

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Unemployment claims surpass 33M in the US

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Nearly 3.2 million laid-off workers applied for unemployment benefits last week as the business shutdowns caused by the viral outbreak deepened the worst U.S. economic catastrophe in decades.

Roughly 33.5 million people have now filed for jobless aid in the seven weeks since the coronavirus began forcing millions of companies to close their doors and slash their workforces. That is the equivalent of 1 in 5 Americans who had been employed back in February, when the unemployment rate had reached a 50-year low of just 3.5%.

The Labor Department's report Thursday suggests that layoffs, while still breathtakingly high, are steadily declining after sharp spikes in late March and early April. Initial claims for unemployment aid have now fallen for five straight weeks, from a peak of nearly 6.9 million during the week that ended March 28.

Applications for jobless aid rose in just six states last week, including Maine, New Jersey and Oklahoma, and declined in the 44 others.

The report showed that 22.7 million people are now receiving unemployment aid — a rough measure of job losses since the shutdowns began.

That figure lags a week behind the figures for first-time unemployment applications. And not everyone who applies for jobless aid is approved. The number of laid-off workers receiving aid is now equal to 15.5% of the workforce that is eligible for unemployment benefits.

Those figures are a rough proxy for the job losses and for the unemployment rate that will be released Friday, which

will likely to be the worst since modern record-keeping began after World War II. The unemployment rate is forecast to reach 16%, the highest rate since the Great Depression, and economists estimate that 21 million jobs were lost last month. If so, it would mean that nearly all the job growth in the 11 years since the Great Recession ended has vanished in a single month.

Even those stunning figures won't fully capture the magnitude of the damage the coronavirus has inflicted. Many people who are still employed have had their hours reduced. Others have suffered pay cuts. Some who lost jobs in April and didn't look for a new one in light of their bleak prospects won't even be counted as unemployed. A broader measure — the proportion of adults with jobs — could hit a record low.

The official figures for jobless claims could also be undercounting layoffs. Surveys by academic economists and think tanks have suggested that as many as 12 million workers who were laid off by mid-April did not file for unemployment benefits by then, either because they couldn't navigate their state's overwhelmed systems or they felt too discouraged to try.

As the economy slides further into what looks like a severe recession, economists are projecting that the gross domestic product — the broadest gauge of economic growth — is contracting in the current April-June quarter by a shocking 40% annual rate. As it does, more layoffs appear to be spreading beyond front-line industries like restaurants, hotels and retail stores. As businesses across the country have shut down and laid off tens of millions, the economy has sunk into a near-paralysis.

Public health announcement

Analysts: US ops in South China Sea amid virus project readiness

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. military for years stayed largely mum about its missions in the South China Sea, where the Navy and Air Force routinely conduct surveillance and freedom-of-navigation operations with an eye on China's ambitions there.

But in past weeks, the Defense Department has highlighted sea and air operations in the contested sea, which some military experts say is an effort to dispel doubts over the capabilities of the American military as it contends with the coronavirus pandemic.

The U.S. Navy has been particularly hard hit by the virus, with the carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt sidelined in Guam since March 26 as it grapples with the pandemic. More than 1,100 sailors on the ship have tested positive, with one death.

The Roosevelt contagion has left the regional allies and partners speculating about the U.S. military's readiness to respond to Indo-Pacific flashpoints, said Collin Koh, a naval expert at the Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore.

"Chinese state media has been adding to this through its own propaganda and possibly disinformation campaign that focuses on arguing that the U.S. military is seriously undermined by the pandemic and

therefore not in any position to come to the rescue of Beijing's rivals in the South China Sea, amongst other flashpoints," said Koh, one of a number of Asia experts interviewed by Stars and Stripes this week by phone and email. "In short, given the credibility at stake, it's understandable if the U.S. Navy is seeking to demonstrate its continued primacy in the area."

The Defense Department repeatedly publicized air-ground operations by the Marine Corps 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit from the amphibious assault ship USS America while in the South China Sea between April 17-24.

During the last week of April, Navy warships operated near the Spratly and Paracel islands, two South China Sea archipelagos that lie at the heart of China's contested claim of sovereignty over most of the area. Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and Taiwan all have overlapping claims with China in the sea.

The guided-missile destroyer USS Barry sailed near the Paracels on April 28, and the following day the guided-missile cruiser USS Bunker Hill steamed near the Spratlys while conducting freedom-of-navigation operations.

On April 30, two Air Force B-1B bombers flew a sortie over

SEE HEALTH ON PAGE 3

USS Reagan returns to sea as Navy's virus battle continues

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The USS Ronald Reagan set sail for sea trials this week, its latest step toward deploying amid the coronavirus pandemic, officials confirmed Thursday.

The underway testing period typically lasts about a week and is one of the final phases before vessels leave for extended patrols. Details about whether the aircraft carrier would return to Yokosuka before deployment officially begins were unavailable, as the Navy does not discuss future personnel or ship movements by policy.

The hulking carrier was noticeably absent from its berth Tuesday after leaving its homeport for the first time since November. The ship had been undergoing a regular maintenance period since returning from a six-month deployment in November.

