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Former Roosevelt chief will not get job back

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Capt. Brett Crozier, the former commander of the USS Theodore Roosevelt, will not be reinstated and the promotion of his senior officer will be delayed following a Navy investigation into the coronavirus outbreak aboard the aircraft carrier that left the ship docked in Guam for nearly two months, Adm. Michael Gilday, chief of naval operations, said Friday.

“Both failed to tackle the problem head on and to take charge. And in a number of instances, they placed crew comfort in front of crew safety,” Gilday said about the investigation’s findings during a news briefing at the Pentagon.

The decision is a result of the Navy’s second investigation into the service’s response to the outbreak aboard the Roosevelt and the conduct of Crozier after the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier arrived in Guam on March 27 as the virus spread among the ship’s crew of more than 4,800 sailors, eventually infecting 1,273 sailors and killing one on April 13.

Navy Secretary Kenneth Braithwaite and Gilday discussed the investigation’s results at the Pentagon on Friday afternoon. Defense Secretary Mark Esper was also briefed earlier in the day on the findings and supported the Navy’s decisions, according to a statement by Jonathan Hoffman, the chief Pentagon spokesman.

The investigation found Crozier’s actions did not meet the expectations of command, Gilday’s memorandum about the investigation states. He did not forcefully or quickly act on the best plans available to him or communicate through his chain of command his concerns despite a number of opportunities. Crozier also did not ensure that he understood all the facts regarding the situation or include important members of his command in an email chain expressing his concerns.

Gilday’s memo also recommended the events regarding the Roosevelt be used as a case study to “identify, analyze, and publish lessons learned regarding the importance of clear, forthright, appropriate communication during crisis action planning and crisis response.”

The House Armed Services Committee is also launching an investigation into the coronavirus outbreak aboard the Roosevelt “in order to better understand the full range

‘Had I known then what I know today, I would have not made that recommendation to reinstate Capt. Crozier.’

Adm. Michael Gilday
chief of naval operations

of mistakes that were made throughout the entire chain of command,” including civilian leadership, Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., the chairman of the committee, announced Friday after the release of the Navy investigation.

Crozier was relieved of his command April 2 by former acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly after a letter the captain wrote detailing his concerns about controlling the coronavirus outbreak and requesting the crew be evacuated from the ship was leaked to the media. At the time Crozier was fired, more than 100 Roosevelt sailors had tested positive for the virus.

In a preliminary investigation in April, Navy leaders had recommended Crozier be reinstated to his command, Gilday said Friday.

Based on the limited scope of that investigation, which looked into why Crozier sent the email and the justification for firing him, Gilday said he believed at the time that the facts did not warrant Crozier being fired.

But former acting Navy Secretary James McPherson requested another investigation April 29 after the initial report left him with “unanswered questions” and Esper had requested more time to review the report.

With the second investigation, Gilday said it was Crozier’s actions in response to the outbreak, not the leaked letter, that led to his decision not to reinstate Crozier.

“Had I known then what I know today, I would have not made that recommendation to reinstate Capt. Crozier. Moreover, if Capt. Crozier were still in command today, I would be relieving him,” Gilday said.

Gilday also said Crozier would not be eligible for a future command.

The Navy also delayed the promotion of Rear Adm. Stuart Baker, the commander of Carrier Strike Group 9 that included the Roosevelt, “pending further investigation,” Gilday said. Baker was the most senior officer on the Roosevelt when the outbreak occurred.

Baker and Crozier fell short of what was expected of them and “they did not do

enough soon enough” to protect the safety and well-being of the crew from the spread of the coronavirus, according to Gilday.

“Ultimately, they were driven by the problem, instead of driving decisions. As Capt. Crozier stated in his email, he should have been more decisive when the ship pulled into Guam. He also said that he was ultimately responsible for his ship and his crew. And I agree,” Gilday said.

While Crozier did some things right, he also made poor decisions by placing the comfort of the crew above their safety, Gilday said.

According to the investigation, Crozier decided to lift the quarantine in the aft section of the ship because of the area was crowded and uncomfortable.

“However, he should have continued to contain the spread of the virus through quarantine while simultaneously doing everything possible to move the crew ashore,” Gilday’s memo on the investigation states. “His determination that onboard quarantine was ineffective should have led to an acceleration of sailors to ashore accommodations. It did not.”

The investigation also found Crozier and Baker should have taken more initiative in the slow removal of sailors from the Roosevelt onto Guam. While Crozier’s letter requested individual hotel rooms become available faster, Gilday said the captain knew but he did not mention the negotiations to get the hotels or find out that the governor of Guam had already agreed to the Navy’s use of the hotels six hours earlier. Also, there were beds available on Naval Base Guam to quickly move sailors off the ship that were not being utilized.

“There were 700 beds unfilled. There were 500 the day before, there were 300 the day before that. So if I go back to the primary responsibilities of the [commanding officer] was the safety and well-being of the crew... I was not impressed by the slow egress off the ship, the lack of a plan to do so,” Gilday said.

1st woman set to be top NCO in Air Force

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY
AND COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Chief Master Sgt. JoAnne Bass will become the next chief master sergeant of the Air Force, the first woman to be the senior enlisted leader for a military service, the Air Force announced Friday.

