

STARS AND STRIPES[®]

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Data from Roosevelt outbreak helps Kidd

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Navy destroyer USS Kidd was heading east across the Pacific from Pearl Harbor when it added an unusual twist to its transit — a quarantine-and-isolation drill. The practice was part of a new protocol built on lessons from a coronavirus outbreak aboard an aircraft carrier soon to be sidelined with sickness.

“That ... actually helped us quite a bit to prepare for what was to come,” the Kidd’s commanding officer, Cmdr. Nathan Wemett, said in a telephone interview Thursday from aboard the ship.

What was coming a few weeks later for Wemett and his crew of about 330 was a COVID-19 outbreak that is just the second aboard a Navy ship at sea. Nearly one-quarter of the Kidd’s crew has the virus. Still, lessons learned from the

outbreak aboard the aircraft carrier, the USS Roosevelt, has allowed the Kidd to avoid a similar spectacle of crisis.

The Kidd’s circumstance is not completely comparable to that of the nuclear-powered Roosevelt, whose crew of 4,900 is far larger and whose presence in the Pacific is a bigger symbol of American power. But Wemett says his ship benefited from information and guidance derived from the unfolding and unforeseen disaster aboard the aircraft carrier.

For example, on April 20, the Kidd received new medical guidance on additional symptoms to be watching for as indicators of possible coronavirus.

“That drove us to report our first case” that same day, Wemett said.

The ill sailor was medically evacuated to a medical facility in San Antonio two days later

for testing, and the following day a positive result was reported. By this time the ship was putting its at-sea drills to use by placing some crew members in isolation.

Even before the first test result was known, the Navy assembled a medical team in the United States and dispatched it to the Kidd. The team leader, Cmdr. Michael Kaplan, the director of medical services at Naval Hospital Jacksonville in Florida, said he was not standing by in anticipation of such a mission.

“We had no heads up whatsoever,” Kaplan said.

But the team was on its way in a few hours and arrived aboard the Kidd by helicopter the same day. By evening the doctors had tested about 25 people, and within 24 hours nearly a quarter of the crew had been tested. The Navy also

diverted an amphibious assault ship, the USS Makin Island, to provide additional support to the Kidd. The Makin Island has fully equipped medical facilities, including an intensive care unit.

Kapan’ said his team also made a point of testing sailors without coronavirus symptoms, drawing on the Roosevelt experience, which initially tested only those with symptoms, not realizing that asymptomatic people can be transmitters of the virus. Kaplan had the asymptomatic cases isolated on board.

“We didn’t know how long it would take to get back on land, and we wanted to do everything we could to try to minimize the spread on the ship,” Kaplan said.

As of Thursday, 78 members of the Kidd’s crew had tested positive. None are hospitalized.

Navy: More than 1,150 Roosevelt sailors test positive

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — More than a fourth of the 4,000 crew members assigned to the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt have tested positive for the coronavirus, according to the Navy’s latest update Thursday.

After more than a month of isolating sailors, sanitizing the ship and testing every crew member, there are 1,102 active cases of coronavirus among Roosevelt sailors, three of whom are hospitalized at U.S. Naval Hospital Guam, the Navy said. An additional 53 sailors have recovered, and one has died.

The numbers have been increasing as previously negative sailors test positive for coronavirus in “exit tests” before leaving isolation despite not having symptoms, the service said.

The aircraft carrier was patrolling the

Western Pacific when it diverted to Guam on March 26 after several of its sailors tested positive.

The prevalence of asymptomatic sailors with coronavirus has emphasized the importance of testing, Task Force 70 spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Sean Brophy said in an email Tuesday.

An undisclosed number of sailors assigned to the carrier USS Ronald Reagan showed no coronavirus symptoms but tested positive in pre-boarding tests. The Reagan, in port at Yokosuka, is preparing for a deployment.

Brophy said catching the positive cases among sailors who otherwise appear healthy “highlights how our measures are working as they were designed to.”

As of Thursday, the Navy reported 1,822 cases of coronavirus service-wide, according to a Defense Department daily update. That means about two-thirds of all corona-

virus cases among active-duty sailors are associated with the Roosevelt.

Officials began moving sailors who have tested negative three times for the virus back onto the carrier Wednesday, according to a statement this week from the Joint Region Marianas Public Affairs Office in Guam.

On Friday, chief of naval operations Adm. Mike Gilday directed vice chief of naval operations Adm. Robert Burke to “conduct a follow-on command investigation into the events surrounding the [coronavirus] outbreak aboard USS Theodore Roosevelt,” Gilday spokesman Cmdr. Nate Christensen said in a statement Friday.

He said the investigation will expand on a recently completed preliminary inquiry prompted by the removal of the Roosevelt’s commanding officer after a letter he sent pleading for additional help for his ship was leaked to the public.

Coalition restricts release of violence data

BY PHILLIP WALTER
WELLMAN

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — The U.S.-led coalition in Afghanistan is for the first time withholding information about enemy attacks in Afghanistan from the public, as violence rises in the country and the U.S. begins drawing down its troops, a U.S. government watchdog said Friday.

