

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## US retaliates against Iran-backed militia

BY CHAD GARLAND  
AND COREY DICKSTEIN

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — An American air raid early Friday morning on an Iranian-backed militia group in Iraq was precise, proportionate and defensive — designed to deter the group from launching more rockets at American and anti-ISIS coalition forces, the top general for U.S. Central Command said.

U.S. fighter jets struck five weapons caches south of Baghdad held by the Kataeb Hezbollah militia at about 1 a.m. in retaliation for an attack blamed on the group that killed two American troops and a British service member Wednesday, Marine Gen. Kenneth McKenzie said. He also blamed the militia for at least a dozen rocket attacks during the last six

months, at least two of which killed Americans.

“We believe this is going to have an effect on deterring future strikes of this nature,” McKenzie told reporters Friday at the Pentagon. “We’ve seen in the past what happens if you don’t respond [to attacks]. Now people know that we are not going to tolerate these direct attacks on American or coalition service members, and we are willing and able to respond.”

McKenzie stopped short of implicating Iran in ordering the attack, which came on what would have been the 63rd birthday of powerful Iranian Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, who was killed in a Jan. 3 U.S. drone strike. However, the CENTCOM commander said Tehran had clearly provided the weapons used in the Wednesday attack on Camp Taji, just north of Bagh-

dad. More than 30 107 mm Katyusha rockets were fired in the attack that killed Army Spc. Juan Miguel Mendez, Air Force Staff Sgt. Marshal D. Roberts and British Lance Cpl. Brodie Gillon.

For the foreseeable future, the U.S. will retain two aircraft carrier strike groups in the Middle East, which will provide flexibility to respond to more strikes and deter Iranian aggression, McKenzie said. The USS Dwight D. Eisenhower and USS Harry S. Truman are operating in the CENTCOM region. The U.S. is also in the process of moving Patriot missile launchers into Iraq, which are designed to shoot down enemy aircraft or missiles. He said the Patriots would not have been capable of stopping the relatively small rockets that struck Camp Taji this week.

McKenzie said damage as-

sessments of the overnight strikes were ongoing and complicated by poor weather conditions in the Baghdad area, but he expressed confidence the U.S. had “effectively destroyed these facilities,” which included storage for rockets and other advanced, Iranian-supplied weapons. Fatalities at the sites were likely, he said, but officials believed “collateral damage is going to be very low.”

The Iraqi government was informed about the strikes after they were launched, McKenzie said. But Iraqi officials on Friday condemned the American actions, warning the attacks could reignite tensions that nearly brought the U.S. and Iran to war in January. Iraq security forces said in a statement that three of its soldiers were killed. At least five members of Iraqi Shiite militias were also killed, according to the statement.

## Sources: Trump preparing to declare virus emergency

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump is preparing to invoke emergency powers as the country struggles to contain the coronavirus outbreak, according to two people familiar with the planning who spoke on condition of anonymity.

It was still unclear Friday, however, precisely what mechanism Trump would use to free up additional federal resources for testing and treatment as well as help those struggling with the economic impact.

The move comes as House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the Trump administration are laboring to finish a coronavirus aid package Friday that would fast-track federal aid to anxious Americans and calm teetering financial markets amid

the global crisis.

Central to the effort is free testing for the virus and guaranteed sick pay for workers who are taking time away from jobs, along with an infusion of dollars to handle unemployment benefits and boost food programs for children, families and seniors.

Pelosi and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin both indicated a deal was within reach after days of around-the-clock negotiations, with expectations of a Friday announcement. The House could then swiftly vote. Republican leaders are reviewing the details.

GOP leaders in Congress want to be sure that Trump publicly supports the package before they sign off on it ahead of any vote, according to a top

congressional aide unauthorized to discuss the private talks and speaking on condition of anonymity.

Earlier Friday, Mnuchin sounded an optimistic note. “I think we’re very close to getting this done,” he said in an appearance on CNBC.

On the COVID-19 illness, Mnuchin cautioned that “people should understand the numbers are going to go up before they go down.”

Providing sick pay for workers is a crucial element of federal efforts to stop the rapid spread of the infection. Officials warn that the nation’s health care system could quickly become overwhelmed with gravely sick patients, as suddenly happened in Italy, one of the countries hardest hit by

the virus.

The ability to ensure paychecks will keep flowing — for people who stay home as a preventative measure or because they’re feeling ill or caring for others — can help assure Americans they will not fall into financial hardship.

“We’re in an emergency, and we’re trying to respond as fast as we can,” said House Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Nita Lowey, D-N.Y., as lawmakers filed in and out of Pelosi’s office on Friday.

In one welcome announcement, the administration said Friday it is awarding \$1.3 million to two companies trying to develop rapid COVID-19 tests that could detect within an hour whether a person is positive for the new coronavirus.

# US troops continue agreed withdrawal

By J.P. LAWRENCE

*Stars and Stripes*

KABUL, Afghanistan – U.S. troops have pulled out of a key base in Afghanistan’s southern Helmand province, the site of some of the fiercest fighting of the war, officials said Friday.

