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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Trump issues travel restrictions on Europe

Associated Press

Taking dramatic action, President Donald Trump sharply restricted passenger travel from 26 European nations to the U.S. and moved to ease the economic cost of a viral pandemic that is roiling global financial markets and disrupting the daily lives of Americans.

Trump, in a rare Oval Office address to the nation Wednesday night, said the monthlong restriction on travel would begin late Friday, at midnight. After days of playing down the coronavirus threat, he blamed Europe for not acting quickly enough to address the “foreign virus” and claimed that U.S. clusters were “seeded” by European travelers.

“We made a lifesaving move with early action on China,” Trump said. “Now we must take the same action with Europe.”

Trump said that the restrictions won’t apply to the United Kingdom, and there would be exemptions for “Americans who have undergone appropriate screenings.” He said that the U.S. would monitor the situation to determine if travel could be reopened earlier.

The State Department followed Trump’s remarks by issuing an extraordinary global health advisory cautioning U.S. citizens to “reconsider travel abroad” due to the virus and associated quarantines and restrictions.

Trump spoke after days of confusion in Washington and in the face of mounting calls on the president to demonstrate greater leadership. At times, though, his remarks contributed to the uncertainty.

While Trump said all European travel would be cut off, Homeland Security officials later clarified that the new

travel restrictions would apply only to most foreign nationals who have been in the “Schengen Area” at any point for 14 days prior to their scheduled arrival to the U.S. The area includes France, Italy, Germany, Greece, Austria, Belgium and others, and the White House said the zone has the highest number of confirmed COVID-19 cases outside of mainland China.

The restrictions don’t apply to legal permanent residents, immediate family of U.S. citizens or others “identified in the proclamation” signed by Trump. Vice President Mike Pence said Thursday on ABC’s “Good Morning America” that the Trump administration is also requesting travelers returning to the U.S. from Europe to “voluntarily quarantine” for 14 days.

Trump said the prohibitions would “not only apply to the

tremendous amount of trade and cargo, but various other things.” But the official proclamation released after Trump spoke made clear that it applies to people, not goods and cargo.

The Oval Office address represented an abrupt shift in tone from a president who has repeatedly sought to play down the severity of the virus outbreak. Many Americans shared a similar mindset in recent weeks, but the grueling events of Wednesday changed the mood. Communities canceled public events nationwide, universities moved to cancel in-person classes, and families grappled with the impact of disruptions to public schools. The number of confirmed cases of the infection topped 1,000 in the U.S., and the World Health Organization declared the global crisis to be a pandemic.

2 Americans killed in rocket attack on Iraqi camp

BY CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

Three coalition troops — two Americans and a Briton — were killed Wednesday when nearly 20 107mm Katyusha rockets struck Camp Taji north of Baghdad, where U.S. and other coalition troops are based, U.S. Central Command’s top officer said.

“They will be remembered,” Marine Corps Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., head of CENTCOM, told the Senate Armed Services Committee on Thursday.

The names of the dead were being withheld pending next of kin notification, the U.S.-led Operation Inherent Resolve

said in a statement, which said about a dozen others were wounded.

The U.K. Ministry of Defense confirmed a service member from the Royal Army Medical Corps was killed. The family had been notified but requested privacy.

“Last night’s attack on U.K. and coalition personnel was a cowardly and retrograde act,” said British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace in a statement Thursday. “The people that did this are not friends of Iraq.”

Coalition and Iraqi security forces were investigating the incident, Inherent Resolve said. While CENTCOM officials were still working to determine responsibility, McKenzie told

lawmakers that only the Iranian proxy group Kataeb Hezbollah had previously conducted an indirect fire attack “of this scale” against coalition forces in Iraq.

In the wake of the attack, Syrian opposition activists and a war monitor reported that three unidentified aircraft struck Iranian militia positions along Iraq’s border with Syria. The air raid killed at least 18 members of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, an umbrella organization that includes Shiite paramilitary groups, the London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported.

U.S. officials told The Associated Press that the strike was

not related to the Taji attack.

The camp, located about 17 miles north of Baghdad, is home to American and other coalition troops training Iraqi forces. A Polish soldier was wounded in the attack, Poland’s armed forces said on Twitter. No Australian or New Zealand troops were harmed, the militaries of those countries said.

The attack was launched from a truck found a few miles from the base, Iraq’s security information cell said on social media, posting photos of the 36-tube launcher installed in the Kia flatbed. Three rockets were still in the launcher, said the government account, which stated that only 10 had been fired.

DOD chief confirms more cases in military

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Seven American service members and seven military dependents have confirmed cases of the coronavirus, Defense Secretary Mark Esper said Thursday at the Pentagon.

At least one service member with a confirmed case has been reported in South Korea; Naples, Italy; Quantico, Va.; and Washington state.

Dependents who have been infected are in South Korea and Washington state, but Esper did not say whether all seven cases are from those two locations.

