angeles Clippers, Denver Nuggets, Utah Jazz, Oklahoma City Thunder and Houston Rockets would theoretically have clinched spots as well.

The Dallas Mavericks would be virtually assured of clinching a West spot, holding a seven-game lead over eighth-place Memphis. So that would mean the Grizzlies, Portland, New Orleans, Sacramento, San Antonio and Phoenix all would be in the running for the No. 8 seed out West. In the East, Washington is six games behind No. 7 Brooklyn and 5½ games behind No. 8 Orlando — so within range of triggering a play-in series.

For a play-in series to happen to determine the No. 8 seed on either playoff bracket, the ninth-place team would have to be within four games of eighth place. If a play-in series occurs, it would basically be a best-of-two — where the No. 9 seed would have to win two head-to-head matchups to take over the No. 8 spot.

There would also be some jostling for playoff positioning happening in the eight-game restart. In the East, Toronto and Bos-

ton are separated by three games for the No. 2 spot and Miami, Indiana and Philadelphia are separated by two games for the No. 4 spot. Out West, the Clippers, Denver, Utah, Oklahoma City and Houston are all within four games of one another in the race for the No. 2 seed on that bracket.

There are still some elements of the restart plan that could be changed, and other matters are still being negotiated — such as how much of a percentage of their salaries that players will lose because some regular-season games will be canceled. If 15% of the regular season is not played, which would be the current estimate based on the proposal, players would have to give up roughly \$610 million in salary this season.

It's also unclear what will happen to the eight teams that would not be vying for a postseason berth under the proposed format — Charlotte, Chicago, Atlanta, Detroit, New York, Cleveland, Minnesota and Golden State. If the 2020-21 NBA season doesn't start until December at the earliest, those teams could go about nine months without playing games and some have concerns over what that will mean for player development.

Stevens: Empathy more important now than hoops

Associated Press

BOSTON — Celtics coach Brad Stevens said he believes the best way he can be helpful to his players right now is by listening to them.

Boston players including Jaylen Brown, Marcus Smart, Enes Kanter and Vincent Poirier have been among several NBA players to participate in recent protests following the death of George Floyd, a black man who died in Minneapolis last month after a white police officer pressed his knee into Floyd's neck.

Demonstrations have taken place in cities around the country in response to the incident, which was captured in a widely seen video that has mobilized protesters. A medical examiner ruled Monday that Floyd's heart stopped as police restrained him.

It all prompted Stevens to

write a letter to his players over the weekend in which he expressed his support for them.

"I think the thing that I wanted them to know is that every decent person is hurting," Stevens said Tuesday. "Every decent person feels the pain of the African American community. But I also don't want to pretend like I know the exact, distinct pain. So what I wanted them to know is that I'm with them."

The Celtics were among several professional sports teams to issue statements in the aftermath of Floyd's death, saying in part that it and other similar incidents "have left the entire Celtics organization struggling with grief and anger."

The resulting national dialogue has reminded Stevens of the discussions he had with players prior to the 2016-17 season during Colin Kaepernick's protests when he took a knee during the national anthem.

WNBA has 2 options for central playing location

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Two people familiar with the situation say the WNBA plans to hold games at just one location if there is a season this year and that the MGM Resorts in Las Vegas and the IMG Academy in Florida are the top candidates.

There is still no date when the 2020 season will tip off.

The people spoke on condition of anonymity because the possible locations haven't been publicly announced. WNBA Commissioner Cathy Engelbert said last month that the league was considering a handful of scenarios that included playing at one or two sites.

Details of the logistics of how the league and its 12 teams would operate at either location remain unclear.

Engelbert said again Tuesday that the league has talked about a number of options, but

declined to confirm whether IMG Academy or MGM topped the list of possible destinations.

"We're looking at the pros and cons of a number of different locations," Engelbert said.

The commissioner reiterated that health and safety of the players and teams was a top priority.

The league postponed the start of its season in April because of the coronavirus pandemic. The WNBA was supposed to begin play on May 15.

If the league goes with MGM Resorts it would have a few options of where the games could be held, but one would likely be ruled out: Mandalay Bay. That is the home court of the Las Vegas Aces, who are owned by MGM Resorts. The league wouldn't want to give the Aces even more of a competitive advantage.