Bass was chosen to be the 19th chief master sergeant by incoming Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Charles “CQ” Brown, who was recently appointed the first African American to be a military service chief.

“I could not be more excited to work side-by-side with Chief

Bass,” Brown said in a prepared statement. “She is a proven leader who has performed with distinction at every step of her accomplished career. I have no doubt that Chief Bass will provide wise counsel as we pursue and implement initiatives to develop and empower airmen at all levels.”

In her new role, Bass will be responsible for guiding the Air Force’s about 410,000 enlisted airmen and serving as the chief adviser to Brown and Air Force Secretary Barbara Barrett on issues facing the enlisted community.

She will move to the Pentagon from Keesler Air Force Base in Mississippi, where she

has served since June 2018 as the senior enlisted leader for the 2nd Air Force, which is responsible for the service’s training programs.

Bass will replace outgoing Chief Master Sgt. Kaleth O. Wright, who is slated for retirement later this year.

In a statement, Bass said she was “honored and humbled” at her selection to follow Wright.

“The history of the moment isn’t lost on me,” she said. “I’m just ready to get after it. And I’m extremely grateful for and proud of my family and friends who helped me along the way.”

Bass has served about 27 years in the Air Force at a variety of locations including sev-

eral assignments in Germany and a recent stint at the Pentagon as the chief of Air Force enlisted developmental education from 2016 to 2018. She has spent some time in special operations units, including the 24th Special Tactics Squadron at Fort Bragg, N.C.

The Air Force said she has also served deployments in support of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“This is a historic moment for our Air Force and she is a phenomenal leader who’ll bring new ideas and her own style to the position,” he said. “She’ll do great things for our airmen and she’ll blaze her own trail as our CMSAF.”

Hiring rose in 46 states yet jobless rates still high

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Employers added jobs in 46 states last month, evidence that the U.S. economy’s surprise hiring gain in May was spread broadly across the country — in both states that began reopening their economies early and those that did so only later.

Unemployment rates fell in 38 states, rose in three and were largely unchanged in nine, the Labor Department said Friday. The disparities ranged from Nevada, with the highest rate (25.3%), Hawaii (22.6%) and Michigan (21.2%) to Nebraska (5.2%, the lowest) and Utah (8.5%). The overall U.S. unemployment rate in May was a still-high 13.3%, a decline from 14.7% in April.

As a whole, the figures illustrate the unusually broad nature of the recession, with all states enduring unemployment rates that soared in April as the coronavirus forced business closures and then generally fell in May but remained painfully high.

At the same time, the viral

outbreak has sharpened disparities among the states, with Nevada, with its hard-hit tourism industry, and Michigan, heavily affected by auto job cuts, reporting jobless rates more than double the rates in states like Utah and Wyoming.

The virus and the accompanying shutdowns have devastated most states’ economies. Last month, four states recorded their highest unemployment rates on records dating to 1976: Massachusetts (16.3%), Delaware (15.8%), Florida (14.5%) and Minnesota (9.9%).

Adam Kamins, senior regional economist at Moody’s Analytics, suggested that the broad-based job gains in May indicate that the government’s small business lending efforts, through the Paycheck Protection Program, helped spur more hiring.

“Policies that benefit states similarly lifted all boats,” Kamins said.

Even in Nevada there were some signs of life. The state gained nearly 33,000 jobs last month.

White House backs Idaho transgender sports ban

Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho — A recently passed Idaho law banning transgender women from competing in women’s sports — the first such law in the nation — received backing on Friday from the administration of President Donald Trump.

The support came in the form of a court filing submitted by the U.S. Department of Justice, saying a federal judge considering a lawsuit challenging the ban should conclude that the law does not violate the U.S. Constitution.

The ban prohibits transgender students who identify as female from playing on female teams sponsored by public schools, colleges and universities. The ban does not apply to men’s teams.

The American Civil Liberties Union and Legal Voice women’s rights group that filed the lawsuit in April, contend that the law violates the 14th Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause because it is discriminatory.

The Justice Department wrote: the “Equal Protection

Clause does not require states to abandon their efforts to provide biological women with equal opportunity to compete for, and enjoy the life-long benefits that flow from, participation in school athletics in order to accommodate the team preferences of transgender athletes.”

Republican Gov. Brad Little on March 30 signed into law the measure that received overwhelming support in Idaho’s Republican-dominated House and Senate and was unanimously opposed by Democrats.

Two plaintiffs are bringing the lawsuit. One is an unnamed Boise area high school student who is cisgender. Cisgender refers to someone whose gender identity corresponds with the sex the person was identified as having at birth.

The other is Lindsay Hecox, who will be a sophomore this fall at Boise State University and hopes to qualify for the women’s cross-country team. She competed on the boys’ team at a Moorpark, Calif., high school before transitioning after graduating.

Attorney refutes claim he's resigning

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department moved abruptly Friday night to oust Geoffrey S. Berman, the U.S. attorney in Manhattan overseeing key prosecutions of President Donald Trump's allies and an investigation of his personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani. But Berman said he was refusing to leave his post and his ongoing investigations would continue.