An airman assigned to Altus Air Force Base, Okla., has tested presumptive positive for the coronavirus, the Air Force announced Thursday afternoon. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a presumptive positive result is when a patient has tested positive by a local public health laboratory, but those results are still pending confirmation at a CDC lab.

The airman had recently traveled to Seattle, Wash. The state currently has one of the largest outbreaks of the virus in the country.

A contractor at Moody Air Force base in Georgia has also tested positive for coronavirus, according to the Air Force.

Starting Friday, all travel for service members, dependents and DOD civilians to and from locations with serious coronavirus outbreaks will be suspended for 60 days, including military moves. Countries with these widespread outbreaks, or Level 3 locations, include Italy, South Korea and Germany.

Travel is also being denied for 60 days for families and DOD civilians to and from Level 2 locations with a sustained community spread.

Pentagon restricts travel to countries affected by virus

By JOSEPH DITZLER
Stars and Stripes

The Defense Department imposed travel restrictions effective Friday and in some cases banned travel for 60 days to countries affected by COVID-19, according to a memo from Defense Secretary Mark Esper.

The order encompasses eight countries in Asia, Europe and the Middle East, including several where the United States has a substantial military presence.

The DOD essentially banned travel to, through or from China, Italy, Iran and South Korea, all countries under a Travel Health Notice Level 3 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, according to Esper's memo. A CDC Level 3 advisory means a widespread community transmission of the disease is occurring.

The "stop movement" order to those countries covers all uniformed service members, DOD civilians and family mem-

bers. It encompasses "all forms of official travel," including permanent changes of station, temporary duty and government-funded leave.

For uniformed personnel, the order also bans personal leave and other non-official travel.

To countries under a Level 2 CDC travel advisory, which include Japan, Singapore, the United Kingdom and Bahrain, DOD ordered official travel deferred for anything other than essential missions. Level 2 means a sustained community spread of the disease is underway.

However, official travel by family members of uniformed and DOD civilian employees to Level 2 countries is barred for 60 days starting Friday. DOD hiring for civilian positions in Level 2 and Level 3 countries is also on hold for that period, according to Esper's order.

His memo allows exceptions for "compelling cases," including mission-essential travel, humanitarian reasons and extreme hardships.

Combatant commanders have authority to grant exceptions for command members, as do secretaries of military departments and chief management officers for their respective organizations, the memo states.

An accompanying personnel and readiness memo details further instructions for all DOD travel, emphasizing risk reduction, screening prior to boarding military aircraft and managing patients who show COVID-19 symptoms.

All DOD organizations should identify service members who "travel or have traveled in the prior 14 days" to a Level 3 or Level 2 country, whether by military or commercial carriers or by personal means. That instruction applies to all travel, official or personal. Those personnel should be placed on 14-day restricted movement.

Military air crews are exempt from most travel guidance for countries under Level 3 and Level 2 advisories, according to the memo.

Army drill in Europe to be scaled back

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The largest U.S. military exercise in Europe in a generation will be scaled back because of concerns about the coronavirus, marking a possible setback for the Army after the service spent years building up for the drill known as Defender-Europe 20.

U.S. European Command said Wednesday that the training, which initially called for sending 20,000 U.S.-based soldiers across the Atlantic Ocean, would be downsized.

"After careful review of the ongoing Defender-Europe 20 exercise activities and in light of the current coronavirus outbreak, we will modify the exercise by reducing the number of U.S. participants," EUCOM said in a statement.

The training will be adjusted, but the military will still work with allies to meet "our highest

priority training objectives," EUCOM said.

In all, more than 35,000 troops were originally slated to take part in Defender Europe, which is already underway and is slated to run until the end of June. Most of the major exercises, including paratroopers dropping into the Republic of Georgia and ground forces rehearsing the defense of territory in the vicinity of the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad, were to take place in April and May.

"The decision to make the change is the right thing to do in light of the ongoing outbreak of the coronavirus," USAREUR said. "The health protection of our force, and that of our allies and partners, is a top priority."

The exercise comes with a price tag of about \$340 million. More so, about 15 of 27 air missions have been completed so far, bringing 3,500 soldiers to Europe, USAREUR said last week.

Americans realize impact as events cut

Associated Press

A basketball tournament, but with no fans. A St. Patrick's Day, but with no parades. College campuses, but with no students. Corporate headquarters, but with barren cubicles. California's governor urged people to avoid even small social gatherings if they can't remain six feet apart.

The nation snapped to attention as the new coronavirus was declared a pandemic and stocks slid into bear market territory. As Americans belatedly seemed to come to grips with the outbreak, President Donald Trump held a rare prime-time address from the Oval Office to calm the public.

Health and government officials have been sounding the alarm about the virus for nearly two months as it infected and killed thousands of people, pinballing from China to Iran to Italy and beyond before striking Seattle in the first deadly outbreak in the U.S.

But Wednesday was the moment that the larger American public came to the dawn-

ing realization that the toll of the virus would be unavoidable for months to come, perhaps longer.