A coronavirus outbreak at Yokosuka in March added an

extra hurdle to getting underway. Navy officials have not said how many on the Reagan have tested positive, but the New York Times on April 22 reported 16 positive cases associated with the carrier.

"The Coronavirus Disease 2019 pandemic brought an invisible enemy to our shores and changed the way we operate as a Navy," Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday told sailors in a written message to the fleet on Thursday. "The fight against this virus is a tough one."

Despite the pandemic, Gilday said, the Navy has "a duty to ensure we are ready to respond."

"We cannot simply take a knee or keep everyone in port until this enemy is defeated. We are America's away team," Gilday said in his message. "The uncertainty caused by [the coronavirus] makes our mission of protecting America at sea more important than ever."

"That is why the U.S. Navy continues to operate forward

every day," he added.

To prevent crews of the Reagan and its strike group from bringing the virus onto their ships, sailors since last month have been undergoing phased sequestrations of up to 21 days before embarking.

Not all Reagan strike group sailors have completed their sequestrations. Some remain under restricted movement orders at bases across Japan "to maximize readiness and protect the health of the force," Task Force 70 spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Sean Brophy said in an email Thursday to Stars and Stripes.

"In accordance with U.S. Pacific Fleet guidance, [restriction of movement] is necessary to protect our sailors and their families; prevent the spread of the [coronavirus] to U.S. forces, allies, partners and the community; and ensure [the Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group] warfighting readiness to accomplish assigned missions," he said.

Navy's vice chief to lead Europe and Africa forces

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Adm. Robert P. Burke has been nominated to serve as the next commander of the Naples, Italy-based U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa in a series of Navy leadership changes announced by the Pentagon.

A career submariner, Burke will replace Adm. James Foggo, who has led NAVEUR and NATO's Allied Joint Forces Command for nearly three years.

Neither a date for a change of command nor Foggo's next move were announced, but USNI News reported Foggo was expected to retire.

Burke's expected move to Naples comes at a time when senior military officials have repeatedly expressed concerns about more aggressive Russian activity, stretching from the Mediterranean Sea to the Arctic.

Having served since 2019 as vice chief of naval operations, Burke will arrive at his new headquarters with insight into whether leadership is on board with U.S. European Command's call for more warships to be homeported in Rota, Spain, to counter the growing Russian presence.

A native of Portage, Mich., Burke previously held operational assignments aboard attack and ballistic missile submarines and commanded the submarine USS Hampton in Norfolk, Va. He was also commodore of Submarine Development Squadron 12 in Groton, Conn.

Tapped to replace Burke in Washington was Vice Adm. William K. Lescher, who was nominated for the rank of admiral. Lescher now serves as deputy chief of naval operations for integration of capabilities and resources in Washington.

Over 30K military families to start move

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — More than 30,000 military families are expected to start the moving process between now and the end of June despite a Defense Department directive prohibiting such moves during the coronavirus pandemic, defense officials said Wednesday.

"So those are the families who have been approved or authorized to move, if conditions allow, will proceed with their [permanent change of station]," Rick Marsh, director of the Defense Personal Property Program for U.S. Transportation Command, said Wednesday during a Pentagon news conference on military moves during the pandemic.

The most recent stop-movement order issued April 20 by Defense Secretary Mark Esper ends June 30, but it allows priority personnel to receive a waiver to the policy through their chain

of command so they can move to their next duty station during the halt.

TRANSCOM is tracking these families in their shipment system, and they are in various stages of the process to have their household goods picked up sometime before June 30, Marsh said.

Marsh said that they expect moves to continue through the fall and winter due to the demand, and it was possible that more families could be added to their queue before June 30. Shipment and delivery of the household goods are conditions-based, including whether families feel it's not yet safe at the new location, he said.

TRANSCOM also announced Wednesday that companies helping military members move must have their personnel follow more safety measures during the packing and shipment of household goods. Families will be emailed details about these safety protocols during the moving process, according to Marsh.

Health: DOD publicized South China Sea ops

FROM FRONT PAGE

the South China Sea in a demonstration of the service's new "dynamic force employment model" intended to keep would-be adversaries off balance with less predictable operations.

"It is possible that recent U.S. activity in the South China Sea has been driven by the pandemic, but my guess is that some of this was already planned and that other elements were added after the outbreak on the USS Theodore Roosevelt," said Zach Cooper, a fellow at the Washington, D.C.-based think tank American Enterprise Institute and an expert on U.S. defense strategy in Asia.

"I haven't heard this directly, but my expectation is that the Navy tried to increase their demonstrations of presence to avoid a weakened deterrence posture with the Roosevelt stuck in Guam."

Retired Navy Cmdr. Bryan McGrath, founder of the Maryland-based naval consultancy FerryBridge Group, said that while he had not perceived a shift in the tempo of Navy operations in the South China Sea over the past year, there nonetheless has been a change.

"It looks to me that the Na-

'Regular shows of force in international waters are a far more effective method of signaling pushback than [freedom-of-navigation operations].'