"I have not resigned, and have no intention of resigning, my position," Berman said. His statement came hours after At-

torney General William Barr said Berman was stepping down from his position.

The standoff set off an extraordinary clash between the Justice Department and one of the nation's top districts, which has tried major mob and terror cases over the years. It is also likely to deepen tensions between the Justice Department and congressional Democrats who have pointedly accused Barr of politicizing the agency and acting more like Trump's personal lawyer than the nation's chief law enforcement officer.

Barr offered no explanation for why he was pushing out Berman in the statement he issued late Friday. The White House quickly announced that Trump was nominating the chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission to the job, a lawyer with virtually no experience as a federal prosecutor.

Hours later, Berman issued his own statement saying he had learned that he was being pushed out through a press release. He vowed to stay on the job until a Trump nominee is confirmed by the Senate, challenging Barr's power to remove

him from office because he was appointed to the job by federal judges, not by the president. Under federal law, a U.S. attorney who is appointed by district court judges can serve "until the vacancy is filled."

A senior Justice Department official said the department was pressing forward with its plans and will have Craig Carpenito, the U.S. attorney in New Jersey, take over the office temporarily, starting on July 3. The official wasn't authorized to speak publicly about the issue and spoke to AP on condition of anonymity.

Trump's Oklahoma rally hoped to be a reset

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Pressing ahead during a pandemic, President Donald Trump looked to reverse a decline in his political fortunes Saturday by returning to the format that has so often energized himself and his loyal supporters: a raucous, no-holds-barred rally before tens of thousands of ardent fans, this time in Tulsa, Okla.

The rally was shaping up to be one of the biggest indoor events in the U.S. since large gatherings were shut down in March because of the coronavirus, and it was scheduled over the protests of local health officials and as COVID-19 cases spike in many states. The event was expected to draw crowds of protesters to the area as well.

It's been more than three months since

the nation last saw a Trump rally. The unemployment rate stood at about 3.5% that March 2. The number of coronavirus cases in the U.S. was estimated at 91.

Now, the unemployment rate stands at 13.3%, based on the most recent monthly report. The number of confirmed coronavirus cases has soared to about 2.2 million. The number of deaths reported in the U.S. has surpassed 119,000. Outrage over the criminal justice system's treatment of minorities following the death of George Floyd and other African Americans has spawned protests around the nation. Only about a quarter of Americans say the country is headed in the right direction.

Republican strategist Alex Conant said the rally gives the president a chance to reset his campaign after a couple of tough months.

"The Tulsa rally is trying to ignite some momentum in a campaign that's been going nowhere," Conant said. "When you look at the polls and then you look at the calendar, you realize he has to do something to try to reframe the election."

The events in Tulsa will go a long way to determining how the campaign plays out in coming months. A success lays the groundwork for Trump to take his show to states that will determine the presidential election. A spike in coronavirus cases coming out of Tulsa would make his reception in those states more contentious.

The rally was originally scheduled for Friday, but it was moved back a day following an uproar that it otherwise would have happened on Juneteenth.

Federal judge approves publication of Bolton's book

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A federal judge ruled Saturday that former national security adviser John Bolton can move forward in publishing his tell-all book despite efforts by the Trump administration to block the release because of concerns that classified information could be exposed.

The decision from U.S. District Judge Royce Lamberth is

a victory for Bolton in a court case that involved core First Amendment and national security concerns. But the judge also made clear his concerns that Bolton had "gambled with the national security of the United States" by opting out of a prepublication review process meant to prevent government officials from spilling classified secrets in memoirs they publish.

The ruling clears the path for a broader election-year readership and distribution of a memoir, due out Tuesday, that paints an unflattering portrait of President Donald Trump's foreign policy decision-making during the turbulent year-and-a-half that Bolton spent in the White House.

Nonetheless, Lamberth frowned upon the way Bolton went about publishing the book.

Bolton took it "upon himself to publish his book without securing final approval from national intelligence authorities" and perhaps caused irreparable harm to national security, Lamberth said.

But with 200,000 copies already distributed to booksellers across the country, attempting to block its release would be futile, the judge wrote.

Signs of relief in Beijing, but not Americas

Associated Press

BEIJING — Authorities in China appeared to be winning their battle against an outbreak of the coronavirus in Beijing on Saturday, but in parts of the Americas the pandemic raged unabated. Brazil surpassed 1 million confirmed infections, second only to the United States.

Europe, in contrast, continued to emerge warily from lockdown, with hard-hit Britain considering easing social distancing rules to make it easier for restaurants, pubs and schools to reopen. In Italy, once the pandemic's European epicenter, Pope Francis told medics that their heroic efforts during the outbreak would help the country forge a future of hope and solidarity.

The head of the World Health Organization said Friday that the pandemic is "accelerating" and that more than 150,000 cases were reported the day before — the highest single-day number so far.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters in Geneva that nearly half of the newly reported cases were from the Americas, with significant numbers from South Asia and the Middle East.

The global battle against COVID-19 is a patchwork of successes and setbacks at this point in the pandemic, quantified by the trajectory of the coronavirus in different countries.

