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Claims for jobless aid in US climb to 36M

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Nearly 3 million laid-off workers applied for U.S. unemployment benefits last week, as the viral outbreak led more companies to slash jobs even though most states have begun to let some businesses reopen under certain restrictions.

Roughly 36 million people have now filed for jobless aid in the two months since the coronavirus first forced millions of businesses to close their doors and shrink their workforces, the Labor Department said Thursday.

Still, the number of first-time applications has now declined for six straight weeks, suggesting that a dwindling number of companies are reducing their payrolls.

By historical standards, the latest tally shows that the number of weekly jobless claims remains enormous, reflecting an economy that is sinking into a severe downturn. Last week's pace of new applications for aid was still four times the record high that prevailed before the coronavirus struck hard in March.

Jobless workers in some states are still

reporting difficulty applying for or receiving benefits. These include freelance, gig and self-employed workers, who became newly eligible for jobless aid this year.

The states that are now easing lockdowns are doing so in varied ways. Ohio has permitted warehouses, most offices, factories and construction companies to reopen, but restaurants and bars remain closed for indoor sit-down service.

A handful of states have gone further, including Georgia, which has opened barber shops, bowling alleys, tattoo parlors and gyms. South Carolina has reopened beach hotels, and Texas has reopened shopping malls.

Data from private firms suggested that some previously laid-off workers have started to return to small businesses in those states, although the number of applications for unemployment benefits remains high.

The latest jobless claims follow a devastating jobs report last week. The government said that the unemployment rate soared to 14.7% in April, the highest rate since the Great Depression, and employ-

ers shed a stunning 20.5 million jobs. A decade's worth of job growth was wiped out in a month.

Even those figures failed to capture the full scale of the damage. The government said that many workers in April were counted as employed but absent from work, but should have been counted as temporarily unemployed.

Millions of other laid-off workers didn't look for a new job in April, likely discouraged by their prospects in a mostly shuttered economy, and weren't included either. If all those people had been counted as unemployed, the jobless rate would have reached nearly 24%.

Most economists have forecast that the official unemployment rate could hit 18% or higher in May before potentially declining by summer.

The job market's collapse has occurred with dizzying speed. As recently as February, the unemployment rate was 3.5%, a half-century low. Employers had added jobs for a record 9½ years. Even in March, unemployment was just 4.4%.

GAO: DOD failed to meet goals in fighting sexual abuse

CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — Back in 2011, the Government Accountability Office urged the Pentagon to start formally monitoring how military leaders were doing in combating sexual harassment and assault, and the auditors also proposed establishing a Defense Department system for tracking progress in the overall effort.

At the time, a top Pentagon official agreed fully in writing with the auditors' recommendations and said that both tasks would be done that year.

But more than eight years later, neither job has been accomplished, GAO reported this week.

Armed Services Committee members in both chambers,

when apprised of the unmet goal, said that it exemplifies an inadequate Pentagon focus on a continuing scourge.

"For the DoD to come to Capitol Hill and provide sworn testimony in congressional hearings that they have zero tolerance for sexual harassment and assault, all the while knowing that they have failed to take even these common-sense steps to prevent this kind of toxic rot for nearly a decade after GAO outlined the actions, is infuriating and unacceptable," Rep. Jackie Speier, a California Democrat who chairs the Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel, said in a statement to CQ Roll Call.

"Had these policies been ad-

opted in 2011, who knows how much further we would be in the fight to eliminate not just harassment, but other forms of sexual violence in our armed forces."

Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., who is a senior member of the Armed Services Committee, also said that the Pentagon has taken too long to set up the oversight mechanisms.

"These delays are a poor reflection of the Department's commitment to root out sexual harassment, and DOD leadership must do better," Shaheen told CQ Roll Call in a statement. "I urge the Department of Defense to move expeditiously and implement these policies and oversight framework to ensure the health and safety of all

service members."

The GAO compiled 81 of the auditors' top-priority recommendations for the Defense Department that have yet to be implemented.

Several recommendations concerned sexual assault and harassment.

"Our work has found weaknesses in DOD's approach to instituting effective policies and programs on sexual harassment," the Tuesday report said. "In 2011, we found that DOD did not have assurance that individuals in positions of leadership were being held accountable for promoting, supporting and enforcing the department's sexual harassment prevention policies and programs."