Bryan McGrath

retired Navy commander, founder of naval consultancy FerryBridge Group

vy's efforts to highlight these operations has, in fact, picked up a bit," he said. "There is little doubt, however, that the pace of U.S. Navy operations in China's near abroad has picked up in the Trump administration as part of its overall signaling campaign to China."

Amid criticism that President Donald Trump's handling of the epidemic has been slow and erratic, the White House and Republican allies have sought to shift blame for the pandemic on China, where the first cases were documented late last year.

Military analysts, however, are generally skeptical that the recent U.S. operations in the South China Sea, and the greater willingness to publicize them, are connected to that White House strategy.

"I get the impression the mil-

itary is driving the [freedom-of-navigation operations] plan with the White House's approval, rather than the White House directing the approach," said Bryan Clark, a senior fellow with the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments in Washington, D.C., and a former strategic planner for the Navy.

Koh, from Singapore, said the most recent U.S. operations in the South China Sea "conveniently piggy-back" onto the coronavirus issue.

"In short, the China-U.S. posturing and counter-posturing in the South China Sea reflects the evolving, broader Sino-U.S. geopolitical competition that has worsened, especially since 2017," Koh said.

Smaller nations in the Indo-Pacific have complained in past years about what they perceive as a lack of U.S. commitment in

the region," said Alex Vuving, a Southeast Asia expert at the Asia-Pacific Center for Strategic Studies in Honolulu.

He speculated that the Pentagon and U.S. Indo-Pacific Command "may be realizing that they have to publicize what they're doing in order to show the world, particularly the smaller countries, that the U.S. is committed to security in the South China Sea."

Operations of the kind conducted on the USS America demonstrate U.S. effort to shift the balance of power in the sea away from China, which in recent years has built and militarized artificial islands in the South China Sea as a means of bolstering its claims of sovereignty and armed ability for enforcing those claims, he said.

"Regular shows of force in international waters are a far more effective method of signaling pushback than [freedom-of-navigation operations], and the presence of the USS America Expeditionary Strike Group in the South China Sea recently was exactly this kind of effective message," McGrath said.

Marines restart annual Australia rotation

BY SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

The Marine Corps is resuming a summer deployment of Marines and sailors to Darwin, Australia, that was postponed over the coronavirus pandemic.

The Marines delayed the rotation of 2,500 Marines on March 30 following an order from Defense Secretary Mark Esper a week earlier barring nearly all official movement overseas for Defense Department personnel.

On Tuesday, however, a statement by U.S. Marine Corps Forces Pacific announced that the annual Marine Rotational Force-Darwin deployment is back on.

"The decision to resume the deployment comes as the government of Australia is

granting an exemption to current travel restrictions to allow the 2020 MRF-D rotation to proceed," it said.

The decision is based on Australia's record of managing impacts from the coronavirus and adherence by deployed U.S. Marines to a 14-day quarantine and other requirements when they arrive in country.

"The Marine Corps is committed to ensuring the health and safety of its forces and the Australian people, including local indigenous communities," the statement said.

The Darwin force, which trains in Australia each summer, has built up slowly since an initial contingent of 250 Marines hit the beach there in 2012. Last year the Marines rotational force had grown to 10 times that size, its target strength.

The Marines are working with the Australians to determine the composition of the force that will resume the rotation along with timing and training plans, according to Thursday's statement. Changes to this year's deployment do not impact plans for those in subsequent years.

Fifty-four Marines who arrived in Darwin in an advance party in March have already gone through quarantine and begun training with their Australian counterparts, according to officials.

Equipment and supplies for the Marines continued to arrive in Darwin last month despite the hold-up for personnel.

Marines and Australian soldiers practiced simulating shooting with each other's weapons April 29, according to a Marine Corps news release dated April 30.

DOD memo: COVID-19 disqualifies recruits

McClatchy Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The Department of Defense has issued new guidelines that would disqualify anyone who previously had COVID-19 from joining the military, according to a new memo.

The U.S. Military Entrance Processing Command, in a memo issued last week, said that “during the medical history interview or examination, a history of COVID-19, confirmed by either a laboratory test or clinician diagnosis, is permanently disqualifying.”

A defense official, who spoke to McClatchy on the condition of not being identified, confirmed the authenticity of the memo, first reported by Military Times, and said it is interim guidance.

The official said the new policy would not necessarily disqualify a potential recruit, but would force an additional review where the recruit would need to get a waiver to move forward with the enlistment.

The new policy would mean a past coronavirus exposure would be treated the

same as other medical conditions, such as hearing loss, “that are considered ‘permanently disqualifying,’ subject to a medical waiver,” the official said.

But the new policy comes as military recruiters are already facing challenges as COVID-19 has closed the high schools, malls and job fairs where they typically meet prospects.

Most of the military services told McClatchy they have seen shortfalls in recruiting since the COVID-19 outbreak. In addition, every service told McClatchy they do not anticipate being at full strength in terms of the number of forces they require by the end of the year.

More than 1.2 million Americans have tested positive for the virus and 72,617 have died as of Wednesday, according to Johns Hopkins University.