In a matter of hours Wednesday afternoon, the signs were everywhere. The NCAA announced that the rite of spring for so many Americans — its college basketball tournament — would be played before largely empty arenas. The NBA said that it would suspend its season until further notice.

News feeds lit up with cancellations of St. Patrick's Day parades, major university systems in California, New York and elsewhere ending classes for the term and late-night comedians making plans to film without live studio audiences.

CBS Evening News anchor Norah O'Donnell solemnly declared during Wednesday evening's broadcast that two employees of the network had tested positive and that those who worked closely with them had been asked to self-quarantine.

Then, Hollywood icon Tom Hanks announced from Australia that he and his

wife have tested positive for the virus.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom issued among the most sweeping "guidance," urging an end to all events involving more than 250 people, and even small gatherings in spaces that don't allow for "social distancing."

Newsom's announcement is a recommendation, not a ban like the one Washington Gov. Jay Inslee imposed on all gatherings of 250 or more in Seattle's metro area. More than two dozen people have died and schools were ordered closed for at least two weeks.

Princess Cruises announced a two-month pause of global operations Thursday that will gradually sideline all 18 of its cruise ships.

The Seattle Public School system said that it would close for at least two weeks for its 53,000 students. COVID-19 has killed more than two dozen in the Seattle area.

As of Wednesday evening, 38 people had died in the U.S., while more than 1,300 people had tested positive for the virus.

Spike in Gulf pushes past 10K infections in Mideast

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — A spike in cases in the Gulf Arab states helped push infections in the Middle East for the new coronavirus past 10,000 cases on Thursday, with most infected people either in Iran or having recently traveled there.

Iran has asked for an emergency \$5 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund to combat the outbreak there, which has killed more than 360 people and infected some 9,000 people in the Islamic Republic. The international lender has said that it stands ready to support countries through a Rapid Financial Instrument.

The recent outbreak of the virus in Iran has compounded its economic woes, with all of its neighbors closing their borders to Iranians and multiple nations cutting travel links, including shipping in some cases, which is affecting imports as well.

Countries in the region have

imposed their own varying levels of travel restrictions, from wholesale halting of all commercial flights in Kuwait, to Saudi Arabia banning travel to 39 countries.

A third Lebanese man died from the coronavirus, state-run National News Agency said Thursday. Outside of Iran, only Iraq, Egypt and Lebanon have recorded deaths from the virus in the Middle East.

This week, Qatar reported a massive jump in cases of the virus late Wednesday, with 262 now infected. The more than 200 new cases had been found in quarantine. In Bahrain, confirmed cases also rose by nearly 70% this week to 189 confirmed cases, after some 77 new cases were confirmed on a returning flight of Bahrainis from Iran.

Kuwait on Thursday closed all workplaces and nonessential business for two weeks, including restaurants, cafes and health clubs. Schools and universities have already been suspended.

DC strains for virus response amid closures and confusion

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Washington is straining for an ample response to the coronavirus outbreak that is testing the nation's political and health care systems after President Donald Trump restricted air travel from Europe. Congress ran into trouble approving an aid package and the centers of power — the domed Capitol and stately White House — are being shuttered to visitors.

Trump, in an Oval Office address to the nation Wednesday night, said that the monthlong restriction on travel would begin late Friday at midnight. After days of playing down the threat, he blamed Europe for not acting quickly enough to address the "foreign virus" and claimed that U.S. clusters were "seeded" by European travelers.

But he said Thursday that he is also considering restricting travel to domestic hot spots such as California and Washington state. "Is it a possibility? Yes," he said. The president

also said that he would postpone campaign rallies, telling reporters that he believes he needs a "little separation until such time as this goes away."

So far, the administration's haphazard response and the stalemate in Congress have resulted in more uncertainty as the crisis roils the financial markets and rewrites daily life for Americans.

Congress decided to close the Capitol to the public until April. Congressional office buildings and the Congressional Visitor Center, through which tourists enter the Capitol, were also being closed. Only lawmakers, staff, journalists and visitors with official business will be permitted to enter. White House tours have been temporarily suspended.

The Smithsonian said that it was canceling all public events, programming and gatherings, including rental of its facilities, through May 3. The Smithsonian's network of museums and the National Zoo will remain open for now.

New base for Marines takes shape on Guam

BY SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

ANDERSEN AIR FORCE BASE, Guam — A new home for thousands of Marines is taking shape on land near Andersen Air Force Base that, until recently, was covered in a thick jungle full of snakes and littered with World War II-era bombs and bullets.

Dozens of workers swarmed over a construction site at Finegayan, near the northern tip of Guam late last month.

The facility they're building, to be known as Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz, is named in honor of the late Marine Brig. Gen. Vicente "Ben" Tomas Garrido Blaz, a Guam native. The base is designed to accommodate 5,000 Marines under a plan to reduce America's military footprint on the Japanese island of Okinawa over the next decade.