U.S. advisers withdrew from Bost Airfield outside Helmand’s capital of Lashkar Gah, as part of a deal signed with the Taliban two weeks ago, said Omar Zwak, the provincial governor’s spokesman.

About 100 troops transferred from the airfield to Camp Shorab, a larger base about 12 miles to the northwest, formerly known as Camp Leatherneck, he said.

The Americans have also begun pulling out of Tactical Base Gamberi in Laghman province, east of Kabul, a tribal leader there said.

For the past few days, tribal elder Haji Shah Mahmoud said

he has seen large numbers of helicopters flying in and out of the base, which is next to his village.

“I thought there must be a huge military operation going on,” Mahmoud said. “(Afghan) soldiers told me that, actually, they are American forces leaving.”

The drawdown began on Monday, the U.S. military said in a statement earlier this week. The terms of the U.S.-Taliban deal state that American forces would pull out from five bases and reduce troop numbers from about 13,000 to 8,600 by mid-July.

Troops have also begun to withdraw from a base in the western province of Herat, an unnamed U.S. official told Agence France-Presse on Tuesday.

U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, declined to comment on specific base closings.

After previously withdraw-

ing from Helmand province as part of a large-scale drawdown in 2014, the U.S. returned to the provincial capital the following winter with about 100 soldiers as part of an “expeditionary advising package” to help bolster security there.

But amid increasing insecurity in the province, U.S. Marines were sent back to the province to strengthen the training and advising for government forces battling the resurgent Taliban.

The province, considered the birthplace of the Taliban, has claimed the most lives of U.S. and British troops since the 2001 invasion.

If the U.S. military leaves again, some locals fear it will likely see a repeat of the 2015 Taliban offensive, they told Stars and Stripes last year.

“Security is going to get worse,” said Haji Abdul Ali Sarwari, a civil activist living in the provincial capital at the time. “We have experience.”

On Friday, provincial council leader Saiful Malook Noori welcomed the American withdrawal and said he hoped it would usher in peace with the insurgent group. Under the terms of its deal with the U.S., the Taliban agreed to break ties with international terrorist groups and broker a durable peace agreement.

“We were told by the local authorities that according to the deal with the Taliban, this base will be closed and its forces will finally leave Afghanistan,” Noori said. “If Taliban also fulfill what they agreed to, it will be good for Afghanistan.”

U.S. officials have publicly expressed doubts that the Taliban will hold up its end of the agreement. Officials have said the militants are continuing to carry out violent attacks at a level greater than agreed to under the deal, though those specific terms remain classified.

## South Korea reassignment backlog expected

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The new 60-day travel restrictions for service members and families will cause a large backlog of people in South Korea who would have left the country during that time for new assignments, the commander of U.S. Forces Korea said Friday.

“We’re going to have a bulge competing with all the inbounds and normal outbounds for the months of May and June,” Gen. Robert Abrams, commander of U.S. Forces Korea, told reporters at the Pentagon during a video teleconference Friday morning.

The travel policy, which started Friday and is expected to end in mid-May, stops travel and military moves in locations that have widespread outbreaks

of the coronavirus, which are categorized as Level 3 and includes South Korea.

The Army has established a 24-hour hotline to help provide information to service members and families affected by the ban on military moves to countries categorized as Level 2 and 3. The number is 1-888-276-9472 and additional resources can be found at [www.army.mil/covid-19](http://www.army.mil/covid-19). Level 2 locations are places with a sustained community spread and Level 3 locations have widespread outbreaks.

During the 60 days, service members and families who would have left for their next duty station will be stuck in South Korea and must wait to leave for their next assignment until after the travel ban lifts, according to Abrams. This affects not just people who are

leaving the country, but others who are moving there to replace them. The backlog could potentially affect when household goods are shipped, military housing or child care availability, and service members who need to move for military courses or are expected to take up a command position at their next unit.

The military has its main moving season starting in the spring and ending in the fall. About 400,000 service members, Defense Department civilians, and their families are moved each year, with 40% of moves happening between May 15 and August 31, according to the Pentagon.

There are 28,500 service members stationed in South Korea. Abrams did not say Friday how many people were expected to be backlogged during

the 60-day travel ban.

Starting April 1, the command is also facing a furlough of several thousand South Korean nationals who support the U.S. mission on the Peninsula, if negotiations for a new Special Measures Agreement falls through between the United States and South Korea.

The contributions in the agreement pay for the salaries of more than 9,000 South Korean employees, logistical support and construction projects. Most of the contributions go back into the South Korean economy.

The furlough will not impact people who support life, health, safety or minimum readiness for U.S. forces in Korea, Abrams said. However, it could exacerbate the impact of the backlog, he said.

# US adjusts to new life amid pandemic

Associated Press

Workers lost their jobs, parents came up with impromptu lesson plans for children kept home from shuttered schools. Families fretted over dwindling retirement accounts, the health of elderly parents, and every cough and sneeze in their midst.