Nelson Lim, a senior social scientist at the Rand Corp. who has researched military personnel policy for more than two decades, said it was too early to determine the impact of the new policy, because there

is still much that is unknown about the accuracy of antibody testing and immunity with COVID-19.

“We don’t have good estimates on the younger population” and the virus impact, Lim said. “Testing is essentially limited to people with symptoms or high risk. So it is difficult to get a clear picture of the impact of this decision.”

It was unclear whether the interim Pentagon policy would eventually extend to currently serving forces who have been ill from the coronavirus while on duty. More than 5,000 military personnel have been infected with COVID-19, almost 1,900 of whom have recovered.

A request for comment to the Defense Department on the impact of the policy on recruiting, and whether it would extend to currently serving forces who re-enlist, was not immediately answered.

A defense official said the new policy would force an additional review where the recruit would need to get a waiver to move forward with the enlistment.

Fractures in many nations widen as lockdowns ease

Associated Press

LONDON — Regional and political fractures are emerging in many nations over how fast to lift the lid on the coronavirus lockdowns, as worries about economic devastation collide with fears of a second wave of deaths.

French mayors are resisting the government’s call to reopen schools, while Italian governors want Rome to ease lockdown measures faster. As the British government looks to reopen the economy, Scottish leader Nicola Sturgeon has warned that acting too fast could let the virus wreak havoc again.

“Any significant easing up of restrictions at this stage would be very, very risky indeed,” Sturgeon said Thursday.

The economic damage around the globe mounted. In the United States, nearly 3.2 million laid-off workers applied for unemployment benefits last week, bringing the running total over the past seven weeks to 33.5 million. And the Bank of England warned that Britain’s economy will shrink by 14% this year, its biggest annual rate of decline since 1706, when Europe was locked in the War of the Spanish Succession.

In Britain, where the official death toll stands at more than 30,000, second only to the U.S., Prime Minister Boris Johnson was expected to extend a more than six-week lockdown on Thursday, but hopes to

ease some restrictions on economic and social activity starting next week.

Restrictions allowing people to leave home only for essential errands, shopping and exercise were imposed in Britain on March 23. On Sunday, Johnson plans to set out a road map for the next phase.

Johnson said that the government will act with “maximum caution” to prevent a second wave of infections.

In France, more than 300 mayors in the Paris region have urged President Emmanuel Macron to delay the reopening of schools, set for Monday. Many mayors around the country have already refused to reopen schools, and many parents will keep their children home even where they are functioning again.

The mayors called the timing “untenable and unrealistic,” saying that they were put on a “forced march” to get schools ready without enough staff or equipment. They complained that the government guidelines were too vague and slow in coming.

But governments are also under pressure to reopen faster and kick-start economies that have been plunged into hibernation.

Italian regional governors are pressing to open shops and restaurants, just days after the country began easing its two-month lockdown by allowing 4.5 million people to return to work in offices and factories.

Governors want to be allowed to present their own plans for reopening, tailored to

the rate of infection and economic needs of their regions.

After an outcry from the nation’s Roman Catholic bishops, Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte announced that public Masses will be allowed to resume May 18.

In Spain, support for the government is crumbling after seven weeks of a strict lockdown, with some regions and opposition parties demanding an end to the state of emergency declared on March 14. The government has argued that it is far too soon.

In Russia, where the number of new infections is growing fast, President Vladimir Putin delegated the enforcement of lockdowns and other restrictions to regional governments, leading to wide variations across the country.

Mikhail Vinogradov, head of the St. Petersburg Politics think tank, told the Vedomosti newspaper that the Moscow government is sending mixed messages which governors find hard to decipher — wanting a victory over the virus, while also encouraging easing of the lockdown.

Fractures are also evident in the U.S., where about half of the 50 states are easing their shutdowns, to the alarm of public health officials.

Many states have not put in place the robust testing and contact tracing that experts believe is necessary to detect and contain new outbreaks.

Mall reopens as counties defy state order

Associated Press

YUBA CITY, Calif. — Some businesses that reopened in two Northern California counties that defied the state's stay-at-home order are not following safety requirements, and the area's top health official said Wednesday that it's "imperative" they do to avoid a resurgence of coronavirus and return to stricter rules.

The local health order that took effect in Sutter and Yuba counties this week allowed diners in restaurants and opened far more retailers than the state approved. It's the most permissive yet in the nation's most populous state, but still requires employees and customers wear masks at indoor businesses.

On Wednesday, Sutter Yuba Mall became the first in California to reopen during the outbreak. Hundreds of shoppers — many not wearing masks — strolled through. A long line quickly formed at the nail salon, a business not allowed to open under Gov. Gavin Newsom's order.

A day earlier, Newsom said that allowing so many businesses to reopen was a mistake and urged leaders to "do the right thing."

California

SAN DIEGO — Former California Rep. Duncan Hunter wants to push back the start of his prison term for stealing campaign funds until next year because of concerns over the coronavirus pandemic.

Hunter's lawyers and prosecutors filed a joint motion in federal court Tuesday and were awaiting a ruling on their request to change the surrender date from May 29 to Jan. 4.