In China, where the virus was first identified and where authorities hoped it had been vanquished, Beijing recorded a further drop in cases amid tightened containment measures. Officials reported 22 new cases in Beijing along with five others elsewhere in China. There were no new deaths, and 308 people remained hospitalized for treatment.

South Korea, which has won global praise for its handling of the coronavirus, recorded 67 new cases, the largest 24-hour increase in about three weeks. Most of them come from the densely populated Seoul area, where about half of the country's 51 million people reside. Many cases have been linked to exposure in nightlife outlets.

Brazil's Health Ministry said the total number of cases had risen by more than 50,000 from the previous day. President Jair Bolsonaro still downplays the risks of the virus after nearly 50,000 fatalities in three months, saying the impact of social isolation on Brazil's economy could be more deadly.

South Africa continues to loosen lockdown measures under economic pressure, despite reporting nearly 4,000 more COVID-19 cases on Saturday. Casinos, beauty salons and sit-down restaurant service are among the latest permitted activi-

ties as the country eases one of the world's strictest lockdowns. South Africa has about 30% of the virus cases on the African continent, or more than 87,000.

South Africa and Ethiopia both said they are recommending the limited use of the commonly available steroid dexamethasone for all COVID-19 patients on ventilators or supplementary oxygen. In a British trial, the drug was shown to significantly improve survival chances for the most seriously ill.

South African Health Minister Zweli Mkhize said "this breakthrough is excellent news for us and we are especially fortunate that it came as we are preparing for our upcoming surge" in cases.

Britain lowered its coronavirus threat level one notch, becoming the latest country to claim it's getting a national outbreak under control.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government said it would announce next week whether it will ease social distancing rules that say people should remain 6 feet apart. Business groups are lobbying for the distance to be cut to 3 feet to make it easier to restart the U.K.'s economy.

While many stores in Britain have reopened, pubs, hotels and restaurants won't be allowed to resume serving customers until July 4 at the soonest.

Small Business Administration to release relief data

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration has abruptly dropped its insistence on secrecy for a \$600 billion-plus coronavirus aid program for small businesses.

The administration announced Friday it will publicly disclose the names of recipients of the taxpayer-funded loans, the amounts they received in ranges, as well as demographic data on the businesses.

The unexpected move came after Democratic lawmakers, government watchdogs, ethics advocates and news organizations called for the administration to make the information public.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin refused to do so at a Senate hearing last week, saying the data on the Paycheck Protection Program was "proprietary information." The Small Business Administration, which manages the loan program, has only provided general information, such as the total amounts of loans awarded in a given time period.

Mnuchin said in a statement Friday that the new position resulted from a biparti-

san agreement with leaders of the Senate Small Business Committee.

The new approach "will strike the appropriate balance of providing public transparency, while protecting the payroll and personal income information of small businesses, sole proprietors and independent contractors," Mnuchin said.

To that end, information on loans of less than \$150,000 will only be disclosed in totals by industry, business type and demographic category. Nearly 75% of the total loan amounts approved are over \$150,000 and will be subject to full disclosure, according to the Treasury Department and the SBA.

In addition, business owners' personally identifiable information, such as a home address associated with the loan, will be withheld.

Critics had denounced the refusal to open the information to the public as an attempt to dodge accountability for how the federal aid money is spent. They said it raised questions about how the money was being distributed and who was benefiting.

President Donald Trump has moved to

curb the oversight of federal relief programs since Congress enacted the multi-trillion-dollar coronavirus rescue law in late March.

Government watchdogs overseeing the law raised the alarm this week over a Treasury Department legal opinion concluding that the law's disclosure requirements don't extend to several programs including the small-business relief.

"The Treasury Department finally gave in to public pressure ... because their position of hiding which businesses have received PPP loans was untenable," Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer said in a statement Friday. "This reversal is a good start and will help us determine if taxpayer money went where Congress intended — to the truly small" businesses.

Businesses struggled to obtain loans in the early weeks of the program in April, and several hundred publicly traded companies received loans despite their likely ability to get funding from private financial sources. Publicly shamed, a number of big corporations said they would return their loans.

Ariz. mandates masks amid surge in cases

Associated Press

PHOENIX — The city of Phoenix on Friday approved a measure requiring people to use face masks in public to ward off the spread of the coronavirus as Arizona hit an all-time high for new daily cases.

In an emergency meeting called by Mayor Kate Gallego, the City Council voted 7-2 in favor of making masks or face coverings mandatory. The order goes into effect at 6 a.m. Saturday.

“Public health professionals tell us there are steps we can take to slow the spread. With today’s vote, the Phoenix City Council is moving forward to protect our community,” Gallego said.

The Phoenix ordinance applies to all public places, including public transit, in the nation’s fifth-largest city. Restaurants and other businesses will have the right to refuse service to people who do not wear masks or face coverings.

Exempted from the order are children under age 6, people with religious beliefs against covering their faces and restaurant patrons who are eating or drinking. The restaurant patrons must wear masks while entering and exiting or moving around in the establishments.

Police are tasked with enforcing the mandate. Chief Jeri Williams said officers have been told to “lead with education” and let violators off with warnings first. Citations will be used as a last resort, she said.