Millions of people settled into new and disrupted routines Thursday as the coronavirus began to uproot almost every facet of American life.

The spate of event cancellations that drove home the gravity of the outbreak a day earlier only intensified Thursday, with Disney and Universal Orlando Resort shutting down theme parks, the NCAA calling off March Madness and Broadway theaters closing their doors in Manhattan. All the major professional sports announced they are halting play, and officials ordered a shutdown of every school in the state of Ohio for three weeks.

In the Pacific Northwest, parents scrambled to devise homeschooling using library books or apps. Others, desperate to get to work, jumped on social media boards to seek child care or exchange tips about available babysitters.

Parents rushed to college campuses and

drove away with their children's belongings and bags of their clothing. College officials scrambled to pay for plane tickets home for others.

A mother in Seattle organized small outdoor play dates where the kids are told not to get too close to one another.

The parents stood awkwardly, several feet apart.

Most big tech companies in San Francisco and Seattle have told employees to work from home, emptying out the downtown neighborhoods that are a hub for tech and venture capital firms. The restaurants, food trucks and other businesses that thrive off lunchtime crowds say that business has pretty much ground to a halt.

Keny and Nancy Pham own a pair of businesses outside of the Salesforce Tower in San Francisco — a nail salon and a Vietnamese Banh Mi restaurant — where they say sales have dropped more than 50% this week. The salon was empty Thursday at the usually busy lunchtime.

In Las Vegas, where so much of the economy is wedded to big crowds from concerts, tournaments, conventions and tourists, many suddenly found themselves out of work.

Las Vegas bartender Rique Rose works part-time at three different locations on the Las Vegas Strip, tending bar in event centers at the MGM Grand, the Mandalay Bay and in the T-Mobile arena, where the Las Vegas Golden Knights play.

First, he lost Friday and Saturday shifts with the cancellation of the Pac-12 men's college basketball tournament. Then, he saw that the NHL was suspending the rest of its season. He's still waiting to see if the Post Malone concert he was scheduled to work Saturday night will be canceled.

"I guess we're just going to have to endure it," he sighed.

Mom Natasja Billiau came up with a quick homeschooling plan for 8-year-old Victor and 5-year-old Anna Laura after their public school in Seattle closed for the first full day Thursday. They kept as close to their regular school schedule as possible, she said, with recess times and lunch built in.

Billiau's husband has been working from home since last week, and the family is moving to a new house in two weeks.

"Everything's up in the air. I don't know how I'm going to get it done, we'll see," she said. "It's a day-by-day situation."

## Nations employ drastic tactics to fight coronavirus

Associated Press

MADRID, Spain — From preschoolers to doctoral candidates, tens of millions of students stayed home on Friday on three continents as schools, playgrounds, bars, restaurants and offices shut down to try and slow the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

Channeling wartime rhetoric and tactics in the face of a microscopic enemy, leaders appealed for solidarity to battle a threat that appeared to expand exponentially. They vowed to protect not just the sick, but those sacrificing their livelihoods and education for the greater good.

With promises of financial support from the European Commission, France and Germany, European stocks rose after turbulent trading in Asia and a day after the market's worst session in over three decades.

With new infections rising sharply in Spain, the government put 60,000 people in four towns on a mandatory lockdown Friday — the nation's first and Europe's second after drastic nationwide measures in Italy. In Madrid, which is struggling with nearly 2,000 infections, many in nursing homes, the government is pooling intensive care units and considering offers by hotel chains to transform rooms into sick wards.

In China, where new infections have tailed off, authorities mobilized to prevent a boomerang effect, quarantining new arrivals for 14 days. But the intensifying spread of COVID-19 beyond Asia dashed any hopes for containing the virus, despite drastic curbs on travel and social events.

In Europe, leaders and medical experts tried to predict the future — or at least the next few weeks — by scrutinizing the virus' trajectory so far, es-

pecially in China and Italy, the epicenters of Asia and Europe. The Italian town of Codogno, which had all but shut down hours after recording Italy's first coronavirus infection, showed that changing habits does make a difference. New infections have slowed drastically there compared to the rest of Italy, where draconian measures came far later.

"More than a sigh of relief, there was some concern over the risk that all of the sacrifices were in vain," said Mayor Francesco Passerini, who like most in the town wears a mask.

In South Korea, which had nearly 8,000 cases overall, Friday marked the first day recoveries outnumbered new infections since the country's first patient was confirmed Jan. 20.

The pandemic's new epicenter is Europe. Italy's death toll topped 1,000 with more than 15,000 confirmed cases.

France, Spain and Germany all exceeded 2,000 cases each.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was isolating himself after his wife tested positive. The Australian home affairs minister was hospitalized in isolation after testing positive. He returned home on Sunday from Washington, D.C., where he met U.S. Attorney-General William Barr and President Donald Trump's daughter, Ivanka.