US military offers solace over deadly Iran accident

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The U.S. military offered condolences Thursday to Iran over a friendly fire incident in the Islamic Republic that killed 19 of its troops, identifying the weapon used in the incident as an anti-ship cruise missile.

Iranian authorities on Monday said that a missile struck the Iranian navy vessel Konarak near the port of Jask, some 790 miles southeast of Tehran in the Gulf of Oman. Authorities said the Konarak was too close to a target and was accidentally hit Sunday in an incident that also wounded 15 troops.

In a statement, Capt. Bill Urban, a spokesman for the U.S. Central Command, said the force offered “our sincere condolences to the Iranian people for the tragic loss of life.” However, Urban also criticized the training for taking place so close to the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which 20% of all oil passes.

“While we are troubled that this mishap occurred in such close proximity to a high-traffic international shipping lane and at a time when most of the region’s focus is on the fight against COVID-19, the unnecessary loss of life is regrettable,” he said.

Tensions had been expected to rise after Iran’s government overcame the initial chaos that engulfed its response to the coronavirus pandemic. In April, the U.S. accused Iran of conducting “dangerous and harassing” maneuvers near American warships in the northern Persian Gulf. Iran also had been suspected of briefly seizing a Hong Kong-flagged oil tanker just before that.

Burials, shock after ambush on Afghan maternity ward

The Washington Post

KABUL, Afghanistan — Hajar Sarwari was in labor with her second child at a western Kabul maternity ward on Tuesday morning when gunmen shot her twice in the abdomen, killing her and her unborn child.

Sarwari’s family buried her atop a hill under overcast skies on the outskirts of the Afghan capital Wednesday morning, one day after three gunmen killed 24 people in a Doctors Without Borders maternity ward. The baby remained in her womb.

“There’s no humanity left in this country,” said Sarwari’s husband, Mohammad Husain Yaqoobi, his speech slow and halting. He stood near his wife’s grave, marked by a simple black headstone and a small mound of upturned earth. “The attackers had no conscience. How can they justify shooting dead innocent newborns and their mothers?”

The burial was one of many across Kabul on Wednesday

morning. Hospital officials said the mothers of 10 newborns were among Tuesday’s dead, as were those of two infants, pregnant women, nurses and a security guard. Sixteen were wounded.

More funerals were held about 100 miles to the east, in Nangarhar province. A suicide bombing there on Tuesday killed 32 and wounded 133. The attacker struck hours after the hospital rampage began and targeted a funeral gathering for a prominent local security official. The Islamic State claimed responsibility.

The brutality of the attack on the maternity ward paired with the funeral bombing shocked Kabul and the country. The Taliban denied responsibility, but the militants have increased attacks on Afghan forces in other parts of the country for weeks, inflicting heavy casualties. Afghan security officials linked that uptick in attacks to the Tuesday’s attacks on civilians.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani responded by directing

his forces to resume offensive operations against the Taliban. The move marks a major setback to peace efforts in Afghanistan. The Taliban called Ghani’s statement a “declaration of war.”

Maintaining a defensive footing was intended as a goodwill gesture as Afghan government officials and Taliban leaders wrestled over how to begin direct peace talks. But the talks, mandated by the U.S.-Taliban peace deal signed in February, were repeatedly delayed for months over a controversial prisoner exchange and escalating violence.

The U.S. military command in Kabul said Wednesday that there had been no change in the posture of American troops in Afghanistan since Ghani’s announcement.

In Kabul, families affected by the maternity ward attack tried to move forward Wednesday. At a hospital in western Kabul, newborns who had been rescued from Tuesday’s shooting were reunited with relatives.

Taliban truck bomb kills 5 civilians

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — A Taliban truck bomb killed at least five civilians when it exploded near a military court in eastern Afghanistan on Thursday, continuing a series of bloody attacks that have put Afghan forces back on the offensive.

Five security officials and 15 civilians were also wounded by the blast in Gardez, the capital of Paktia province, the Afghan Defense Ministry said in a statement.

“The area was crowded with civilians,” Interior Ministry spokesman Tariq Aryan said in a phone interview.

The Taliban intended to attack the court building, but guards identified the explosives-laden vehicle before it reached the entrance and the blast detonated early, the defense ministry said.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the bombing, which spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said in a statement was a direct response to President Ashraf Ghani ordering Afghan troops Tuesday to resume offensive operations against the insurgents.