In 18 months, the workers have cleared snake-filled jungle that covered a small arsenal of unexploded munitions, including bombs as large as 500 pounds, grenades, rockets and bullets.

Heavy equipment is still moving earth across 400 acres that will become work and living areas for single Marines. But it's possible to get an idea of what the base will look like with a road leading to its main gate and the shells of a few concrete buildings rising from the dirt.

The heart of Camp Blaz, where barracks will be built for unaccompanied Marines, is next door to Naval Computer and Telecommunications Station Guam, just west of Andersen. The top secret listening post includes an impressive array of white domes

that look like giant golf balls.

During a recent tour of Camp Blaz, Navy Cmdr. Brian Foster, who is helping oversee the construction for the Naval Facilities Engineering Command, pointed out some of the planned facilities using a tabletop map.

The Navy last month awarded a contract to build two six-story barracks at the new base, he said, adding: "It's more than the construction of Camp Blaz."

The Marines will practice sharpshooting at several new ranges, including a "multi-purpose" machine-gun range being built along Guam's northwestern coast. Troops will also train on the islands of Tinian and Farallon de Medinilla, Foster said.

An abandoned housing area, known as Andersen South, is being turned into an urban training compound.

"There are hundreds of vacant houses there. It's already being used by the Marines for urban training," he said.

The Navy plans to add taller buildings to allow Marines to train the way they'd fight in a major city, as well as a mock embassy, breach training facility and a convoy training course, Foster said.

Marine families will live on Andersen, where another 300 housing units will be built, he added.

The base will also host the Marines' aviation element. Andersen's North Ramp is being turned into a facility equivalent to a Marine Corps air station, Foster said.

One hangar has already been built and another is under construction. Workers have also completed a headquarters building and facilities for ground-support equipment and an armory, he said.

At Naval Base Guam, to the south, workers will build new embarkation and debarcation facilities for the Marines, including a headquarters, medical and dental facilities, equipment storage areas and a kennel for military working dogs involved in customs inspections, Foster said.

Only 1,300 Marines will be permanently stationed on Guam with another 3,700 coming to the island as a rotational force in the same way that a Marine Air Ground Task Force deploys to Australia's Northern Territory to train each summer, he said.

The Japanese government is funding \$3 billion worth of projects for the Marines' relocation with the U.S. government spending another \$5.7 billion, Foster said.

"What we will see in the months and years ahead is a steady increase in the number of these construction projects," he said. "There will be about 50 in total, including projects that encompass multiple facilities."

The arrival of the Marines will have a deep impact on the 32-mile-long island and its 170,000 inhabitants, Foster added.

"We are trying to limit impact on infrastructure," he said.

That means improving roads, bridges and utilities such as water treatment, electricity and sewage systems to cater to the Marines.

"It's a huge benefit to everybody who lives on the island," he said.

Not everyone agrees. Last year, more than 100 residents held a roadside protest south of the planned base to voice concerns about the construction's impact on the environment and cultural sites, the Pacific Daily News reported July 11.

Military family sues over moldy housing conditions

BY ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

Another military family in the San Diego area has filed a lawsuit against Lincoln Military Housing, complaining of mold-infested housing that was not properly addressed and caused ongoing illnesses.

There are now at least nine ongoing cases against the military housing management company in San Diego Superior Court, according to the court's online database.

The latest lawsuit, filed Feb. 18 by Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Ryan Prunty, his wife, Cynthia, and their three sons, seeks damages for nine allegations including gross negligence, rent abatement and negligent infliction of emotional distress.

The family arrived at Camp Pendleton

after leasing two other homes at California bases from Lincoln with no issues. Their troubles began at Camp Pendleton on the day they arrived in March 2017, according to the lawsuit. When they moved into the residence, the family "discovered a number of sanitation issues and health hazards on the leased property, including dirt and animal hair imbedded in the floor, dog feces inside the house, a maggot infestation underneath the house and mold visible in the closets and within the windowsills," according to the suit.

The issues were reported to Lincoln and the company classified the mold as cosmetic and directed the family to use bleach and clean it themselves, according to the lawsuit. The Prunty family ultimately paid a cleaning company "to sweep the home

and make it habitable."

Ryan Prunty, a hospital corpsman at the base, also reported water damage and leakage.

Throughout the two years that the Prunty family lived in the house, the couple's children became sick. All three boys began wheezing, coughing and sneezing, according to the lawsuit. In January 2019, one son spent a month in the hospital for a swollen lymph node.

Lincoln Military Housing said in a statement that the company strictly follows state and federal industry standards.

"While we are looking into the facts in this case, we strongly deny these allegations and look forward to defending ourselves in a court of law," according to the statement.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman charged in case of compensation fraud

CA POMONA — A former Southern California college student has been charged with making fake threats in order to portray herself as a victim, prosecutors said.

The criminal complaint alleges that Anayeli Dominguez Pena, 25, of Ontario reported the false threats to police and applied for compensation from the California Victim Compensation Board, the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office said.