Casualty figures among U.S.-trained and funded Afghan security forces have also been classified, adding to a growing list of data that's been restricted or is no longer tracked, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction John Sopko said in a quarterly

report to Congress.

Enemy attack information, which was used to measure security in Afghanistan, "was one of the last remaining metrics" provided to SIGAR for public release, the watchdog said in the report. The U.S.-led NATO Resolute Support mission told SIGAR it is withholding the information because it's become a critical part of discussions in ongoing negotiations between the U.S. and Taliban, the report said. The Defense Department may release the data once those discussions end, according to the report.

Instead of providing SIGAR with enemy attack information, including successful attacks, Resolute Support said that in the month following

the signing of the U.S.-Taliban deal, attacks by the insurgents on coalition forces decreased but those on Afghan security forces were at levels beyond "seasonal norms," the report said.

The U.S. has begun withdrawing its forces as part of the deal signed with the Taliban, which would see all international troops out of Afghanistan by late spring 2021, provided the Taliban meets all of its obligations under the agreement. Those include beginning negotiations with the Kabul government, disavowing terror groups like al-Qaida and preventing any groups on Afghan soil from threatening the security of the United States and its allies. But the Taliban

ramped up attacks on Afghan forces immediately after signing the deal on Feb. 29, Sopko wrote in the report.

"Although not all such attacks are expressly prohibited by the text, U.S. officials had said they expected the level of violence to remain low after the agreement came into effect," Sopko wrote.

Within days of the Feb. 29 deal being inked, U.S. aircraft bombed the insurgents in defense of Afghan forces, but it remains unclear whether the U.S. has carried out further strikes. U.S. officials have also declined to discuss what would constitute a violation of the deal.

Navy awards contract for next-gen frigates

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Navy has agreed to spend an initial \$800 million on the newest class of guided-missile frigates as the service looks to develop a more flexible surface fleet to take on other naval powers around the globe, the service announced Thursday.

"The Navy's guided-missile

frigate will be an important part of our future fleet," Adm. Mike Gilday, the chief of naval operations, said in a prepared statement. "[The guided-missile frigate] is the evolution of the Navy's small surface combatant with increased lethality, survivability, and improved capability to support the National Defense Strategy across the full range of military operations."

The Pentagon's 2018 Na-

tional Defense Strategy shifted the military's focus from counterterrorism operations to "great-power competition" with China and Russia. The Navy has aligned its budget, ship building and training with the strategy.

The new ships will be part of the Navy's ongoing effort to grow their battle force fleet to 355 ships by 2030.

The initial contract for \$795

million to Marinette Marine Corp. is for the design and production of the first ship in the class. The contract has the option to allow for production of up to 9 additional ships as well as provide several supplies and services including training equipment and post-delivery availability support. The total cost for the first ship is \$1.281 billion, which includes the \$795 million.

Air Force flaunts US military might in South China Sea

BY WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

The U.S. military continued its weeklong show of force in the South China Sea with a sortie over the contested waters on Thursday by two Air Force bombers.

The B-1B Lancers from the 28th Bomb Wing at Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D., flew a 32-hour round trip to conduct operations over the sea as part of

a joint bomber task force by the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and U.S. Strategic Command, the Air Force said in news release Thursday.

The mission further demonstrated the service's new "dynamic force employment model," which is intended to make its global bomber presence less predictable, the Air Force said.

China has claimed sovereignty over much of the South

China Sea, an assertion disputed by other nations with competing claims, such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei.

During the past week, Navy warships operated near the Spratly and Paracel islands, two of the archipelagos China has claimed most vehemently.

The guided-missile cruiser USS Bunker Hill sailed near the Spratlys on Wednesday as part of its so-called freedom-

of-navigation operations. They are intended to challenge assertions by China and other claimant nations that military passing near the islands must first receive authorization.

The U.S. contends that international law allows for direct passage through the contested archipelagos.

On Tuesday, the guided-missile destroyer USS Barry sailed near the Paracel Islands.

Trump speculates China released virus in laboratory

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump has speculated that China could have unleashed the coronavirus on the world due to some kind of horrible “mistake,” and his intelligence agencies said they are still examining a notion put forward by the president and aides that the pandemic may have resulted from an accident at a Chinese lab. Trump even suggested Thursday that the release could have been intentional.

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the clearinghouse for the web of U.S. spy agencies, said it had ruled out the virus being man-made but was still investigating the precise source of the global pandemic.

Though scientists suggest the likeliest origin of the pandemic remains natural, that it spread from an infected animal to a human, Trump claimed to have seen evidence to support the theory that the origin was an infectious disease lab in Wuhan, the epicenter of the Chinese outbreak. He said the U.S. now “is finding how it came out.”

“It’s a terrible thing that happened,” the president said. “Whether they made a mistake or whether it started off as a mistake and then they made another one, or did somebody do something on purpose.”

The intel statement said the federal agencies concur “with the wide scientific consensus that the COVID-19 virus was not manmade or genetically modified.”

In recent days the Trump administration has sharpened its rhetoric on China, accusing the geopolitical foe and vital trading partner of failing to act swiftly enough to sound the alarm about the outbreak or to stop the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19.