Although Ghani’s televised speech focused on the Taliban, his country’s troops have continued to fight ISIS, which both the Taliban and Afghan forces consider a foe.

As of Thursday afternoon, the Afghan military had yet to resume offensive attacks against the Taliban, said Rohullah Ahmadzai, a defense ministry spokesman.

“You cannot go into action as soon as the president orders it,” Ahmadzai said. “But we’ll finish the planning and start physical operations very soon.”

Zubair Babakarkhail contributed to this report.

Wis. court rules against stay-home order

Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. — The Wisconsin Supreme Court struck down Gov. Tony Evers' coronavirus stay-at-home order Wednesday, ruling that his administration overstepped its authority when it extended it for another month without consulting legislators.

The 4-3 ruling essentially reopens the state, lifting caps on the size of gatherings, allowing people to travel as they please and allowing shuttered businesses to reopen, including bars and restaurants. The Tavern League of Wisconsin swiftly posted the news on its

website, telling members, "You can OPEN IMMEDIATELY!"

The decision let stand language that had closed schools, however, and local governments can still impose their own health restrictions. In Dane County, home to the capital of Madison, officials quickly imposed a mandate incorporating most of the statewide order. City health officials in Milwaukee said a stay-at-home order they enacted in late March remains in effect.

Evers reacted angrily in a conference call Wednesday night, saying the state has been doing well in the fight against

the coronavirus. He predicted the ruling will lead more counties to adopt their own restrictions, leading to a confusing patchwork of ordinances that will allow infection to spread.

"Today, Republican legislators convinced four members of the state Supreme Court to throw the state into chaos," Evers said. "They have provided no plan. There's no question among anybody that people are going to get sick. Republicans own that chaos."

Chief Justice Patience Roggensack wrote for the majority that health secretary Andrea Palm's order amounted to an

emergency rule that she doesn't have the power to create on her own.

"Rule-making exists precisely to ensure that kind of controlling, subjective judgment asserted by one unelected official, Palm, is not imposed in Wisconsin," Roggensack, part of the court's 5-2 conservative majority, wrote.

Rebecca Dallet, one of the court's liberal justices, dissented, saying the decision will "undoubtedly go down as one of the most blatant examples of judicial activism in this court's history. And it will be Wisconsinites who pay the price."

Japan easing emergency, but not in its urban areas

Associated Press

BANGKOK — Experts on Japan's coronavirus task force on Thursday approved a government plan to lift a state of emergency in most areas ahead of schedule except for Tokyo and several other high-risk areas.

Economy Minister Yasutoshi Nishimura said after the task force met that the experts approved lifting the emergency in 39 of the country's 47 prefectures. Emergency measures would remain for eight others, including Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto and Hokkaido, where risks still remain high.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had declared the state of emergency on April 7 for Tokyo and six other urban prefectures and later expanded it to the whole country through May 31. With signs of the infections slowing, Abe is seeking to relax the measure while balancing disease prevention and the economy.

Japan now has more than 16,000 confirmed cases, with about 680 deaths. The number of new cases has significantly decreased nationwide.

Abe will explain details at a news conference later Thursday. Experts are also expected to provide the basis for easing the measure, as well as its pos-

sible tightening if there is a resurgence.

Ehime prefecture in western Japan, where an outbreak in a hospital has infected about 20 nurses, patients and their families, will have the state of emergency lifted on the condition containment measures are taken and the infections are closely investigated, Nishimura said.

Experts and officials have urged people to adopt "new lifestyles" and continue practicing physical distancing measures such as remote-working and avoid out-of-town trips even after the state of emergency is lifted.

In China, some residential compounds in Wuhan have begun testing inhabitants for the coronavirus as a program to test everyone in the Chinese city of 11 million people in 10 days got underway.

The city ordered local communities to test everyone after six new cases surfaced last weekend, the first infections there in more than a month. Wuhan, where the virus was first detected last December, was the hardest-hit city in China with 3,869 reported deaths. China reported three new cases nationwide for 82,929 cases in total.

As pandemic rolls on, GOP hits pause on additional aid

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Businesses are going belly up, tens of millions have been laid off and, by some measures, the U.S. seems headed for another Great Depression. But Republicans surveying the wreckage aren't ready for another round of coronavirus aid, instead urging a "pause."