Connecticut

HARTFORD — Connecticut Department of Labor Commissioner Kurt Westby said Friday his agency is still seeing an “unprecedented number” of unemployment claims because of the coronavirus pandemic but has managed to reduce processing times to one-to-two weeks from a high of six weeks.

The department is in the process of establishing a new consumer contact center, which Westby said will launch in mid-July. DOL currently has about

100 customer service representatives and about 40 staff answering phone calls. The new consumer contact center will add 60 new customer service representatives that will help applicants by phone and email. The center will also have text, chat, call back, and virtual assistant features.

Hawaii

HONOLULU — Hawaii’s Department of Health reported 27 new cases of coronavirus Friday, the largest single-day increase since April in what officials say is an expected spike as places such as restaurants, gyms and churches re-open.

The new cases bring the number of people who have tested positive statewide to 789. The number of people who have died remained unchanged at 17.

On Thursday, there were 18 cases reported. The highest daily number of cases Hawaii has seen since the outbreak began was 34.

“The majority of new cases reported over the past week are associated with community clusters in large households with crowded conditions, adult care and long-term nursing facilities, and with a church group,” the state said a statement announcing Friday’s cases.

Illinois

SPRINGFIELD — School will be different when a new academic year starts this fall, but whether students are still learning remotely or the number of days per week they attend class will likely vary by location and district.

The Illinois State Board of Education is expected to release health and safety guidelines by the end of June for districts trying to prepare for fall during the coronavirus pandemic. Some will be requirements, such as wearing masks or cleaning regimens for school facilities.

But Illinois State Schools Superintendent Carmen Ayala

says there won’t be a one-size-fits-all approach.

Districts will have the option of continuing remote learning, bringing students and staff back to buildings, or doing a combination in which fewer students are in a classroom at one time.

Michigan

DETROIT — Dozens of people in the Detroit area were bailed out of jail during the coronavirus pandemic by nonprofits pushing to dismantle the cash bail system.

The immediate release from jail before trial for low-income people grew urgent with the arrival of the COVID-19 virus for nonprofits advocating to transform the criminal justice system, a system they say disproportionately harms communities of color.

Roughly 55 people in the area have been bailed out of jail during the pandemic by Michigan Liberation and The Bail Project, a national nonprofit with an office within the Detroit Justice Center.

Minnesota

ST. PAUL — Youth outdoor sports can return to games and scrimmages on Wednesday after being on pause during the coronavirus pandemic, Minnesota health officials said Friday.

The Minnesota Department of Health also announced that indoor youth sports can resume games and scrimmages on July 1.

Full team practices for all sports can start Wednesday. The Health Department recommended a phased-in approach to the reopening of all sports.

“I think it was a deliberate and intentional rollout,” said Todd Johnson of the Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission. “They just wanted to get it right.”

Minnesota Health Commissioner Jan Malcolm said it’s important to look for opportunities for children to “engage in

activities that promote health and well-being.”

Pennsylvania

HARRISBURG — Heavily populated regions of Pennsylvania that were among the hardest hit by the coronavirus pandemic will move next week into the “green” phase of Gov. Tom Wolf’s reopening plan, meaning gyms, salons and theaters can reopen and people can gather in larger groups, his administration announced Friday.

The move leaves a single Pennsylvania county — Lebanon County, where local GOP leaders reopened early in defiance of the Democratic governor and virus cases have been rising since late May — under tighter pandemic restrictions.

In the green zone, spas, gyms, barbers, theaters, casinos, malls and similar venues can reopen at reduced capacity. Bars and restaurants may allow indoor dining, also at reduced capacity. Gatherings of up to 250 people are permitted in green zones.

Washington

SEATTLE — Washington state’s most populous county has been approved to move into Phase 2 of reopening from Gov. Jay Inslee’s coronavirus restrictions.

King County, which has about 2.2 million residents, as of Friday will be allowed to relax rules for businesses like restaurants, barbers and retail operations.

Also Friday, the Department of Health released a report that showed more than one in three COVID-19 infections in the state have occurred in people who work in the Health Care and Social Assistance industries.

Through May 27, 2,375 cases — or 37% of overall cases — were from people working in those fields. The second highest industry for infections was manufacturing, at 9%, a sector that includes food processing facilities.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man disguised as UPS driver killed ex-neighbor

MA BRAINTREE — A man who fatally shot his former neighbor when she answered the door at her Braintree home disguised himself as a UPS driver and hid his gun inside a box, a prosecutor said.

Robert Bonang, who's charged with killing Laurie Melchionda, 59, was ordered held without bail during his arraignment. He pleaded not guilty.

Norfolk Assistant District Attorney Greg Connor said a teenager who was babysitting children nearby saw Bonang walk up to Melchionda's door, wearing a surgical mask and brown jacket and carrying a box. Connor said the teen was walking away with the children when she heard screaming and turned around to see Bonang shooting Melchionda with the gun from the box.

Man accused of trying to use Molotov cocktail

FL OCALA — A Florida man accused of trying to throw a Molotov cocktail at a child welfare office faces up to 10 years in federal prison.