Earlier Thursday, before Trump’s comments, the Chinese government said that any claims that the coronavirus was released from a laboratory are “unfounded and purely fabricated out of nothing.”

Marine volunteers offer free grocery shopping on Okinawa

BY AYA ICHIHASHI

Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Fidelis Rides, a volunteer program on Okinawa that provides service members with free rides after a night on the town, now offers a curbside grocery-delivery service called U-Shop.

Fidelis Rides was created in March 2019 by Marine 1st Sgt. Jacob Karl to help Marines without cars or a lot of spending money. Volunteers provide free lifts on Friday and Saturday nights to any service members who request them.

So far, the program has given rides to over 4,500 people, according to volunteer Cpl. Christopher Madero of Headquarters & Support Battalion, Marine Corps Installations Pacific.

Fidelis Rides started up its U-Shop program after a weeklong pause of its ride service April 1 due to coronavirus concerns.

“At first, we thought we should focus on single-parent households, dual military service member families or families with immune disorders,” said Col. Vincent Ciuccoli, commander of Camp Foster and Camp Lester, who has been leading the group. “Then we realized that we should extend the service to help anyone who needs our help to shop.”

On Wednesday evening, Ciuccoli and Madero waited in front of the Camp Foster commissary. With them were three more volunteers: group coordinator Cpl. Derrick Ngeudeu Talla of 3rd Marine Division, Camp Foster; Gunnery Sgt. Michael Diggs of Headquarters and Support Battalion, Camp Foster; and Lance Cpl. Luis Flores Gonzalez of the Provost Marshal Office at Camp Butler.

“I always wanted to volunteer and now I have so much time. I wanted to help others rather than wasting it,” Flores Gonzalez said.

Anyone older than 16 with commissary privileges can volunteer for the U-Shop program, Ciuccoli said, adding “we see some high school volunteers now.”

He explained how the operation works. First, the person who wants their grocery shopping done contacts U-Shop via Messenger on Fidelis Rides’ Facebook page.

“Then they will need to send us a shopping list with their name and phone number. We connect our volunteer and the requestee,” Ciuccoli said. “Our volunteers will be their personal shopper.”

The volunteers stay in contact with the client via text messages to make sure they pick up the correct items, he said. Fidelis Rides has its own checkout line, No. 8, at the commissary. Customers pay at the register over a phone provided by the volunteer.

“As Fidelis Rides, we do not touch cash, so implementing the payment system was the most challenging part of this program, but we were thrilled to have [the commissary agency’s] full support on this,” Ciuccoli said.

Shaun Bullman, commissary officer for Camp Foster, on Wednesday said the store is the first in the region to implement the volunteer shopping system.

“Kadena was the second commissary, now Camp Courtney, and Kinser is a work in progress,” he said. “We are happy to work with Fidelis Rides to support our military families.” Delivery is also available anywhere within 15 minutes of Camp Foster, including Camp Lester, Plaza Housing, Marine Corps Air Station Futenma and off-base homes.

People can use the free service as often as needed; however, the group will monitor for abuse of the system. Forty items per request is the current limit with up to a 30-minute shopping time.

Fidelis Rides plans to keep the program until restrictions end on Okinawa, but it may become a permanent service.

USAA to return additional \$280M to auto policy holders

BY JAMES BOLINGER

Stars and Stripes

An additional \$280 million will be returned to USAA auto policy holders amid continued coronavirus lockdowns, the company announced late Thursday afternoon.

This brings the company’s total rebates since the start of the pandemic to \$800 million.

The financial services and insurance

company, which provides insurance and banking services to more than 13 million active-duty military members, veterans and their families, returned \$580 million in auto policy rebates in April totaling 20% of members’ monthly premiums.

The most recent rebate reflects an additional 20% discount on a third month’s worth of premiums, according to a statement emailed Thursday to Stars and Stripes. The newly announced rebates

apply to policies in effect as of April 30.

The company said its members continue to drive less due to shelter-in-place procedures enacted to combat the virus.

Policyholders should see the rebates on their next billing statement, which will be available at the end of May.

Members do not need to call, and no further action is required to receive the dividend, the statement said.

GOP lawmakers reject call to extend Mich. order

Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. — The Republican-led Michigan Legislature refused Thursday to extend the state's coronavirus emergency declaration and voted to authorize a lawsuit challenging Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's authority and actions to combat the pandemic.

The governor, unfazed, responded with orders stating under one law that an emergency still exists while declaring a new 28-day state of emergency under another law.

The declarations are important because they are the foundation for Whitmer's stay-at-home measure, which will remain in effect through May 15, and other directives aimed at slowing the spread of the coronavirus. The virus that causes COVID-19 has infected more than 41,000 Michigan residents and contributed to the deaths of 3,789, many in the Detroit area.

Whitmer accused GOP lawmakers of "putting their heads in the sand and putting more lives and livelihoods at risk. I'm not going to let that happen."

The legislative pushback came as hundreds of conservative activists, including some who were openly carrying assault rifles, returned to the Capitol to denounce her stay-home order.