Though many professional sports teams canceled or postponed games, decisions still loomed for the biggest athletic competition of them all — the 2020 Summer Olympics — which was still firmly on the calendar. The International Olympic Committee and the Tokyo organizing committee were not considering canceling or delaying the games, "absolutely not at all," said Japan Olympics minister Seiko Hashimoto.

# Biden, Sanders give crisis response plans

Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. — Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden on Thursday called for a sweeping national response to the coronavirus outbreak, chiding President Donald Trump for a response he said was woefully insufficient and warning that the widening public health crisis should not be viewed through a lens of politics.

“This administration has left us woefully unprepared for the exact crisis we now face,” Biden said in a speech delivered from his hometown of Wilmington, Del., and tailored to draw sharp contrasts between the former vice president and the Republican incumbent he hopes to topple this fall.

A short time later, Biden’s last Demo-

cratic presidential rival, Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, said the outbreak may isolate Americans working from home and in quarantine and he suggested the country needed to band together, not divide.

“If there ever was a time in the modern history of our country when we were all in this together this is the moment,” Sanders said. He said of Trump’s White House, “We have an administration that is largely incompetent and whose incompetence and recklessness have threatened the lives of many, many people in our country.”

Biden said he is already up to meeting such challenges better than Trump.

“No president can promise to prevent future outbreaks, but I can promise you this when I’m president we will be better prepared, respond better and recover better,”

Biden declared. “We will lead with science, listen to the experts, will heed their advice. We’ll build American leadership and rebuild it to rally the world to meet the global threats that we are likely to face again.”

Biden cautioned that the virus, which some Trump allies have dismissed as overblown fodder for the president’s critics, “does not have a political affiliation.” And in a direct dig at Trump, Biden added another pledge: “I’ll always tell you the truth. This is the responsibility of a president. That’s what is owed the American people.”

The former vice president and Sanders gave their dueling addresses on the coronavirus less than 24 hours after Trump spoke to the nation from the Oval Office about a public health crisis he’d previously downplayed.

## Rep. Hunter’s son pens letter to keep dad out of jail

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The teenage son of convicted California Republican Rep. Duncan Hunter has penned a letter asking the court to not send his dad to jail for mispending his campaign funds.

Hunter, who resigned from Congress in January, is scheduled to be sentenced next week after pleading guilty to mispending his campaign funds. The former Marine served six terms, representing a district east of San Diego that is one of the last conservative bastions of Southern California.

His defense team is asking the judge to sentence Hunter to 11 months of home confinement. The prosecution is asking for 14 months in prison.

Hunter’s attorneys also submitted to the judge letters from Democratic Rep. Juan Vargas of San Diego and former Navy

SEAL Edward Gallagher, who received support from Hunter in fighting his war crimes case before Gallagher was pardoned by President Donald Trump.

Gallagher and his wife, Andrea, wrote that Hunter visited Gallagher in his pre-trial confinement and fought for Gallagher when few others would. The couple added that “he is a man of character, and the mistakes he made do not define him nor should they overshadow his activism on behalf of service members and their families.”

Hunter’s son said his dad raised him to be a hard worker with a strong Christian faith.

“With everything that has happened in the last thirteen years or so, my father has made it to every single one of my sports games,” the unnamed teen was quoted as writing in the defense team’s sentencing

memorandum filed Tuesday and made public Wednesday.

He went on to write: “I truly do not wish to fathom what kind of person I would be if I never knew him.”

Congressman Vargas, a Democrat representing the district next to Hunter’s 50th district, wrote a handwritten letter on blank paper without a congressional letterhead. He stated that while the two differ politically, Hunter needs help not punishment.

“While his behavior is not excused by the afflictions he suffered in Afghanistan and Iraq, I personally believe that Mr. Hunter would not have committed his crimes and hurt his family in such a profound way if he was not battling the demons and substance abuse addiction that followed him home from his wartime deployments,” Vargas wrote.

## Judge orders release of Chelsea Manning from jail

Associated Press

FALLS CHURCH, Va. — A federal judge on Thursday ordered the release of former Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning, ending roughly a year of incarceration that she had served for refusing to testify to a grand jury.

U.S. District Judge Anthony Trenga ordered Manning’s release from jail after prosecutors reported that the grand jury that subpoenaed her has disbanded.

The Alexandria sheriff’s office confirmed Thursday night that Manning had

been released.

The judge left in place more than \$256,000 in fines he imposed for her refusal to testify to the grand jury, which is investigating WikiLeaks.

The fines had been accumulating at a rate of \$1,000 a day.

A hearing in the case that had been scheduled for Friday was canceled. Manning had argued that she had shown through her prolonged stay at the Alexandria jail that she proved she could not be coerced into testifying and therefore should be released.

Manning’s legal statement asked for privacy and said they were relieved at her release. On Wednesday, her lawyers said she had attempted suicide while at the jail.

Manning was held since May for refusing to testify before a grand jury investigating Wikileaks. She spent an additional two months in jail earlier in 2019 for refusing to testify to a separate grand jury.

She could have faced nearly six more months of jail time if the grand jury had continued its work. The civil contempt citation was designed to coerce her testimony.

# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Worker rescues injured dog from incinerator

**MD** BALTIMORE — A Baltimore worker operating a trash loading machine rescued a severely injured dog after the animal fell 30 feet into a garbage incinerator.

The front-end loader operator noticed something moving among the piles of debris, stopped his machine and jumped into the trash to save what turned out to be a critically injured dog, Baltimore Animal Rescue & Care Shelter said in a statement Wednesday.

The dog was taken to the shelter, where veterinarians found he was covered in trash, unable to walk and suffering from multiple cuts and puncture wounds, according to Animal Rescue. The center named him Donut, and he has since been recovering, Bailey Deacon, a spokeswoman for the shelter, told The Baltimore Sun.

## Horse-drawn carriages may clog into history

**IL** CHICAGO — A ride in a horse-drawn carriage in downtown Chicago may turn into nothing but a memory after a City Council committee voted in favor banning them at the start of next year.

The council's Committee on License and Consumer Protection's vote Wednesday sent the proposed ordinance to the full City Council for a vote next week. The full council rarely fails to pass measures that are endorsed by its committees.

The vote could be a final chapter for the carriages that have been popular with tourists, newlyweds and others for generations but have also been the subject of harsh criticism by animal rights activists and others in recent years.

Alderman Brendan Reilly said it is time for the carriage

rides to clip clop into the history books.

"There are folks that have an issue with this industry entirely related to traffic and public safety, (and) there are others who care about whether these animals are being treated in a humane fashion," said Reilly. "For me, it's a combination of both."

## Mountain lion attacks 2, including deputy

**CO** FORT COLLINS — Authorities in northern Colorado say a mountain lion attacked one person and bit a sheriff's deputy who was responding to the scene.

David Moore, a spokesman for the Larimer County Sheriff's Office, says the attack happened in Big Thompson Canyon in Loveland on Wednesday. The deputy suffered non-life-threatening injuries, and the other person who was attacked was taken to a hospital.

The Fort Collins Coloradoan reports the mountain lion was shot.

## Bank robbery suspects arrested after chase

**MO** KANSAS CITY — Two bank robbery suspects are in custody after leading police on a chase through parts of the Kansas City area that reached up to 110 mph.

The Kansas City Star reported that the suspects robbed the First Federal Bank in Independence, Mo., on Wednesday morning and fled with an undisclosed amount of money.

Police spotted the suspects' black SUV and a chase began along Interstate 435 through south Kansas City, Mo., and into Kansas, where at one point the SUV reportedly reached speeds of about 110 mph.

The suspects abandoned the

SUV and ran into a neighborhood before Overland Park, Kan., officers arrested them.

## Charge dropped against man in wildfire case

**UT** PROVO — State prosecutors dismissed a charge and canceled a jury trial scheduled for a man accused of starting one of the largest wildfires in Utah history.

The state dismissed a misdemeanor charge of burning during a closed fire season against Robert Ray Lyman on Tuesday, The Daily Herald reported.

A misdemeanor reckless burn charge involving starting a fire that endangers the lives of animals was dismissed with prejudice Feb. 25.

Lyman, 63, pleaded not guilty to both charges in Provo district court in June.

The wildfire that burned 112 square miles in Iron and Garfield counties destroyed 13 homes and caused more than \$40 million in damage.

## Annual ice breaking ritual begins at harbor

**MN** DULUTH — A U.S. Coast Guard cutter has started ice breaking activities in the Twin Ports of Duluth and Superior, an annual ritual that signals the approach of spring.

The cutter Alder began cleared the channels Tuesday for the upcoming shipping season. It's so the 1,000-foot long ships loaded with taconite, coal, limestone and other cargo can maneuver through without getting stuck.

Minnesota Public Radio News said the Coast Guard is also responsible for maintaining the ports in Two Harbors and Silver Bay and may help break ice in the Thunder Bay, Ontario, harbor.

The Great Lakes shipping

season begins March 25 when the Soo Locks open between Lake Superior and lakes Huron and Michigan. High water levels have delayed the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway on the eastern side of the lakes by two weeks.

## Thief snatches phone, is hit by subway train

**NY** NEW YORK — A man was struck and killed by a New York City subway train Thursday after he grabbed someone's cellphone and jumped onto the tracks to flee, police said.

The unidentified man snatched a phone at the Canal Street station at about 4 a.m., police said. He jumped onto the tracks and was hit by a northbound train, they said.

The man was pronounced dead at the scene. Subway service was delayed in both directions while police investigated.

## Crew finds human remains in sewer pipe

**FL** PANAMA CITY — An underground utility crew checking out a sewer blockage found skeletal remains on Wednesday morning, police said.

As the crew was vacuuming out the sewer pipe, some debris broke loose and clogged the vacuum, according to Panama City police Chief Scott Ervin.

The crew stopped the vacuum and found what appeared to be skeletal remains, Ervin said. The medical examiner's office was then called to the scene.

Ervin told the News Herald that they've since learned the bones are human.