If granted, Hunter promised to not ask for any other changes to his term or that his home confinement be counted toward the 11-month prison stint.

Hunter was sentenced in March to 11 months in prison after pleading guilty to stealing campaign funds and spending the money on everything from outings with friends to

his daughter's birthday party. The ex-Marine resigned from Congress in January after representing one of Southern California's last solidly Republican districts. A Democrat and Republican are headed to a November runoff for his seat.

Michigan

LANSING — The Republican-led Michigan Legislature sued Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer on Wednesday, asking a judge to declare invalid and unenforceable her stay-at-home order and other measures issued to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

The lawsuit, filed in the state Court of Claims, said a 1945 law that gives the governor broad emergency powers to order such restrictions governs local, not statewide, declarations like one that has been in place since March. A 1976 law gives Whitmer emergency authority only for a limited period that expired when the House and Senate didn't extend her emergency and disaster declarations last week, according to the suit that alleges a "patent disregard for the law" and a violation of the separation of powers.

The stay-at-home directive is in place through at least May 15 and generally requires people to shelter in place, except to do critical jobs, exercise outdoors and buy groceries or other items. An order closing places of public accommodation and limiting restaurants to pickup and delivery is in effect through May 28.

Minnesota

MINNEAPOLIS — Minnesotans should fish close to home to help curb the coronavirus pandemic when the wall-eye season opens this weekend, avoiding overnight stays and driving no further than they can go on one tank of gas, Department of Natural Resources officials said Wednesday.

A surge in fishing license sales showed that many Minnesotans are getting antsy under the state's stay-at-home order

and want to hit the lakes. DNR fisheries chief Brad Parsons said that license sales are up 40% from this point last year, with some 362,000 sold so far.

On Wednesday, the Upper Midwest Law Center, a Minnesota-based public interest law firm, sued in federal court on behalf of Minnesota churches and small business owners wanting to strike down Gov. Tim Walz's stay-at-home emergency orders as unconstitutional.

The Minnesota Department of Health on Wednesday reported new one-day highs for the state in confirmed coronavirus cases at 728, and deaths at 30, which raised Minnesota's totals to 8,579 cases and 485 deaths. The new deaths included one in Nobles County, where an outbreak connected with the JBS pork processing plant in Worthington has resulted in 1,082 confirmed cases and one other death.

Nevada

LAS VEGAS — Restaurants may offer disposable menus and dishes, day cares could try to keep children from playing or napping within six feet of each other and hotels could remove decorative pillows from rooms and encase televisions and remotes in wipeable covers.

Those are among the guidelines that Las Vegas-area health officials are offering as the state prepares to start reopening more businesses which were shuttered because of the coronavirus.

Gov. Steve Sisolak last week said that restrictions will be eased gradually, with businesses deemed nonessential, such as retail stores, being allowed to allow shoppers inside. Sisolak has not yet announced an opening date, but said that it could be May 15 if the state sees 14 days of declining rates of new virus cases and deaths.

Pennsylvania

HARRISBURG — Pennsylvania on Wednesday reported under 1,000 new cases of the coronavirus for the fourth

straight day, the longest such streak since the daily reports of new cases first reached four figures in early April.

Health Secretary Rachel Levine called the four-day dip below 1,000 "good news."

Also Wednesday, Gov. Tom Wolf announced the creation of the Commonwealth Civilian Coronavirus Corps, an organization whose scale, funding and timeline remained unclear Wednesday.

The corps, Wolf said, will be designed to marshal Pennsylvanians into a force of workers to help contain future outbreaks of the virus and inject life into the economy.

Wisconsin

MADISON — Wisconsin's presidential primary election held last month in the face of the coronavirus pandemic drew concern from doctors, voters, poll workers and politicians who warned that having thousands of people leave their homes to cast ballots would further spread the highly contagious virus.

Now well beyond the 14-day incubation period for COVID-19, and with a Tuesday special congressional election in northern Wisconsin looming, it remains largely unknown just how many people contracted the virus at the polls on April 7.

A team of epidemiologists and public health experts who examined the potential impact of the election on the spread of COVID-19 in Milwaukee released a study Wednesday that drew no conclusions, in large part because of the lack of widespread testing and contact tracing.

Nearly 411,000 people showed up statewide to vote, some waiting in lines for hours in Milwaukee, many of them wearing masks and voicing anger at Republicans in the Legislature who refused to delay the election. Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, who worked the polls in a mask, gloves and protective gown, was widely derided for reassuring voters that it was "incredibly safe to go out."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

ATF: Man with 90 guns researched killings

SC COLUMBIA — A South Carolina man was arrested and accused of illegally possessing 90 weapons, including numerous assault rifles, authorities said.

Edward Daniel Kimpton Jr., 25, was charged Tuesday with wire fraud, mail fraud and illegal possession of machine guns, The Columbia State reported.

Kimpton was arrested after an 18-month investigation by the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the Secret Service. Authorities said Kimpton purchased firearms, bullets, scopes and tactical gear online from individual and retail sellers using a fake name and an electronic payment platform.