Alabama

MONTGOMERY — Alabamians filed onto beaches and into previously shuttered retail stores Thursday evening as a state stay-home order expired, although salons, on-site restaurant dining and other places remained closed under a new state health order.

A state stay-home order expired at 5 p.m. and retail stores and beaches could open with occupancy limits. Beach cams showed people strolling along the sand in Gulf Shores under the late afternoon sun as beaches opened for the first time in a month. Elective and non-emergency medical procedures are also being allowed to resume.

Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey on Tuesday announced that some

restrictions were being lifted, but many would remain in place.

Arizona

PHOENIX — Arizona's three universities plan to hold classes on campus this fall with precautions to limit the spread of the coronavirus, the presidents said Thursday.

Michael Crow of Arizona State University, Robert Robbins of University of Arizona and Rita Cheng of Northern Arizona University said they would follow recommendations from state and local health authorities when their classes resume in August.

Cheng said the campus reopening plan will include testing for COVID-19 and tracing the contacts of people who test positive. The Flagstaff university will create social distancing policies in public areas and classrooms, and will implement safety and health measures in residential and dining facilities, she said.

California

SACRAMENTO — After state officials signaled an intention to close all California beaches, Gov. Gavin Newsom on Thursday chose instead to shutter only Orange County's coastline, a clumsy rollout that left local officials livid and had Republicans claiming politics was at play.

Newsom has engendered strong bipartisan support for most of his actions during the virus outbreak. But more recently, some of the more rural and GOP-leaning areas of the state have begun chafing against what they see as an overly cautious move toward reopening California.

The divisions were laid bare by the beach announcement.

The California Republican Party accused Newsom of backpedaling. The Orange County GOP, desperate to regain ground lost to Democrats in what was once a Republican stronghold, accused him of "targeted harassment" and "petty politics."

Newsom, a Democrat, said he was only reinforcing his vow

to make sure California doesn't backslide on its progress against the virus by allowing crowds to gather on beaches as they did during the weekend in Orange County.

Georgia

ATLANTA — More than a million voters have requested a mail-in ballot to vote in Georgia's primary elections in June, an enormous increase driven by the coronavirus outbreak.

When he postponed the primary elections because of the virus outbreak, Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger encouraged people to vote by mail. Election officials said they mailed a form that can be used to request an absentee ballot to all 6.9 million active registered voters.

Raffensperger's office says 700,000 ballots have already been mailed to voters. People will still be able to vote in person as well, both during early voting and on Election Day June 9.

Illinois

SPRINGFIELD — Illinois has spent tens of millions of dollars building makeshift field hospitals to prepare for an anticipated flood of coronavirus cases, but so far hasn't had to use the thousands of extra beds. That was exactly the plan.

The state government says prevention strategies such as social distancing and a statewide stay-at-home order have worked so well that a small city of beds proposed for McCormick Place in Chicago — the nation's largest convention center — has been dramatically reduced. Beds hastily installed at three closed hospitals in suburban Chicago remain on standby, while the renovation of a former hospital in Springfield has yet to begin.

"We've talked a lot about standing down," Gov. J.B. Pritzker said this week. "I don't want to speak too soon because all of these identified alternate care facilities need to be in a state of some kind of readiness in the event that there's a surge, either because, God forbid, we reopen too fast or because

there's a surge that people expect in the fall."

Louisiana

NEW ORLEANS — A couple of Louisiana parishes are bucking the governor's continued coronavirus order by letting churches and other establishments open their doors to more people Friday.

LaSalle Parish in central Louisiana and East Feliciana Parish near Baton Rouge both said churches and businesses may open Friday at 25% of occupancy limits — a change Gov. John Bel Edwards has said he hopes to make in mid-May. East Feliciana Parish also is reopening libraries and some other establishments.

Local officials may set restrictions tougher than the state's but cannot be less restrictive, Edwards said at his daily news briefing Thursday.

Texas

AUSTIN — Texas' coronavirus death toll hit a single-day high of 50 on Thursday, just as the state was preparing for a slow reboot of one of the world's largest economies by reopening retail, restaurants, malls and movies to limited amounts of customers.

Republican Gov. Greg Abbott's stay-at-home order expires Friday. The state-reported death toll of 119 over the past three days marks the deadliest stretch since Texas' first fatality in the pandemic was recorded March 17. Thursday's 1,033 new cases is the first time the state has been over 1,000 since April 10.

The number of infections is thought to be far higher because many people have not been tested and studies suggest people can be infected without feeling sick.

Abbott has pushed for the reopening to rescue a state economy walloped by staggering unemployment. Labor advocates have criticized the plan as short on safety for workers, and questioned by some Democrats, notably the leadership of the state's largest cities, as too soon.

Biden denies woman's assault allegation on TV

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Joe Biden denied a former Senate staffer's allegation of sexual assault on Friday, saying the accusation is "not true."

"This never happened," Biden said in a statement.

It's Biden's first public comment on an accusation of sexual assault by his former Senate staffer, Tara Reade. He later appeared on MSNBC's "Morning Joe" to discuss the allegation for the first time on television.