Tommy Lee Holt, 26, pleaded guilty in Ocala federal court to possession of an unregistered destructive device in the form of an incendiary bomb, according to court records.

According to the plea agreement, Holt manufactured eight incendiary bombs last November and brought them to the Marion County branch of the Florida Department of Children and Families.

DCF records showed Holt had 18 previous interactions with the agency. A criminal complaint said Holt has five minor children, all of whom have been placed in foster care by the agency.

Trooper: Traffic stop nets 5 lbs. of cocaine

NE LEXINGTON — A traffic stop on Interstate 80 in south-central Nebraska turned up five pounds of cocaine in a suitcase, the Nebraska State Patrol said.

A trooper stopped a sport utility vehicle heading east on I-80 near Lexington, the patrol said in a news release. The patrol said that during a search of the SUV, troopers found the cocaine hidden inside a backpack inside a suitcase in the cargo area.

The SUV's driver, a 40-year-old woman from Buffalo, N.Y., was arrested on suspicion of drug trafficking and taken to the Dawson County Jail, the patrol said.

Officials: Stop bugging bear roaming fields

IA ELDRIDGE — A black bear that has been spotted wandering through eastern Iowa cornfields is drawing crowds of people, potentially posing a danger to the animal as well as tickets for those seeking a glimpse of the bear.

The adult bear has been spotted munching on corn and taking frequent naps.

Sightseers are getting too close to the bear and are interfering with efforts to let it head back north, so officers could issue citations, said Jeff Harrison, an Iowa Department of Natural Resources officer.

Driver arrested after golf cart crash; 5 hurt

AZ SCOTTSDALE — The driver of a car that allegedly crashed into the back of a golf cart in Scottsdale, injuring five people, was arrested, police said.

They said Robert Gandara, 22, was taken into custody on

suspicion of aggravated assault and other felony charges.

Police said the impact ejected the four female passengers and the male driver of the golf cart.

Four of the victims were transported to a hospital with serious but non-life-threatening injuries with the other person suffering minor injuries. Police said impairment is believed to be a factor in the crash.

Cops likely had bleach in Shake Shack drink

NY NEW YORK — Three New York City police officers received treatment after drinking Shake Shack milkshakes that may have been contaminated with a disinfectant.

The officers had been assigned to work at a protest in Manhattan when they stopped at the restaurant for a meal, The New York Patrolman's Benevolent Association said in a statement. The officers determined "a toxic substance, believed to be bleach," was added to their beverages, the statement said.

The officers weren't seriously harmed, The Detectives' Endowment Association stated.

The restaurant chain said it was working with police in the investigation.

'Black Lives Matter' mural restored

NC CHARLOTTE — Artists in Charlotte repaired the "Black Lives Matter" mural in the city after it was damaged by a driver who left tire marks on it.

No arrests have been made since police began investigating the vandalism, but 16 artists who created the pavement art came out to restore their works just six days after they were first painted, news outlets reported.

The artwork, with each letter spelling out Black Lives Matter in a different theme, has quickly become a focus of political gatherings in the city.

2nd major weed bust made at Canadian border

NY BUFFALO — A citizen of India was charged with attempting to smuggle more than 3,300 pounds of marijuana over the Peace Bridge from Canada into Buffalo, federal prosecutors said.

The arrest of Gurpreet Singh, 30, was the second major pot seizure at the border crossing in eight days, U.S. Attorney James Kennedy said.

Singh was indicted on charges of unlawfully importing 1,000 kilograms or more of marijuana and smuggling merchandise into the United States and was held pending a detention hearing.

2 charged in phone scam targeting seniors

MA ADAMS — Two men face charges in Massachusetts after authorities said they participated in a multi-state phone scam that targeted seniors.

Ajaykumar Chaudhari, 24, of Pownal, Vt., and Jitendra Chaudhari, 27, of Williamstown, Mass., were to be arraigned on charges of larceny and conspiracy in Northern Berkshire District Court.

Police in other areas notified Adams Police that residents in their communities had sent thousands of dollars in cash to addresses in Adams under potentially fraudulent terms, the Berkshire District Attorney's office said.

Investigators said they are investigating how the fraud was carried out.

From wire reports

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World, National
and Military News

Outbreak closes spring training sites

Associated Press

Every team in Major League Baseball will shut spring training camp over concerns about the coronavirus pandemic, a move that came in the wake of the Philadelphia Phillies announcing Friday five players had tested positive for COVID-19.

The closures come while MLB owners and players try to negotiate a deal to begin the season, and raise the possibility the virus outbreak could scuttle all attempts at starting up this year.

A person familiar with the decision told The Associated Press the spring complexes in Florida and Arizona will temporarily close because of recent events. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because there wasn't an official statement.

The facilities will undergo a deep cleaning and disinfecting. No one will be permitted back inside without a negative test for the virus.

Soon after the Phillies became the first known team to be affected by the outbreak, Toronto shuttered its site in Dunedin, Fla., about five miles from Philadelphia's camp in Clearwater. The Blue Jays said one player showed virus symptoms.