The former University of La Verne student pleaded not guilty on Tuesday to two felony counts and six misdemeanor counts.

According to the prosecution, the woman created fake messages and email accounts last spring and used them to fake a threat against herself and a student who was unaware of the scheme.

Police: Theft suspect claims she's Beyonce

NM LAS CRUCES — A New Mexico woman is facing charges after police say she stole a car and later tried to claim she was pop singer Beyonce Knowles.

Surena Henry was arrested Saturday in Las Cruces, N.M., when an officer spotted a vehicle that resembled one that had been reported stolen, the Las Cruces Sun-News reported.

According to court documents, Henry, 48, ignored the officer's orders to pull over and later parked in front of her home.

Documents say Henry told the officer she was Beyonce.

Police also reported Henry told the officer she found the

keys in the vehicle and decided to take it for a ride. Henry is charged with unlawful taking of a motor vehicle, concealing identity and resisting or obstructing an arrest.

Man arrested in gas pump skimming scheme

MA BOSTON — A Florida man prosecutors say was involved in a scheme to attach "skimming" devices to pumps at gas stations across New England to steal the debit and credit account numbers from thousands of unsuspecting drivers has been charged.

Luis Angel Naranjo Rodriguez, 29, of Hialeah, Fla., was charged Monday with possessing 15 or more counterfeit access devices, and possession of device-making equipment, the U.S. attorney's office in Boston said in a statement.

Naranjo Rodriguez was arrested in Concord, Mass., in November after police spotted him at a closed gas station next to an unlocked gas pump with keys in the lock, prosecutors said.

Officers searched Naranjo Rodriguez, a nearby vehicle and his hotel room and found multiple skimming devices and additional pump keys, authorities said.

School district to drop Redskins nickname

MI PAW PAW — A school district in southwestern Michigan is dropping its Redskins nickname and mascot after the superintendent urged school board members to end the contentious name.

The Paw Paw school board voted 6-1 on Monday to retire the nickname by the end of the school year following Superintendent Rick Reo's recommendation last week to drop the nickname.

The board's decision to drop the Redskins comes after it voted 4-3 in 2017 to keep the name after months of heated debate.

2 charged with defacing ancient rock art

NV LAS VEGAS — Two Nevada men have been indicted on charges of vandalizing an archaeological site after U.S. prosecutors say the pair spray-painted rock formations in a national monument that features petroglyphs.

Daniel Plata and Jonathan Pavon, both 25 and from Elko, are charged with conspiracy, destruction of government property and unauthorized damage or alteration or defacement of archaeological resources, U.S. Attorney Nicholas Trutanich's office said Monday.

Prosecutors say the men drove into the White River Narrows Archaeological District within Basin and Range National Monument, where Pavon acted as a lookout as Plata spray-painted, according to a criminal indictment.

Teacher used bathroom camera on coworkers

NJ PARSIPPANY — An elementary school teacher who put a hidden camera in the school's faculty bathroom has pleaded guilty to 12 counts of invasion of privacy.

Christopher Esnes, 42, of Long Hill, will forfeit his teaching license as part of a plea deal with the Morris County Prosecutor's office. He entered his pleas Monday and will be sentenced April 17, when prosecutors will recommend that he get probation and 90 days' community service.

Esnes admitted putting a camera in a faculty bathroom at the Littleton Elementary School in Parsippany during

the 2016-17 school year. Officials have said no students were filmed, but they have not disclosed when the camera was installed, how long it was there or how it was discovered.

Man sentenced in scheme to forge money

KS OVERLAND PARK — A California man has been sentenced to three years in prison for washing the ink off \$1 bills in a Kansas hotel room and reprinting them to look like \$100 bills.

The U.S. attorney's office said John Sebestyen, 51, of Mission Viejo, also was ordered Monday to pay nearly \$20,000 in restitution. Two co-defendants previously were sentenced in the case.

Charging documents say they used the fake \$100 bills to purchase items from retailers in the Kansas City metro area.

Police: Woman paid bail with pot-scented cash

LA ASHLAND — A Louisiana woman was arrested on drug charges after police determined the \$5,000 cash she used to post an inmate's bail had a "strong odor of marijuana."

Authorities began investigating Stormy Lynn Parfait, 33, on Friday, shortly after she showed up at the Ashland jail to pay the bond fee for an inmate being held there on drug charges, the Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's Office said in a statement obtained by news outlets.

After catching a whiff of the cash, a detective searched her car while she was still at the jail and found nearly \$40,000 more inside, along with about 100 Klonopin pills and a food stamp card that wasn't registered to Parfait, according to the sheriff's statement.

From wire reports

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US sports leagues suspend play

Associated Press

The NBA became the first major American sports league to suspend play because of the coronavirus pandemic, raising questions about the future of college basketball's March Madness and other pro sports.

It looked as if the NBA might be moving toward playing in empty arenas before it announced that a Utah Jazz player tested positive for the coronavirus and it had decided to pause its season after Wednesday's games.