Biden said he will also ask the National Archives to determine whether there is any record of such a complaint claiming

that he assaulted Reade in the basement of a Capitol Hill office building in the 1990s. His campaign issued a statement in early April denying the allegation, and a number of former Biden staffers have defended their boss in interviews.

The accusation, took on fresh attention this week, however, after two of Reade's associates said she previously told them about elements of her allegations.

Republicans worried about President Donald Trump's increasingly precarious political standing are seizing on the allegation to portray Democrats as hypocrites who only defend

women who allege wrongdoing against conservatives. They are digging in despite the fact that it could renew attention on the multiple sexual assault allegations lodged against Trump.

Democrats, meanwhile, are in an awkward position of vigorously validating women who come forward with their stories while defending the man who will be their standard-bearer in what many in the party consider the most important election of their lifetimes.

The November contest between Biden and Trump will be the first presidential race of the #MeToo era, which has led numerous women to come for-

ward with allegations of sexual assault. Trump has been accused of assault and unwanted touching by numerous women, allegations he denies.

Women are a core constituency for Democrats, and Biden has a mixed history.

While he wrote the Violence Against Women Act as a senator, he also came under heavy criticism for his handling of Anita Hill's Senate testimony in the 1990s.

Just before he launched his 2020 campaign, several women also accused him of unwanted touching, behavior for which he apologized.

Hearings for 'Remain in Mexico' asylum-seekers delayed

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The Trump administration on Thursday suspended immigration court hearings for asylum-seekers waiting in Mexico through June 1, bowing to public health concerns while extending a state of limbo to those locked down in Mexican migrant shelters.

With an order suspending hearings through Friday set to expire, the Homeland Security and Justice departments said that asylum-seekers with hearings through June 1 should appear at a border crossing when instructed, to get new dates. They said in a joint statement that authorities will review conditions related to the coronavirus and proceed "as expeditiously as possible," raising the prospect of addi-

tional delays.

While it is difficult to know precisely, the Justice Department estimated in late February that there were 25,000 people waiting in Mexico for hearings in U.S. court.

A woman who fled Nicaragua with her 9-year-old son said Thursday that the delays mean more time locked down in a Tijuana shelter, which, like many in the Mexican border city, stopped accepting new migrants and won't let anyone already there leave to work or shop to prevent the virus from spreading.

She moved to the shelter in March after a family that subsidized her rent ended their support due to a job loss.

Mileidy, the woman's middle name, said she showed up at a San Diego crossing for her fifth hearing under heavy rain at 3 a.m.

on April 7, an hour ahead of the appointed time. She said she was unable to reach U.S. officials for a new date but learned online that her next hearing was May 7.

About a week ago, Mileidy's attorney got notice that her hearing was delayed again, this time to June 16. She spoke on condition that her full name not be published due to fears for her personal safety.

"All of this time in Mexico is nerve-racking," said Mileidy, who ran out of epilepsy medicine for her son and has been unable to get a new supply.

More than 60,000 asylum-seekers have been returned to Mexico to wait for hearings in U.S. court since January 2019, when the U.S. introduced its "Migrant Protection Protocols" policy, known informally as "Remain in Mexico."

Turtles to race on traditional Kentucky Derby date

Associated Press

Losing the Kentucky Derby has left race fans shell-shocked.

The first Saturday in May has yielded to the legs of a bunch of slowpokes: Seattle Slow headlines a field of turtles — yes, turtles — that will race in the Kentucky Turtle Derby.

Call it the slowest eight minutes in sports.

The race is more methodical marathon than mad dash to the finish — though the victor can win at the line by a turtleneck rather than a nose — and is just one more

offbeat sport that has had a moment during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Derby, America's longest continuously held sports event, had been scheduled for May 2. It will now be run Sept. 5, kicking off Labor Day weekend. It's the first time the Derby won't be held on its traditional first Saturday in May since 1945, when it was run June 9. The federal government suspended horse racing nationwide for most of the first half of the year before World War II ended in early May, but not in time to hold the first leg of the Triple Crown that month. Looking for a slower substitute, the first Kentucky Turtle

Derby was hatched.

The sounds may be familiar for Derby fans: Triple Crown announcer Larry Collmus is calling the race and bugler Steve Buttleman will serenade viewers prior to the turtles taking off.

The turtle race will actually be pre-taped in Chicago with the likes of Sir-Hides-A-Bunch, American Toruga and Galapa-GO! in the field.

"It is weird, but there's been a lot of weird going on the last couple of months in this country," Collmus said. "It will be like the Derby broadcast. Just turtles instead."

And one big shell-abrasion at the end.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police: Kids stole \$1M in cars from dealerships

NC WINSTON-SALEM — Police in North Carolina have accused a group of teenagers and children as young as 9 of stealing more than \$1.1 million in vehicles from car dealerships.

Investigators think 19 suspects ranging in age from 9 to 16 were responsible for taking nearly 50 cars from auto sellers in Winston-Salem and Kernersville during a monthlong string of break-ins, Winston-Salem police told news outlets.