The area is now being treated as a crime scene.

"The remains, by appearance, have been in there for some time," Ervin said.

From wire reports

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# Coronavirus craters world of sports

Associated Press

The world's sports schedule cratered at warp speed Thursday, with one of the biggest events on the U.S. calendar, the fun-filled and colorful college basketball tournament known as March Madness, becoming the first mega-event to be scrubbed due to fear of the spread of the coronavirus.

Leaders at all levels of sports, including the NCAA, NBA, NHL, Major League Baseball, golf, tennis and soccer, decided the risk of playing games with the threat of the virus hanging over them was too great despite the billions of dollars — to say nothing of the trophies, pride and once-in-a-lifetime experiences — hanging in the balance.

By late in the afternoon of an extraordinary, headline-a-minute day across a pandemic-rattled globe, the NCAA, which regulates March Madness and virtually all major U.S. college sports, basically had no choice. With conferences and individual teams calling off their basketball seasons at breakneck pace, the NCAA followed suit. They scrapped all college winter and spring championships, the highlight of which is the men's basketball tournament — a three-week extravaganza that stands as the biggest event this side of the Super Bowl on the U.S. sports calendar.

The cancellation leaves a massive hole in

American sports — from campuses across the country, to a growing passel of sports-betting businesses that rely on college hoops money, to say nothing of the hearts of players who were poised to get their first, or last, or only chance to shine on the big stage.

All of it was to be covered by CBS and its partners; about 80 percent of the NCAA's \$1.05 billion annual budget is bankrolled by the money the networks pay to present the 68-team tournament over the air, on cable and online.

"This is bigger than a sport or championship," said Kansas University coach Bill Self, whose team would've been the likely favorite to win it all.

Hours earlier, Kansas and Duke had each taken matters into their own hands, announcing they wouldn't be sending any of their teams to games, no matter the stakes.

It wasn't even the most jaw-dropping moment of the morning. That came, fittingly, at one of the world's most renowned sports venues — Madison Square Garden — where at halftime of a Big East Conference tournament game, the PA announcer came on and said the tournament had been called.

By then, every major conference, and virtually all of the minor ones, had done the same thing. They were prompted in

part by the NCAA's decision a day earlier to hold all its tournament games — which had been scheduled to start next week in nine cities and close April 6 at a 71,000-seat stadium in Atlanta — in front of friends and family and limited "essential" personnel.

"I'm not a researcher in immunology or infectious disease, but those who are engaged at the NCAA level provided some stark information yesterday," said Greg Sankey, the commissioner of the Southeastern Conference.

The March Madness news meant it will be a world free of basketball for the foreseeable future.

A day after the NBA put its season on temporary hiatus, a second member of the Utah Jazz — Donovan Mitchell — tested positive for the coronavirus. The league said its suspension would last for at least 30 days — possibly a conservative guess, as teams undertake the task of identifying any player or referee who has had recent contact with the Jazz, then putting them into isolation for the required two weeks.

"What would kill the NBA season is if more players catch it," Mavericks owner Mark Cuban said in an interview on CNBC. He called the hiatus a matter of "us being vigilant, as all businesses should be. Businesses are going to have to be incredibly vigilant, and that's hard."

## Commentary

# Virus outbreak leaves fans out in the cold

Associated Press

Going a week without watching sports used to be a dare. It's the new reality.

A quick glance at today's TV sports listings provides all the confirmation you need. It looks like the departure screen at the airport during a blizzard:

Canceled.

Canceled.

Postponed.

Canceled.

Efforts by sports leagues to contain the spread of the virus have become one more way to track the impact of the outbreak around the globe. The closer the event was to a cluster of cases, the more likely it was to be played in front of empty

seats, canceled or about to be. After several weeks watching from what seemed like a safe distance, sports fans in the United States are waking up to see those red pins scattered across their maps.

On Thursday, conference basketball tournaments stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific hung a "Sorry, We're Closed" sign on the door. The NBA, NHL, MLB and MLS did the same. The last likely major college basketball game of any import to be played, a Big East tournament contest between St. John's and Creighton at Madison Square Garden, was abandoned at halftime Thursday.

"Bizarre. We shouldn't have been here today," said St. John's

TV analyst Brandon Tierney. "There's no other way to put it. We had enough information last night when we went to bed."

Now picture the poor person who crawled off the couch just before intermission to make a quick lunch, then returned to find a blank screen. The rest of us will be wearing that same expression soon enough.

If the idea of self-quarantine held any allure for sports fans, it was the chance to binge-watch March Madness and Opening Day in baseball. Good luck with that. Televised games are about to become as scarce as toilet paper at Costco.

Don't waste much time worrying about the owners or players — they'll be fine. Most will

welcome the opportunity to take a few weeks off. The real harm being done to sports at the moment is happening on the fringes, to folks who eke out a living selling beer in the arenas and parking cars near the stadiums.

And if you've got any sympathy left, well, save it for the fans.