The NHL followed suit on Thursday, with Commissioner Gary Bettman announcing that the league will 'pause' its season with 189 games left and uncertainty about how many more — if any — could be played before the playoffs. A handful of European hockey leagues have already called off the remainder of their seasons.

A person with knowledge of the situation said the Jazz player who tested positive was center Rudy Gobert. The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because neither the league nor the team confirmed the presumptive positive test.

"The NBA will use this hiatus to determine next steps for moving forward in regard to the coronavirus pandemic," the league said in a statement.

The test result, the NBA said, was reported shortly before the Utah at Oklahoma City game was called off. New Orleans

at Sacramento also was postponed after the announcement.

The G League also suspended its season.

NCAA President Mark Emmert said earlier in the day that only essential staff and limited family will be allowed to attend the upcoming NCAA basketball tournaments, draining the signature school spirit from one of the biggest events on the sports calendar.

But the organization could reassess its plans in the wake of the move by the NBA.

Also Wednesday, the Mariners said they will move their home games in March out of Seattle, the U.S. city hardest-hit by the outbreak; the team and Major League Baseball have not decided whether the games will be played at the opponent's ballpark or a neutral site.

The pinnacle of the college basketball season, the NCAA Tournament is a month-long festival of pep bands and face-painting and a cash cow that, along with football, helps fund non-revenue sports at schools throughout the country. A decision to play in fanless arenas would cost millions in ticket sales but preserve billions in TV rights fees.

The 68-team men's tournament is scheduled to begin Tuesday in Dayton, Ohio, where Gov. Mike DeWine has announced plans to ban "mass gatherings" to combat the spread of COVID-19, which was

declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization on Wednesday.

"It will have a different feel but it will still be highly competitive, and the kids will still play like there's no tomorrow," said Kansas Jayhawks coach Bill Self. "They'll make the most of it. We'll make the most of it."

Elsewhere, the Ivy League canceled all spring sports, as many American schools told students not to return from spring break and prepare for classes to be taught online. The conference had already canceled its men's and women's basketball tournaments.

More than 1,000 people have tested positive for the new coronavirus in the United States, with 32 deaths; those rates are expected to continue to rise.

Most people quickly recover from the virus after experiencing only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia.

According to WHO, people with mild illness recover in about two weeks, while those with more severe illness may take three to six weeks to recover. In China, where the virus first exploded, more than 80,000 people have been diagnosed and more than 58,000 have so far recovered.

NHL 'pausing' season amid coronavirus outbreak

Associated Press

The NHL is following the NBA's lead and suspending its season because of the coronavirus pandemic.

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman announced Thursday it is pausing its season, one day after the NBA suspended play after a player tested positive Wednesday for COVID-19.

"In light of ongoing developments resulting from the coronavirus, and after consulting with medical experts and convening a conference call of the Board of Governors, the National Hockey League is announcing today that it will pause the 2019-20 season beginning with tonight's games," Bettman said in a statement. "The NHL has been attempting to follow the mandates of health experts and local authorities, while preparing for any possible developments without taking premature or unnecessary measures. However, following last night's

news that an NBA player has tested positive for coronavirus — and given that our leagues share so many facilities and locker rooms and it now seems likely that some member of the NHL community would test positive at some point — it is no longer appropriate to try to continue to play games at this time."

The NHL is halting play with 189 games left in the season and uncertainty about how many more — if any — could be played before the playoffs. A handful of European hockey leagues have already called off the remainder of their seasons.

"We will continue to monitor all the appropriate medical advice, and we will encourage our players and other members of the NHL community to take all reasonable precautions — including by self-quarantine, where appropriate," Bettman said. "Our goal is to resume play as soon as it is appropriate and prudent, so that we will be able to complete the season and award the

Stanley Cup."

In anticipation of the season being suspended, numerous teams set to play road games were already finalizing plans to return home in the afternoon. The NHL preceded its decision to suspend the season by having all 31 teams cancel practices and pre-game skates. There were 10 games scheduled for Thursday night.

It's unclear what this move means for the rest of the regular season or playoffs.

The Stanley Cup has been awarded every year since 1893 with two exceptions: in 1919 when the final was canceled after five games because of the Spanish flu outbreak and in 2005 when the season was called off because of a lockout.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia.

NCAA Tournament still on — for now

Associated Press

The NCAA basketball tournaments are on — for now — though the buzzer-beaters, upsets and all the other shining moments will take place in mostly empty arenas.

Trying to avoid spreading the new coronavirus that has become a global pandemic, the NCAA on Wednesday decided the men's and women's Division I tournament games will be off-limits to the general public. The major college conferences followed the NCAA's lead, one by one announcing their league tournaments would go on the rest of the week with restricted fan access.

"I think the right answer is we considered every option available to us," NCAA President Mark Emmert told The Associated Press. "The notion of cancellation, however, is one that is pretty draconian because we're dealing with student-athletes for whom participating in a national championship is a lifelong dream.