Some of the children accused of involvement had stolen multiple cars before, The Winston-Salem Journal quoted Lt. Amy Gaudin as saying. Police alleged the suspects stole the keys of new cars or vehicles being serviced at the dealerships and took them on joy rides.

Man admits fatally shooting therapy dog

NJ MAPLE SHADE — A man who fatally shot his neighbor's therapy dog last year has pleaded guilty to animal cruelty, authorities said.

William Stroemel, 64, of Maple Shade, also pleaded guilty Wednesday to a weapons possession count as part of a plea deal with Burlington County prosecutors. They will recommend that he receive a five-year state prison term when he's sentenced July 29.

Stroemel used an air rifle to shoot Toby, a 9-year-old Pomeranian-poodle mix, after the dog escaped from his owner's home Sept. 17. The dog's owner is a Vietnam War veteran, and family members have said the animal helped relieve his post-traumatic stress disorder.

The dog, who was shot in the head, had to be euthanized a day after the shooting.

Police: Woman drove car with child on hood

SC ROCK HILL — A woman who allegedly recorded a video of herself driving a car while her 5-year-old child was sitting on the hood of the vehicle was arrested in South Carolina.

Thrista Miquisha Johnson turned herself in Tuesday after Rock Hill police learned about the video and issued a warrant for her arrest, news outlets reported. Lt. Michael Chavis told the Rock Hill Herald the video was taken near an apartment building in the city just two days earlier.

Chavis said police don't know how fast the car was moving in the video, but noted the child was not injured.

Deputies: Middle school fire caused by arson

WA PORT ORCHARD — A teenager was taken into custody after a fire damaged property at a middle school in Kitsap County, deputies said.

Kitsap County sheriff's deputies believe a 15-year-old boy allegedly broke into the school Wednesday and set it on fire, KCPQ-TV reported.

Deputies responded to calls of an alarm activation at Marcus Whitman Middle School. No one was injured.

South Kitsap Fire and Rescue, the Bremerton Fire Department and others helped put out the fire, authorities said.

The fire caused "substantial damage" and the Port Orchard teenager is being interviewed at a juvenile detention center, deputies said. The boy faces first-degree arson and second-degree burglary charges, authorities said.

Chain reaction crash on I-44 leaves 1 dead

MO ST. CLAIR — A chain reaction crash on Interstate 44 in eastern Missouri left one man dead, authorities said.

The crash happened Wednesday morning near St. Clair, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported. The Missouri Highway Patrol said the crash occurred around 10 a.m. when a sport utility vehicle driven by Kevin Broshous, 67, of Sullivan, lost control, hit a guardrail and veered back into the interstate's westbound lanes. Broshous' SUV was then hit by a semitrailer, which jackknifed across the westbound lanes, causing two more semitrailers to crash into it.

Broshous died at the scene. The patrol said no one else involved in the crash was hurt.

Gardens struck by thefts amid shutdown

CA RIVERSIDE — The University of California, Riverside, Botanic Gardens have been struck by plant thefts during the lengthening coronavirus shutdown.

About 30 large potted plants and additional smaller ones have been taken, gardens director Jodie Holt told The Press-Enterprise.

About a third of the stolen plants were part of the gardens' collection and the remainder would have been sold.

The gardens closed in mid-March due to the pandemic and the thefts were first noticed around April 16-17.

The thief or thieves cut through chain-link fencing that surrounds the 40-acre gardens and an adjoining 3-acre orchard on the UC Riverside campus and even used the fa-

cility's wheelbarrows to carry the loot.

City councilman is accused of beef theft

GA FRANKLIN — A Georgia city councilman was charged after he allegedly stole a beef tenderloin from a grocery store.

Georgia Bureau of Investigation spokeswoman Nelly Miles told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution Clifford Henry Jiles was accused of swapping the price tag of a beef tenderloin with a cheaper pork tenderloin at a Piggly Wiggly grocery store in Franklin on Sunday. Miles said the beef retailed for over \$83, while the pork was about \$12.

The case was given to the bureau by Franklin police after police learned about the alleged swapping on Monday.

Police: Buggy accident kills 4 Amish children

KY BATH COUNTY — Authorities in Kentucky said four children died and one is missing after a buggy carrying an Amish family was swept away in the current while trying to cross a low-water bridge.

Six people were in the horse and buggy that overturned on Wednesday in Bath County, Kentucky State Police said in a statement. The adult in the buggy made it to the bank of the stream and called for help, police said.

The four siblings were found and pronounced dead by a coroner's office on Wednesday. Kentucky State Police Trooper Scott Ferrell said authorities from various agencies were continuing to search Thursday for the last missing child.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

Little League World Series canceled

Associated Press

WILLIAMSPORT, Pa. — This year's Little League World Series and the championship tournaments in six other Little League divisions have been canceled because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Little League President Stephen Keener announced the cancellations in a Facebook Live broadcast Thursday afternoon from league headquarters in Williamsport, Pa., saying it would be "impossible" to hold the events amid ongoing restrictions on large gatherings and travel.

The Little League World Series has been held every August since 1947 and had never been canceled before. Next year was to be the 75th playing of the tournament; that milestone has been pushed back to 2022.