The San Francisco Giants' facility in Scottsdale, Ariz., was shut after one person who had been to the site and one family member exhibited symptoms Thursday. Texas closed its camp about 30 miles away in Surprise, saying no one had tested positive but that it wanted to expand testing protocols.

Also, the Houston Astros said a player working out at their spring camp in West Palm Beach, Fla., tested positive several days ago and was recovering. The Astros said they "implemented all health and safety protocols" but didn't say the camp was closed.

Stuck in a bitter fight over money, owners and the union had hoped to have players begin testing Tuesday and then

start a second round of spring training by next weekend. Most teams had anticipated holding those workouts at their home ballparks, rather than at their spring camps in Florida and Arizona.

Earlier this week, Deputy Commissioner Dan Halem wrote in a letter to players' union chief negotiator Bruce Meyer that "the proliferation of COVID-19 outbreaks around the country over the last week, and the fact that we already know of several 40-man roster players and staff who have tested positive, has increased the risks associated with commencing spring training in the next few weeks."

Regarding the implications of the outbreak on the season, the Phillies said "it is too early to know."

The Phillies said three staff members at the camp also tested positive. The team didn't identify any of those affected.

Florida has experienced rising incidents of new cases and rates of those testing positive

for COVID-19. Over the past two weeks, the rolling average number of daily new cases in Florida has increased by 1,422.7, or 144.4%.

Arizona also has had a recent spike in cases, hitting a record for new daily cases.

The Phillies said the first confirmed case occurred Tuesday. The club said eight staff members have tested negative for the virus, while 12 staff members and 20 players — both major leaguers and minor leaguers — living in the Clearwater area are being tested.

The Phillies closed their facility in March when the coronavirus pandemic shut down sports. Players returning from injuries were allowed to continue their rehab after the facility was cleaned thoroughly. A few of the team's athletic trainers and staff remained to supervise and safety precautions were taken.

Several more players began working out at the facility over the past few weeks but group sizes were limited.

Simpson takes lead as coronavirus strikes PGA Tour

Associated Press

HILTON HEAD ISLAND, S.C. — Webb Simpson and Bryson DeChambeau were trading birdies with vastly different games. Rory McIlroy ran off enough birdies to make the cut. And the biggest move of the day at the RBC Heritage belonged to a player who made it to the course, but not the tee.

Nick Watney became a footnote in golf history Friday as the first player to test positive for the coronavirus.

He did not return a telephone call seeking comment. Watney played the opening round with Vaughn Taylor and Luke List, and a rules official notified them of the positive test at the turn.

"I was a little shocked, to be honest," said Taylor, who went for testing immediately after his 69. "Heart started racing,

got a little nervous. Just hope Nick's doing well and we get through this."

Watney tested negative when he arrived Tuesday, experienced symptoms Friday and took another test that came back positive. He now faces self-isolation for at least 10 days as the tournament goes on.

The weekend buzz at Harbour Town figures to be about more than just birdies and bogeys.

Simpson got the last word with a 6-foot birdie on his final hole at No. 9 for another 6-under 65, giving him a one-shot lead after another day of watching DeChambeau and his additional 40 pounds of mass swing out of his shoes for a 64. DeChambeau made six birdies on his back nine, missing a 5-footer on the last that would have tied for the lead. Corey

Conners also was one back after a bogey-free 63.

"It's very satisfying knowing I'm not near as long as some of these guys and I'm able to kind of use my skills of distance control and shot shape to pick me back up when I'm 40 yards or 30 yards behind these guys," Simpson said. "I would like to hit it further. I set out on a journey three years ago to get stronger, hit it further, but do it a lot slower than Bryson. But he's made it look easy and seamless."

Simpson was at 12-under 130, and scoring remained bunched. Thunderstorms that rolled through the island and halted play for two hours only gave players more time to talk about Watney and the ramifications. McIlroy and Jordan Spieth, who is on the PGA Tour policy board, said a positive test was bound to happen as

the tour returns from a three-month shutdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The whole plan put in place was not if, but when somebody tests positive, what's the protocol, and what are the next steps," Spieth said. "So I feel confident, just in being on those phone calls, in what the PGA TOUR's going to do going forward here, and hopefully contact tracing doesn't lead to anybody else testing positive within the bubble."

McIlroy, who shot 66 to make the cut with one shot to spare, said he saw Watney on the putting green before the test result was returned. Brooks Koepka, who was three shots behind after a 66, said he saw Watney in the parking lot.

"It's unfortunate Nick got it, but at the same time, hopefully, it stays with just him and doesn't spread," Koepka said.

Fans return to stands for NASCAR in Texas

Associated Press

FORT WORTH, Texas — Texas Motor Speedway plans to open its massive grandstands to thousands of fans for a rescheduled NASCAR Cup Series race next month.

Gov. Greg Abbott on Friday approved a plan submitted by the track to allow spectators for the race on July 19. The governor had previously said that outdoor sporting events could be held with 50% capacity.

Track President Eddie Gossage said it was still too early to know how many fans would be able to attend the race at the 1½-mile track that has a capacity of about 135,000, including suites and the grandstands that stretch about two-thirds of a mile from end to end.

“We don’t know, because it depends,” Gossage said.