"We debated every option available to us, but that's the one nobody wanted to pursue."

A few hours later, the NBA suspended its season after Utah Jazz player Rudy Gobert tested positive for COVID-19,

and re-opened questions about whether the NCAA had gone far enough.

The NCAA did not immediately return a request for comment following the NBA's announcement.

The NCAA's plan is to conduct both tournaments, which begin next week, with only essential staff and limited family in attendance.

"The decision was based on a combination of the information provided by national and state officials, by the advisory team that we put together of medical experts from across the country, and looking at what was going to be in the best interest of our student-athletes, of course," Emmert told the AP in a phone interview. "But also the public health implications of all of this. We recognize our tournaments bring people from all around the country together. They're not just regional events. They're big national events. It's a very, very hard decision for all the obvious reasons."

Emmert said the NCAA wants to move the men's Final Four on April 4 and 6 from Atlanta's Mercedes-Benz Stadium to a smaller arena in the area. The NCAA also will consider using smaller venues for second-week regional sites

currently set to be played at the Toyota Center in Houston, Madison Square Garden in New York, Staples Center in Los Angeles and Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

"We have to determine the availability of the sites, obviously, but it doesn't make good sense to have a football stadium be empty," Emmert said.

All sites for next week's men's games will remain the same unless conditions in those areas force relocation, he said. Or worse.

The NCAA said tickets already purchased will be refunded.

First- and second-round sites for the women's tournament will become official next week. Those games are usually played at or near the campuses of the highly seeded teams.

"It's really sad. Obviously it's disappointing for all our fans," said Louisville women's coach Jeff Walz, whose team is ranked No. 6 in the latest AP poll. "At the same time, I completely understand for the health and safety of the fans and student-athletes and everyone involved."

The decision applies to more than just men's and women's basketball. All NCAA-sponsored championships including

hockey's Frozen Four will be affected.

But the men's basketball tournament is the crown jewel, one of the most popular events on the American sports calendar. March Madness draws hundreds of thousands of fans to arenas from coast to coast. The men's tournament generated more than \$900 million in revenue last year for the NCAA and its member schools, though the majority of that was from a media rights deal with CBS and Turner that pays about \$800 million per year.

"We're like any enterprise of this size, we have business interruption insurance, and a variety of other things but we'll sort that out in due course," Emmert said.

Emmert said CBS and Turner plan to broadcast the games as usual. Other media members will be allowed into the arenas to cover the games, but how many is still being determined, he said.

Emmert said a protocol for the medical screening of people entering the arenas is still being worked out, too, along with what constitutes essential staff (bands? cheerleaders?) and how to define family members.

Seattle teams shut out of city because of virus concerns

Associated Press

SEATTLE — The Seattle Mariners are seeking alternative options for their season-opening series after Washington Gov. Jay Inslee announced Wednesday a ban on all large gatherings in the three counties of the Seattle metro area because of the virus outbreak.

Inslee said social gatherings of 250 or more people, including sporting events, are banned through at least the end of March because of the COVID-19 outbreak in the Seattle area. Officials said gatherings of under 250 could also be barred unless specific measures are

followed.

The decision impacts the Mariners' first seven games of the Major League Baseball season against the Texas Rangers (March 26-29) and Minnesota Twins (March 30-April 1), plus home games for the MLS Seattle Sounders, XFL Seattle Dragons and a pair of junior hockey teams in the area.

"We're working through the alternatives right now," Mariners owner John Stanton said at the team's spring training complex in Peoria, Ariz. "We think the alternatives include playing in Seattle in an empty stadium, the alternatives include playing in the home park of our oppo-

nents, in this case the Rangers and the Twins. Or playing at a neutral park in Peoria."

Stanton said he hoped to have an answer on where the team will play the first two series by Friday. He said it's unlikely the Mariners would play in Seattle at an empty stadium.

"As you can imagine, a lot of this is happening real time. So we're trying to figure it out as we go," he said.

Seattle third baseman Kyle Seager said conversations about the virus have dominated the clubhouse over the past few days. He added players would like some sort of resolution to the team's playing situation

as soon as possible, but that everyone's health was most important.

"This is a major, major, major thing," Seager said. "This is a major event, not only in Seattle, but the world."

MLB could shift the Rangers-Mariners four-game series to Texas. The Rangers are set to open a retractable-roof stadium this year, and Texas general manager Jon Daniels said this week the park would be ready if need be.

"Everything's being discussed, all potential contingency plans," Daniels said at the Rangers' camp in Surprise, Ariz.

Protests precede apology from US Soccer

Associated Press

The U.S. Soccer Federation apologized Wednesday night after it made claims in court documents that women on its national team had lesser responsibilities and physical abilities than their male counterparts, an assertion that drew widespread criticism and sparked a player protest.

The statement from USSF president Carlos Cordeiro came hours after The Coca-Cola Co. denounced the federation for its stance. Cordeiro also announced a shake-up of the USSF legal team.