"Let me tell folks in all those

communities and all the sites where we have regional qualifying tournaments how disappointed we are to have to do this, but it was inevitable," Keener said. "It would be irresponsible and impossible to bring teams and thousands of people from all over the world into the community of Williamsport as well as those six other communities that have been such great friends and supporters of ours over the years."

He added that travel restrictions would make it equally impossible to hold qualifying tournaments for international teams and to bring those teams safely to the United States.

Little League has not, however, called off the 2020 regular season. Keener said there was reason for optimism that teams could play this spring and summer, depending on restrictions in states and localities.

The annual major league game in Williamsport, which this year was to feature the Boston Red Sox and Baltimore Orioles on Aug. 23, has been canceled, MLB said.

"While the cancellation of the 2020 Little League World Series is extremely disappointing, the health and safety of all of the people involved must be the paramount consideration. We look forward to our return to Williamsport for the 2021 MLB Little League Classic," baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred said in a statement.

Little League announced in March that the season was on hold until at least May 11 because of guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention against gatherings of 50 people or more.

After that date, Keener said, districts and leagues should look to states and localities for

guidance on when or if the season can resume. He also urged districts to hold all-star tournaments to give kids at least a taste of the competition they'll be missing with World Series qualifying scrapped.

"We will be very amenable to (changing) eligibility requirements and be very flexible to allow as many kids the opportunity to play as possible for whatever can remain of the 2020 Little League season," he said.

Along with the Little League World Series, which is held in South Williamsport, the other events canceled were the World Series of Little League Softball in Greenville, N.C.; Junior League Baseball in Taylor, Mich.; Junior League Softball in Kirkland, Wash.; Senior League Baseball in Easley, S.C.; and Senior League Softball in Sussex County, Del.

Banks to pay fines in FIFA money laundering scandal

Associated Press

NEW YORK — An Israeli bank and its Swiss subsidiary agreed to pay over \$30 million for their role in conspiring to launder more than \$20 million in kickbacks to soccer officials, becoming the first financial institutions implicated in the FIFA scandal to reach a resolution with U.S. prosecutors.

Bank Hapoalim BM in Israel and its wholly owned Swiss company Hapoalim Ltd. agreed to forfeit \$20.73 million and pay a fine of \$9.33 million as part of a non-prosecution agreement, the U.S. attorney's office in Brooklyn said Thursday. The scheme took place through the banks' Miami branch from 2010-15, with many of the payments tied to marketing rights for the Copa America.

Eugenio Figueredo, a former president of the South American governing body CONMEBOL and Uruguay's federation, was among those accused of receiving the bribes, along with Luis Bedoya, a former presi-

dent of Colombia's federation and like Figueredo a onetime member of FIFA's executive committee.

Former federation presidents Sergio Jadue of Chile and Rafael Esquivel of Venezuela also were implicated by the U.S. Justice Department, along with Jose Luis Chiriboga, whose father, Luis, was president of Ecuador's federation.

Bank Hapoalim (BHMB) and Hapoalim Ltd. (BHS) reached a deal with the Justice Department and the U.S. attorney's office in which they and BHMB subsidiary Hapoalim (Latin America) SA will not be subject to prosecution for any of the crimes admitted in the deal, except for criminal tax violations. No bank employees involved in the illegal activities were identified by name.

"This announcement illustrates another aspect in the spider web of bribery, corruption and back-room deals going on behind the scenes as soccer games were played on

the field," William F. Sweeney, assistant director in charge of the FBI's New York field office, said in a statement. "Bank Hapoalim admits executives looked the other way, and allowed illicit activity to continue even when employees discovered the scheme and reported it."

In a weave of bribes that included details from wiretaps and unidentified individuals referred to as Relationship Manager 1, Compliance Employees 1 and 2 and Co-Conspirators 1 and 2, prosecutors detailed the actions by Full Play Group, the Argentine company that won rights to sell media and marketing for the 2015, 2016, 2019 and 2023 Copa Americas, South America's national team championship.

Traffic Sports, a Brazilian company, held the rights from 1987-2011. Traffic Sports and Traffic Sports USA reached guilty pleas and were fined a total of \$1 million last year.

Full Play is controlled by

Hugo Jinkis and son Mariano, who were first indicted in 2015 and have been charged with racketeering conspiracy, wire fraud, wire fraud conspiracy and money laundering conspiracy.

Full Play had accounts at the banks in the names of subsidiaries Bayan Group, Cross Trading and Yorkfields, and the two Jinkises used those accounts to make at least 53 bribe payments totaling more than \$14.02 million from 2010-14 to Bedoya, Chiriboga, Esquivel and Figueredo as part of Full Play's deal to acquire marketing rights to the 2015, 2016, 2019 and 2023 Copa Americas, prosecutors said in a statement of facts.

"For nearly five years, Bank Hapoalim employees used the U.S. financial system to launder tens of millions of dollars in bribe payments to corrupt soccer officials in multiple countries," Brian A. Benczkowski, assistant attorney general of the criminal division, said in a statement.

NASCAR to restart season on May 17

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — NASCAR plans to restart its engines with a flurry of races at two historic tracks.