A criminal complaint said Kimpton had the guns shipped to federal firearm license-holders in different South Carolina counties, then he would pick up the gear and contest the sale, stating he never received the items. The complaint said Kimpton retained the guns and the money.

During the investigation, authorities discovered that Kimpton researched content on South Carolina mass shooters in Charleston in 2015 and Florence in 2018.

City's oldest girls Catholic school closing

MD BALTIMORE — A Catholic college preparatory school for girls which counts among its alumni House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and former U.S. Sen. Barbara Mikulski announced on Tuesday that it is closing.

The Institute of Notre Dame will close on June 30 in the midst of a pandemic that will prevent anyone from being inside the school building during

its final days, The Baltimore Sun reported. Leaders cited declining enrollment, financial difficulties and a need to raise millions of dollars with at least \$5 million in building repairs as among the reasons for closing.

According to the school's history, its first class graduated in July 1864 as Civil War cannon fire could be heard in the distance.

Police: Woman set blaze after traffic stop

PA COATESVILLE — Authorities say a woman whose car was towed after a weekend traffic stop near Philadelphia is accused of having set fire to one of the city's police cars and trying to ignite other vehicles.

Chester County prosecutors say an officer spotted a police vehicle on fire in the Coatesville police parking lot shortly after 8:30 p.m. Sunday. He ran to retrieve a fire extinguisher and put out the blaze, then noticed a trail of fluid on that vehicle toward three other police vehicles and two personal cars of department employees.

Police said the incident was recorded by video surveillance cameras, and an investigation revealed that the suspect had been stopped earlier that day by police and her car had been towed.

Prosecutors said the 33-year-old woman is facing charges of arson, attempted arson and related counts.

Trooper helps deliver his baby on side of road

MA BOSTON — A Massachusetts State Police trooper's helped deliver his baby on the side of New Hampshire highway.

Trooper George D'Amelio was on duty when his wife, Christine, called to tell him she

was going into labor. He quickly went home to pick her up and started driving to a hospital in New Hampshire. On the way there, D'Amelio had to pull his car over on a major highway in Bedford, N.H., and deliver his son.

"Baby Jackson 'Jack' D'Amelio is doing great," state police wrote Monday in a Facebook post. "What a little Trooper!"

New Hampshire State Police troopers and members of the Bedford Fire Department assisted D'Amelio with the delivery.

Nearly \$1M dumped during police chase

CA LOS BANOS — Nearly \$1 million in cash was dumped on a Central California road during a police chase that ended with the arrests of two New York men who apparently planned to buy marijuana with the money, the California Highway Patrol said.

Frank Capraro, 23, and Desmond McDay, 25, both of Medford, were arrested last Friday evening, the Merced Sun-Star reported.

The chase began shortly before 6:30 p.m. when a CHP officer tried to stop one of three black SUVs that appeared to be traveling together on Interstate 5 south of Los Banos, authorities said.

During the chase, one SUV straddled lanes to block the patrol car, which maneuvered around it and kept chasing the first car, a Chevrolet Suburban. The Suburban stopped on the shoulder at one point and the driver got out, dumped two cardboard boxes and then took off again before finally stopping for good, the CHP said.

The cardboard boxes contained \$915,000 in cash, and a police dog alerted to the odor of drugs on the money, authorities said.

Families evacuate after sinkhole opens old mine

SD RAPID CITY — Several homes in the Rapid City area were evacuated after a sinkhole collapsed and opened into an abandoned gypsum mine.

Twelve Blackhawk families were displaced last week when the 40-foot-by-50-foot sinkhole opened, breaking water and sewer lines.

"It was going into a bottomless pit," said John Trudo, 40, who realized something was wrong when his sink faucet didn't work.

Cavers found that the sinkhole opened into an abandoned gypsum mine at least 600 feet long, filled with holes from drilling and mining equipment, the Rapid City Journal reported Monday.

"I really never imagined that when we went back down there it would be that big," said Adam Weaver, a member of Paha Sapa Grotto, a local caving group. He added the mine is 25 feet to 30 feet below ground.

3 national forests halt recreational shooting

AZ PHOENIX — Recreational shooting is being temporarily prohibited in three national forests in Arizona in a move that officials say is aimed at reducing the wildfire threat.

The Southwestern Region of the U.S. Forest Service ordered the prohibitions in the Coronado, Prescott and Tonto national forests to begin Wednesday and to continue until July 31 or until rescinded. Officials said the three forests are experiencing an increase in drying trends with large amounts of grass that could be fuel for fires resulting from above-average winter moisture.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

NFL adopts plans for opening team practice facilities

Associated Press

The NFL has set protocols for reopening team facilities and has told the 32 teams to have them in place by May 15.

In a memo sent by Commissioner Roger Goodell, several phases of the protocols were laid out. The first phase to deal with the coronavirus pandemic would involve a limited number of nonplayer personnel, initially 50% of the nonplayer employees (up to a total of 75) on any single day, being approved to be at the facility. But state or local regulations could require a lower number.

The individual clubs would decide which employees could return to the facility and when once facilities reopen. No players would be permitted in the facility except to continue therapy and rehabilitation for injuries that was underway when facilities were closed in late March by Goodell.