Being able to argue about sports with your crazy relatives — as opposed to say, politics — has kept many a family dinner from spiraling into a food fight. It's small talk, granted, but also one of these things, as Joni Mitchell put it, "That you don't know what you've got 'till it's gone."

## MAJOR POSTPONEMENTS

### March Madness

Following a flurry of conferences and individual teams calling off their basketball seasons Thursday, the NCAA followed suit. They scrapped all college winter and spring championships, the highlight of which is the men's basketball tournament — a three-week extravaganza that stands as the biggest event this side of the Super Bowl on the U.S. sports calendar. The tournament, more commonly known as March Madness, had been held every year since 1939 for men's teams. There has been an annual women's tournament since 1982.

### NBA

The NBA put its season on indefinite hiatus Wednesday night after Utah Jazz center Rudy Gobert tested positive for COVID-19. The Jazz's Donovan Mitchell also has tested positive for the virus. The league said its suspension would last for at least 30 days — possibly a conservative guess, as teams undertake the task of identifying any player or referee who has had recent contact with the Jazz, then putting them into isolation for the required two weeks.

League commissioner Adam Silver said there is a possibility the season could end up wrapping in the summer, with the NBA Finals possibly played in July instead of mid-June.

Cancellation also is a possibility.

### Hockey

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman said Thursday the league would “pause” its season, effective immediately, because of the pandemic, although the league did not report any positive tests for

coronavirus. Bettman said the hope is to resume play later and still award the Stanley Cup.

Bettman on Friday urged players to self-isolate while the league is on hiatus.

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

A handful of European hockey leagues have called off the remainder of their seasons.

### Baseball

Major League Baseball scrapped spring training and postponed the start of its season, currently scheduled for March 26, for at least two weeks.

MLB had not had a mass postponement of openers since 1995, when the season was shortened from 162 games to 144 following a 7½-month players' strike that also wiped out the 1994 World Series.

This year marked the earliest opening day other than for international games. As it stood, Game 7 of the World Series would have been Oct. 28.

The minor league season, which was to start April 9, also will be delayed along with qualifying in Arizona for this year's Olympic baseball tournament and for next year's World Baseball Classic.

### Golf

Augusta National on Friday postponed the Masters, with no indication as to when it might be played. The Masters has finished in April every year since 1935 — the first tournament was in late March — except when it was canceled from 1943 to 1945 because of World War II.

The PGA Tour decided Thursday to scrap the rest of

The Players Championship and shut down its other tournaments for the next three weeks. There was no immediate word whether The Players Championship would be rescheduled.

The PGA Tour postponed three tournaments, beginning next week, including its first major of the season.

### Tennis

The ATP called off men's tournaments for the next six weeks; the WTA said its tournament in South Carolina, set for April 6-12, would not be held as scheduled, with decisions about the rest of the season to come in the next week.

As of now, the next men's or women's tennis tournament still on the schedule is a WTA event on clay at Stuttgart, Germany, beginning April 20.

The next Grand Slam event, the French Open, is still scheduled to be held in Paris beginning May 24.

### Auto racing

NASCAR on Friday announced it would postpone its next two races, in Atlanta and Miami, after initially planning to hold the events without spectators.

IndyCar announced Friday that it would suspend its season through the end of April. The series also had planned to run this weekend in St. Petersburg, Fla., without fans in attendance before having a change of heart.

The first Formula One Grand Prix of the season, the Australian GP, was canceled. The Bahrain and Vietnam F1 races were postponed Friday. The Chinese Grand Prix in Shanghai, scheduled for April 19, was postponed on Feb. 12. The Formula One season could start in the Netherlands, at the Zandvoort track outside Amsterdam, on May 3.

### Football

The XFL will be suspended for the rest of the 2020 season.

“The XFL is committed to playing a full season in 2021 and future years,” the league said in a statement.

The NFL, never off the radar even in the depths of the offseason, announced a number of changes and cancellations on its schedule of meetings, fan fest and scouting trips — all related to coronavirus.

### Soccer

MLS is shutting down for 30 days and reportedly plans to reschedule postponed matches on the back end of the season.

The Premier League and the Champions League were suspended Friday, meaning all five of Europe's biggest national competitions are on hold. Matches in England will be stopped until at least April 3 after five Premier League clubs said some players or staff were in self-isolation.

The National Women's Soccer League is scheduled to begin the season April 18. The league canceled all preseason matches.

### Horse racing

Races were going on in several states, although without fans in the stands; organizers of the Kentucky Derby were moving forward with plans for the May 2 race.

### Olympics

The IOC on Thursday went ahead with its ceremonial lighting of the Olympic flame. On Friday, though, the Greek Olympic committee suspended the rest of its torch relay because of the “unexpectedly large crowd” that gathered to watch.

# Trump's suggestion to 'postpone' Olympics not under consideration

Associated Press

TOKYO — President Donald Trump's suggestion to postpone the Tokyo Olympics for a year because of the spreading coronavirus was immediately shot down by Japan's Olympic minister.