NASCAR said Thursday it is set to return — without spectators — on May 17 with an elite Cup Series race at Darlington Raceway in South Carolina, the first of seven events in an 11-day stretch across the top three series.

There will be no practice, no qualifying and drivers will jump into their cars for the first time since March 8 and attempt to tackle “The Track Too Tough To Tame.”

“Events are going to look different than they have in the past,” said John Bobo, NASCAR vice president of racing operations.

NASCAR has set guidelines to safely hold the events using CDC guidelines on social distancing and personal protective equipment. The entire venue will be used to maintain distancing in garage stalls and where the haulers are parked, while drivers will have to self-isolate in their motorhomes as they prepare to compete.

“Our priority right now is to try and get back racing in a safe way,” said Steve O’Donnell,

chief racing development officer.

NASCAR follows the UFC as the first major sports organizations to get back to work since the coronavirus pandemic shut down U.S. sports in mid-March. The Professional Bull Racing Series resumed competition last weekend and there has been some horse racing.

NASCAR’s revised schedule goes only through May and has a pair of Wednesday Cup races, fulfilling fans’ longtime plea for midweek events. The first of those races will be at Darlington, three days after the return race at the 70-year-old, egg-shaped oval.

Charlotte Motor Speedway will then host the Coca-Cola 600 on May 24 to mark 60 consecutive years the longest race on the NASCAR schedule will be held on Memorial Day weekend. The track in Concord, outside NASCAR’s home base of Charlotte, will then host a Wednesday race three days later.

There also will be lower-tier Xfinity and Truck series races at the two tracks. The North Carolina governor has said the the Charlotte races can be held as long as health conditions in the area do not deteriorate.

“This has been a proactive effort to put our motorsports industry back to work and boost the morale of sports fans around the world,” said Marcus Smith, president and CEO of Speedway Motorsports. He said “sports fans around the world need this, a return to some sense of normalcy with live sports on TV, and NASCAR is uniquely positioned to deliver it from a competition standpoint.”

NASCAR suspended its season March 13 with only four of its 36 scheduled races completed. The stock car series, heavily reliant on television money and sponsor payments, has vowed to complete its full schedule. The revised schedule for now stays at tracks within driving distance of Charlotte-based race teams and in states that have started reopening.

O’Donnell said NASCAR wanted to get seven events completed within driving distance of North Carolina before it resumes competition in states that require air travel and hotels.

NASCAR has completed a fully revised schedule but would not reveal it Thursday as so much relies on the pandemic and guidelines in differ-

ent states.

Darlington will now have three coveted Cup races for the first time in track history. It is also scheduled to open the playoffs with the Southern 500 on Sept. 6. Because the track now has two additional dates, NASCAR will lose two Cup races from its other properties. The same goes for Speedway Motorsports, which gained one additional race so far and will have to forfeit one at another facility.

“For the couple tracks where we need to move an event, we want to do that in the right way,” O’Donnell said. “We just want to take a little time here before we’re able to announce that.”

Almost all teams began returning to their shops this week with either a reduced initial workforce or in split shifts. Now that NASCAR has told the teams where it will be racing this month, they can start preparing cars suitable for the two tracks.

Although Florida and Texas invited NASCAR to compete in those states without spectators, the sanctioning body is holding off on announcing races in those states because of the travel required.

NFL plans to play full season; timeline is still up in air

Associated Press

The NFL is planning to play a full season though it’s uncertain what that will look like.

League spokesman Brian McCarthy said Thursday that since January the 2020 schedule was intended for release after the draft. It is planned for release by the end of next week, with the date for the kickoff game Thursday, Sept. 10, concluding with the Super Bowl on Feb. 7 in Tampa.

But the league is planning several contingencies because of the coronavirus pandemic that could lead to everything from a delayed start to a late-winter Super Bowl.

“The schedule will come out as normal, but we’re doing reasonable and responsible planning as we always do, inside of game operations,” league executive Troy Vincent told The Associated Press on Thursday. “Based off of what we are learning from the medical community and how people are handling this domestically and abroad, we are being deliberate with reasonable and responsible planning about what can work in our environment and what we can incorporate to protect the health and safety of all involved.”

Empty stadiums, neutral sites and no bye weeks are

among several alternatives being discussed.

“We have to look at it in the current environment based off what we’re learning through the science and through the medical community,” said Vincent, who oversees football operations for the NFL.

If the season needs to be pushed back or the regular season has to be adjusted, the NFL players’ union would have to approve. The league and the players’ association reached a new labor agreement in March that carries through the 2030 season.

Vincent said the league would not take virus tests away from the public.

“We won’t,” he said. “General public safety is first and foremost.”

In other NFL news:

■ Former first-round draft pick Charles Harris was traded Friday after three unproductive seasons by the Miami Dolphins to the Atlanta Falcons for a seventh-round choice in 2021.

A defensive end from Missouri, Harris was the 22nd overall pick in 2017, but he totaled only 3½ sacks with Miami. That included half a sack last year, even though he started a career-high five games for rookie coach Brian Flores. Harris has one year left on his rookie contract.