“While these protocols have been carefully developed and reflect best practices,” Goodell wrote, “they can also be adapted and supplemented to ensure compliance with any state and local public health requirements.”

Dr. Allen Sills, the NFL’s medical director, will speak with each team physician and the infection control officer to discuss implementation and medical aspects of the protocols.

The step-by-step requirements are:

- Local and state government officials must consent to reopening.
- The team must implement all operational guidelines set by the league to minimize the risk of virus transmission among employees.
- Each club must acquire adequate amounts of needed supplies as prescribed by the league.
- An Infection Response Team with written plan for newly diagnosed cases, with an Infection Control Officer.
- Each employee who returns to work at the club facility must receive COVID-19 safety and hygiene training prior to using the facility, and agree to report health information to the ICO.
- The response team must consist of a local physician with expertise in common infectious disease principles; the team physician can fill that role. Also on the response team will be the infection control officer, the team’s head athletic trainer; the team physician, if he or she is not serving as the local physician; the human resources director; the team’s chief of security; its mental health clinician or someone with equivalent clinical expertise; and a member of the club’s operations staff such as the facility manager.

UFC 249 participants ready to inspire hope knowing risk

Associated Press

When the UFC leads North America’s major sports back into action Saturday night in Florida, Tony Ferguson and Justin Gaethje know they can’t do anything tentatively.

“We’ve got to go out there and keep sports alive,” Ferguson said Tuesday after he flew into Jacksonville and was quickly tested for COVID-19.

The 24 fighters at UFC 249 all realize they added another risk to their already hazardous professions when they agreed to compete amid the growing coronavirus pandemic. While the UFC has strict safety protocols in place, no one can be certain of the dangers involved when the mixed martial arts promotion returns from an eight-week break with three shows in eight days in Jacksonville.

Ferguson and Gaethje both believe their risks are outweighed by the sporting rewards they will reap and the example they will provide when they fight for the interim UFC lightweight title in a fan-free arena.

“We’re going to bring a sense of normalcy to people,” Gaethje said in a phone interview. “I’m proud to be a part of it. It’s the opportunity to inspire. People need to be inspired right now. They need to not let themselves become depressed (or) emotional because they can’t control what’s going on right now. We’ve got to ride it through. They need to be inspired, and we can do that.”

“I honestly had no reservations,” Ferguson added. “Fighting is very dangerous, so I think we’ll be just fine.”

The UFC never wanted to stop competition while the pandemic grew, and president Dana White was never short of fighters willing to compete while he scrambled desperately to keep holding fight cards amid the unprecedented public health crisis. Now that White has found a state and an athletic commission willing to host him, UFC 249 will be followed by additional shows on May 13, May 16 and probably May 23 from Jacksonville.

“There’s not very often you’re going to get to fight for a world title, much less during a pandemic when there’s zero sports going on and you’re going to be the only one on TV,” Gaethje said. “You have to face your fears. You’ve got to go out there and take the chances when they’re presented. ... We get to put paychecks in our own pocket, and we get to put a paycheck in every UFC employee’s pocket that’s going to work this event, and we get to inspire people to not

give up right now.”

Even seasoned veterans like ex-champion Dominick Cruz have jumped at the opportunity despite being well aware of the health risks involved. Like Gaethje, Cruz sees UFC 249 as an opportunity to overcome fear.

“Realistically, anybody can contract this virus,” said Cruz, who will return from a three-year cage absence to fight bantamweight champion Henry Cejudo on Saturday. “I think that’s partially the point, is understanding that anybody out there can get this, but you can’t just freeze up when you see something that’s scary. You’ve got to take the precautions, be as safe as possible, but live your life. That’s what I’m doing.”

Some MMA fighters prefer to train in busy gyms with several teammates, while others work out with only their coaches and sparring partners. The necessary changes over the past two months haven’t bothered Cejudo, an Olympic gold medal-winning wrestler and champion of two UFC divisions.

“I really don’t know the difference between the COVID-19 quarantine and me in my training camp,” Cejudo said. “I’m a professional. I train each and every day. I try to do everything right. This whole quarantine, I think by the time the U.S. comes back together, I’m just not going to know the difference.”

Cruz feels particularly strongly about the symbolic importance of the UFC’s return to competition. The former 135-pound champion wants to reclaim the belt to use it as an instrument for social change, even citing Muhammad Ali’s activism against the Vietnam War as his inspiration.

“What’s the value of championship belts or Olympic gold medals when there’s 33 million Americans that just filed for unemployment benefits, that can’t see their families since mid-March?” Cruz said. “There’s no vaccine for COVID-19 coming, probably no end in sight. So I’ve been (contemplating) the question of what’s the value of belts or even Olympic gold medals unless you use it to make a difference in the lives and the service of humanity?”

But after listening to Cruz’s passionate thoughts about the state of the world during their joint phone interview, Cejudo brought the discussion back to usual MMA levels of discourse.

“You’d better sign up for those unemployment checks, because I’m taking you out,” Cejudo said. “Dominick, you sound like Miss Universe.”