With social distancing protocols in place, the speedway first has to reassign seating for people who had already purchased tickets for the race that was originally scheduled for March 29 before NASCAR paused its season due to the coronavirus. Gossage described that process as like doing a jigsaw puzzle. There are already 25,000-30,000 tickets out for the race, though fans can still request credit for future tickets or refunds.

“If everybody responds and wants to be seated two by two, that requires a lot more empty seats between them. If it’s groups of fours and sixes and eights, and things like that, then it’s a little denser,” he said. “So I don’t know how many it will be. And we’re not focused on any number. We’re just wanting to seat everybody properly, socially distanced apart so that everybody is safe and has a good time.”

There were no fans when IndyCar opened its delayed season at Texas two weeks ago in what initially was supposed to be the midpoint of a 17-race season for the open-wheel series. No spectators will be

allowed at the NASCAR Xfinity and Truck Series races at Texas the day before the Cup race.

NASCAR is set to allow up to 30,000 fans at Bristol for its All-Star race four days before the Cup race in Texas. A recent spike in COVID-19 cases in North Carolina sparked the move of that race from Charlotte Motor Speedway.

About 1,000 fans, mostly military personnel, were allowed for the Cup race last weekend at Homestead-Miami Speedway. About 5,000 fans are expected Sunday at Talladega Superspeedway in Alabama.

The announcement about fans in Texas comes as the state continues to see rising numbers of new coronavirus cases and hospitalizations since Memorial Day. A record 3,148 COVID-19 hospitalizations were reported in Texas on Friday, more than double the number in hospitals over the holiday weekend. The reported 3,454 new cases were down slightly from the single-day record 3,516 set Thursday.

“Texans are eager for sporting and entertainment events to return, and this is a great step towards that goal,” Abbott said. “As we continue to open Texas, it is essential that we do so in a way that keeps Texans safe and limits the spread of COVID-19.”

Along with social distancing in the grandstands and concession lines, there will be enhanced cleaning and sanitation in high-touch, high-traffic public areas and more hand sanitizer stations. Masks will be encouraged. While there will be no fans or camping on the infield, camping will be allowed outside the track. Fans won’t be allowed to bring their coolers inside.

The track is going to 100% digital ticketing for the first time since it opened in 1997, and won’t be selling tickets on race day. All purchases, such as concessions and merchandise, will be cashless transactions.

Canada approves NHL’s restart plan

Associated Press

Canada has approved the NHL’s return-to-play proposal that could lead to one or more cities north of the border serving as host sites for the league’s 24-team playoff format.

Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland announced Friday that the nation’s top public health officer, and health officials in Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario had signed off on the NHL plan.

The decision followed discussions with government health officials, and comes as the league enters the advanced stages of selecting its hub cities — most likely two — from a list of seven in the U.S. and three in Canada, NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly wrote in an email to The Associated Press.

Daly didn’t rule out the possibility of two hubs being located in Canada from among Toronto, Vancouver and Edmonton.

The NHL, however, did encounter a setback in its bid to resume playing since the season was paused on March 12.

The Tampa Bay Lightning closed their facilities indefinitely Thursday after three players and “additional staff members” tested positive for COVID-19. The team said the players were largely asymptomatic and were self-isolating.

The move came as baseball’s Philadelphia Phillies announced that some of their players and staff had tested positive in nearby Clearwater, Fla., and the Toronto Blue Jays had one player show symptoms consistent with the coronavirus in nearby Dunedin, Fla.

The NHL announced late Friday that 11 of the 200 players tested since training facilities were allowed to open on June 8 have tested positive. They are self isolating. The league declined to say who.

Two weeks ago, NHL players were allowed to return to their respective facilities for voluntary on- and off-ice workouts. Players were allowed to skate in groups of up to six a time.

The NHL’s return-to-play plan approved by Canada required an exemption allowing players and team officials to cross the border. The border is currently closed to non-essential travel until at least July 21, and those entering Canada must self-isolate for 14 days.

Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada’s chief public health officer, said robust protocols such as group quarantining and testing will be in place. The decision on selecting hub cities — each would host 12 teams — could come as early as next week.

“I want to emphasize that it will be very important for the NHL and the players to continue to work very closely with public health officers and to follow their instructions,” Freeland said. “This is essential not only for the players, which I know we all have affection for, but for the health and safety of Canadians.”

The NHL is targeting July 10 to open training camps, with games being played without fans present starting in late July or early August.

Though Las Vegas and Columbus, Ohio, are considered strong candidates to serve as hub cities, the focus on Canada comes at a time the United States is experiencing a spike in positive tests. Playing games in Canada could also be cost-effective, with the Canadian dollar worth about 73 cents versus its U.S. counterpart.

Daly said it wasn’t of “significant consideration” as to whether the hubs are located in separate or the same time zones.

Toronto Mayor John Tory supported his city being selected, noting he considers it to be the “hockey capital of the world.”

“It will be a morale boost for us,” Tory said. “It will be great for the psychology of the city.”

Gillies reported from Toronto, Wawrow from Buffalo, N.Y. AP hockey writer Stephen Whyno also contributed to this report.