“On behalf of U.S. Soccer, I sincerely apologize for the offense and pain caused by language in this week’s court filing, which did not reflect the values of our Federation or our tremendous admiration of our women’s national team,” the statement said. “Our WNT players are incredibly talented and work tirelessly, as they have demonstrated time and again from their Olympic gold medals to their World Cup

titles.”

American players wore their warm-up jerseys inside out for the national anthems and team photo before a 3-1 win over Japan in an Olympic prep match. Players hid the USSF crest on the jerseys but allowed the four stars — one for each World Cup title — to be visible.

“I think it just was a powerful message,” said forward Carli Lloyd, a two-time FIFA Player of the Year.

Coca-Cola had called the federation’s assertion in documents filed earlier this week “unacceptable and offensive.”

“We have asked to meet with them immediately to express our concerns. The Coca-Cola Co. is firm in its commitment to gender equality, fairness and women’s empowerment in the United States and around the world and we expect the same from our partners,” Coca-Cola said in a statement, first reported by The Wall Street Journal on Wednesday.

Coca-Cola has been a long-term partner with the USSF and a sponsor of the World

Cup.

In court documents filed Monday in response to the players’ motion for a summary judgment, the USSF said the women claimed their ability level is the same as the men “by ignoring the materially higher level of speed and strength required to perform the job of an MNT player.”

“A reasonable juror could conclude that the job of MNT player requires materially different skill and more responsibility than plaintiffs’ job does, while also taking place under materially different working conditions,” USSF lawyers wrote. “The job of MNT player (competing against senior men’s national teams) requires a higher level of skill based on speed and strength than does the job of WNT player (competing against senior women’s national teams).”

Molly Levinson, spokeswoman for the players in the lawsuit, said “this ‘argument’ belongs in the Paleolithic Era.”

“It sounds as if it has been made by a caveman,” she said

in a statement. “Literally everyone in the world understands that an argument that male players ‘have more responsibility’ is just plain simple sexism and illustrates the very gender discrimination that caused us to file this lawsuit to begin with.”

In addition to apologizing, Cordeiro said the USSF had retained the law firm of Latham & Watkins, the firm where former USSF president Alan Rothenberg is a retired partner. Seyfarth Shaw had been representing the federation.

“I have made it clear to our legal team that even as we debate facts and figures in the course of this case, we must do so with the utmost respect not only for our women’s national team players but for all female athletes,” Cordeiro said.

Players filed the gender discrimination lawsuit in federal court in Los Angeles last year, claiming they are paid less than their counterparts on the men’s national team.

Will ‘pandemic’ ruling impact Tokyo Olympics?

Associated Press

TOKYO — Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike spoke Thursday after the World Health Organization labeled the spreading virus a “pandemic,” a decision almost certain to affect the Tokyo Olympics.

“I can’t say there won’t be an impact,” she said. “But I believe cancellation is impossible.”

The reality for Koike and Japanese organizers is that any decision to cancel or proceed with the July 24 opening rests ultimately with the Switzerland-based International Olympic Committee.

Last year, Koike vehemently opposed moving the Olympic marathon out of Tokyo to Sapporo. IOC President Thomas Bach supported the move, and he won.

The IOC and local organizers say the games will open as planned in 4½ months. An irrevocable decision probably needs to be made by the end of May or early June — giving 11,000 Olympic athletes time to plan, TV space to set up, and sponsors enough notice to activate advertising

programs.

Is the torch relay going ahead?

Yes, though plans change almost daily.

The torch is to arrive on a flight from Greece on March 20 at a military airbase in northern Japan. The welcome ceremony has been downsized but is still to include a military band and a flyover by Japanese forces. About 140 children who were to perform have been withdrawn. The flame will be displayed in each of the three northern prefectures devastated by the 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and meltdown of three nuclear reactors.

The relay starts officially on March 26 in Fukushima prefecture — 150 miles northeast of Tokyo. Organizers have put off announcing any change in the scope of the relay until a government science panel meets on March 19 to assess conditions. If plans don’t change, IOC President Thomas Bach is to be in Hiroshima when the torch circulates there on May 18-19.

Are test events happening?

Several test events since the end of Feb-

ruary have been postponed or downsized. The next big one to watch is a gymnastics test set for April 4-6. The meet is being coordinated by FIG, the governing body of world gymnastics. Non-Japanese athletes are supposed to attend. The final test ends on May 6.

How much money is at stake?

Tokyo is officially spending \$12.6 billion to organize the games. But a national government audit board says it’s at least twice that. Perhaps as much as \$28 billion. Of all the money spent, \$5.6 billion is privately financed and represented in the local organizing committee’s operating budget. The rest of public money is from the city of Tokyo, other prefectures, and the national government.

The IOC has a budget reserve of almost \$2 billion to carry it to the next Olympics — the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing — in case of cancellation. The IOC also has an insurance policy on cancellation. It paid \$14 million for the policy four years ago in Rio de Janeiro.