Researchers request assistance from NBA

Associated Press

Dr. Priya Sampathkumar gets asked by her two teen-aged sons every day when they can expect to see NBA games again.

She's among the doctors desperately trying to answer that question — and the NBA is now trying to help.

Sampathkumar is on the staff at the Mayo Clinic, which is starting to get support from the NBA and its players for a study that will aim to shed more light on how antibody testing can help the medical world further understand COVID-19. NBA teams were told this week about the study through an invitation for players and staff to volunteer to take part.

"I think this is one step towards understanding when we might be able to open things back up," said Sampathkumar, the Mayo Clinic's Chair of the Immunization and the Infection Prevention and Control Specialty Councils. "It's certainly not that at the end of the study, we're not going to be able to say, 'OK, on X, Y and Z date everything can open up again.'"

But every little bit helps right now, which is why the NBA asked teams to assist, if possible. Teams were told that the study would also help doctors understand the prevalence of COVID-19 among infected individuals who were asymptomatic or experienced only mild symptoms.

"From a team perspective, and saying this broadly across all teams, participation across the NBA allows for more robust information from the community at large in providing prevalence data," said Dr. Jimmie Mancell, the team physician for the Memphis Grizzlies.

It's a relatively simple process: Teams will receive materials from researchers, then have phlebotomists collect specimens that will be shipped back to the Mayo Clinic. Participants will also have to fill out a survey to gauge their level of potential exposure. Within two days, test results will be known — and because this is about antibodies, it will not take resources away from those doing other testing to identify those who are sick with the virus.

Additional goals of the study include being able to identify more patients who could donate plasma and improve care for patients who are dealing with the coronavirus, plus potentially move researchers closer to a vaccine.

"It really has a couple of different potential goals in the sense that one is that it does help to assess the prevalence of antibodies within society in general and certainly for those players who participate with the NBA in terms of exposure," said Dr. John DiFiori, the NBA's director of sports medicine. "But it also is a study that is attempting to do sort of a higher-level validation of a tool that will be more easy at point of care or at home. So, it has two parts to it."

The virus has infected more than 3.6 million people worldwide and killed over a quarter-million, according to a tally through Wednesday by Johns Hopkins University. Experts believe the actual number of infections and deaths are higher than what has been officially reported by government agencies.

Sports briefs

NCAA waives scholarship spending minimum

Associated Press

The NCAA approved a waiver that will allow schools to spend below the minimum level on athletic scholarships required to compete in Division I.

The Division I Council Coordination Committee approved two other blanket waivers Wednesday that had been requested by several conferences in recent weeks in response to coronavirus pandemic.

Basketball and football players will be allowed to participate in summer athletic activities without being enrolled in school. Also, schools that are in the process of moving to D-I can be counted toward the minimum required Division I opponents.

The coordinator committee also signed off on waiving some recruiting rules to provide more flexibility for coaches and athletes through the extended dead period. The dead period for all sports currently runs through May 31. The commit-

tee decided at its May 13 meeting to extend the dead period through June 30.

Former Wake Forest C transfers to Kentucky

LEXINGTON, Ky. — Former Wake Forest center Olivier Sarr said Wednesday he is transferring to Kentucky, giving the Wildcats an experienced 7-footer after the team's entire starting lineup declared for the NBA Draft.

Sarr, a 255-pound junior from France, told ESPN last week he had entered the transfer portal. In his announcement on Twitter, he called former Demon Deacons coach Danny Manning and his staff "family" and added, "I just didn't feel like I could be at my best by returning to Wake Forest."

Sarr will have one season of eligibility remaining. He would have to sit out the 2020-21 season under NCAA transfer rules, but Kentucky said Sarr will seek a waiver for immediate

eligibility because of the coaching change at Wake Forest.

Manning was fired 11 days ago and replaced last week by Steve Forbes, who spent the previous five seasons coaching at East Tennessee State.

Raiders make moves on both side of ball

ALAMEDA, Calif. — The Las Vegas Raider signed free agent linebacker Justin Phillips and offensive tackle Sam Young on Wednesday.

The Raiders also signed undrafted free agent tackle Kamaal Seymour out of Rutgers.

Phillips returns to the Raiders after playing four games as a rookie with the team last season. He had four tackles on defense and three on special teams.

Young enters his 12th season in the NFL. He played four games with San Francisco last season and has also played for Miami, Jacksonville, Buffalo and Dallas in his career.

Taiwan set to allow baseball fans back

TAIPEI, Taiwan — Fans will be allowed to enter baseball stadiums in Taiwan for the first time this season as part of a gradual easing of coronavirus pandemic restrictions.

The China Professional Baseball League said up to 1,000 people would be permitted to enter ballparks from Friday after an agreement between the league and Taiwan's Central Epidemic Command Center.

Leagues around the world were still suspended last month when games began in Taiwan in empty stadiums. South Korea's league commenced this week, also without fans.

"One month has elapsed since the start of play on April 11. With the unity and cooperation of the government and the people, the epidemic in Taiwan has eased," the CPBL said on its official website. "Welcome back fans!"