"The IOC and the organizing committee are not considering cancellation or a postponement — absolutely not at all," Seiko Hashimoto, an Olympic bronze medalist, told a news conference on Friday in Tokyo.

The International Olympic Committee and Tokyo organizers have stayed on message since the viral outbreak in China three months ago spread across Asia and then the globe: The games will open as scheduled on July 24.

"I just can't see having no people there. In other words, not allowing people," Trump told reporters at the White

House on Thursday. "Maybe, and this is just my idea, maybe they postpone it for a year."

Television broadcasters and sponsors have billions invested in the Olympics, and the crowded international sports calendar has little space for pushing the games back a year. Holding the Olympics without fans has been floated, as has simply canceling the Olympics, which has only happened during wartime.

"As best we can — so athletes will have no confusion or uncertainty — we will put in our maximum effort," Hashimoto said. She competed in four Winter Olympics as a speed skater, winning bronze in 1992, and three Summer Olympics as a cyclist.

A cancellation or postponement will ripple in thousands of directions, hitting sponsor, television, 11,000 Olympic and 4,400 Paralympic athletes,

staffs, airlines, hotels, and \$1 billion lost in ticket sales. It also hurts 80,000 unpaid volunteers who will miss a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

The IOC oversaw an Olympic flame-lighting ceremony on Thursday in Greece, another sign it hopes to go ahead in 4½ months. The flame is to arrive in Japan on March 20 and will begin a four-month relay around the country on March 26.

Tokyo organizers have downsized the torch arrival ceremony and will announce a week before the relay begins if crowds will be limited, or the route will be changed.

"This ceremony demonstrates once more our commitment to the success of the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020," Bach said in Greece. He lauded officials who are "taking so many significant measures to contain the spread of the coronavirus."

# NASCAR, IndyCar pull plug

Associated Press

NASCAR and IndyCar both reversed course Friday and pulled the plug on racing this weekend, with IndyCar also suspending its season through the end of April due to concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic.

NASCAR called off Sunday's race at Atlanta Motor Speedway and next weekend's events at Homestead-Miami Speedway. Both events were already scheduled to be run without spectators.

Seven-time NASCAR champion Jimmie Johnson supported the move.

"We want to race as much as you want us to race but this is the right decision," Johnson wrote on Twitter. "This is so much bigger than sports right now and the health and safety of our fans, industry members and the overall public is top priority."

IndyCar was scheduled to open its season Sunday on the streets of downtown St. Petersburg without fans. Formula One also canceled its season opening race in Australia, leaving the first full weekend of global motorsports without a major event.

"After careful consideration, including regular communication with our event promoters, health officials, and the city administrations in our respective race markets regarding COVID-19, we have made the decision to cancel all events through April," IndyCar said. "(The) safety of our fans, participants, staff, partners, and media will always remain our top priority."

NASCAR said the decision to postpone the next two weeks "is in the best interest of the safety and well-being of our fans, competitors, officials and everyone associated with our sport."

There was no announcement of any plans to reschedule the races.

# Iditarod to continue without post-race events

Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Officials with the world's most famous sled dog race announced Thursday they have postponed post-race events in Nome in response to the new coronavirus.

The Iditarod has postponed both the awards banquet set for March 22 and the meet-the-mushers event set for March 21, both in Nome, where the winner is expected some time next week.

The finish line is near the Nome mini-convention center, which serves as a gathering point for mushers, their families, race fans and volunteers who descend on the city.

"They will still be using the mini-convention center as their headquarters. But we're going to be limiting the amount of people that are allowed in there at any one time," Nome City Manager Glenn Steckman said.

The number of people al-

lowed inside the building isn't yet known.

"I have to meet with the representatives from the Iditarod to discuss numbers, but the numbers are ultimately up to me," he said.

Steckman said the race will continue, but they are also encouraging people to employ appropriate social distancing.

"If you're ill or feeling ill, don't come to the event," he said. "If you're over 60 years of age, you shouldn't come to the event."

Meanwhile, the leader is taking a day's rest at the halfway point of the race.

Brent Sass, a native of Minnesota living near the Alaska community of Eureka, was the first musher to the checkpoint in Cripple, the race's halfway point. He arrived late Wednesday with 13 dogs in harness and planned to take his mandatory 24-hour rest period.

He said he was pleased with his team's performance, telling the Iditarod Insider, "Everybody is just smooth trotting, and they're doing their job."

Sass is the two-time defending champion of the 1,000-mile Yukon Quest International Sled Dog Race, run between Fairbanks and Whitehorse, Yukon. He won this year's Yukon Quest on Feb. 11.

He said most of the dogs on his team are 3 and 4 years old and were part of the two Yukon Quest championship runs.

Sass said the Iditarod is a new trail for all but one of his dogs and they're "super excited."

"They definitely have the mental ability to do it so it's just about getting down the trail and me making a lot of good decisions," he said.

For being first to Cripple, Sass won his choice of \$3,000 in gold nuggets or a cellphone with a service plan for a year.