It's a position based on a confluence of factors. Polls have showed that GOP voters think the government is already doing enough. Republicans on Capitol Hill are divided over the best approach. Billions approved by Congress have yet to be spent. And it's also unclear what President Donald Trump wants to do next, if anything, to juice the economy — his payroll tax cut idea hasn't gained any traction on Capitol Hill.

For these and other reasons, GOP leaders see an unfolding crisis that does not yet cry out for further action.

"There's just a pragmatic piece to this, which is, if we're going to do another bill, let's get into June and July so we know how people are reemerging," said Rep. Patrick McHenry, R-N.C., who gave up his leadership post last year to take the top GOP job on the Financial

Services Committee.

The political balancing act comes as the long-dormant deficit-hawk wing of the GOP lumbers back to life, recoiling from the House Democratic proposal to spend another \$3 trillion in taxpayer money. Yet many Republicans have conceded that there is risk to standing pat at a time of massive unemployment, financial struggles for local governments and growing COVID-19 caseloads, particularly with the November election fast approaching.

Despite their distaste for further talks with Democrats, many Republicans privately see passage of another coronavirus measure as inevitable.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, a proponent of the pause, said Tuesday that Republicans are "taking a look at what we've already done. And we've added about \$3 trillion to the national debt, and assessing the effectiveness of that before deciding to go forward."

Yet McConnell cracked open the door to more legislation.

"I'm in discussion, we all are, with the administration. If we reach a decision along with the administration to move to another phase, that'll be the time to interact with the Democrats," he said.

Pa. counties resist after funding threat

Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. — Two days after Gov. Tom Wolf lambasted them as “cowardly” and vowed to withhold funding, several Pennsylvania counties signaled Wednesday that they are moving ahead with plans to defy him by lifting some of their pandemic restrictions. Others, however, backed down under the governor’s threat.

Commissioners in many GOP-controlled counties where the Democratic governor has yet to ease any restrictions have said that they can manage the public health impacts of the coronavirus and reopen safely. They said that the shutdown threatens to destroy local economies — especially small businesses — the longer it goes.

Beaver County, home to a severe nursing home outbreak, said that it plans to operate as if Wolf had already eased restrictions there, meaning that residents can freely leave their homes and retailers, offices and other kinds of businesses can reopen. Because of the outbreak, Beaver is the lone western Pennsylvania county that remains locked down.

Hawaii

HONOLULU — Some Hawaii hotels said they need more guidance about how to enforce a 14-day quarantine on travelers, including what to do if guests refuse to comply or how to participate if they still use physical keys instead of cards.

The Hawaii Tourism and Lodging Association recently asked hotels to give out room keycards that are only good for checking in, so that if a guest leaves the room, they need a new one to re-enter — signaling to hotel staff that a guest defied the quarantine.

Gov. David Ige mandated the traveler quarantine starting March 26 in trying to curb the spread of the coronavirus. As of Wednesday, the state reported 638 virus cases and 17 deaths.

Some visitors who allegedly violated the quarantine have been arrested.

Idaho

WEISER — A cluster of COVID-19 cases has been confirmed in Washington County, leading to the voluntary shutdown of a food processing plant, Idaho health officials said Wednesday.

Southwest District Health said that some people infected with the coronavirus work at Fry Foods Inc. in Weiser.

Company Human Resources Manager Douglas Arnold Wold said that eight workers are infected, and all of them had attended a family gathering of at least 30 people last weekend in Weiser or are related to someone who attended. Wold said that some people from Utah also took part.

Health officials were working to contact people who have been in close proximity to those who became infected.

Louisiana

BATON ROUGE — On Monday, Gov. John Bel Edwards’ administration will start releasing the names of nursing homes where residents have tested positive for the coronavirus and where there have been deaths from COVID-19.

The administration initially released that information early in the outbreak, but later stopped providing details, offering only the numbers of nursing home residents statewide who have tested positive and who have died.

That raised questions about whether family members of nursing home residents who aren’t infected were told about what was happening in the facility.

Dr. Alex Billieux, leader of Louisiana’s public health office, said that the state will resume offering further details, including which nursing homes have seen residents or staff test positive for the coronavirus, how many have made a recovery and how many residents have died at a facility. The information will be released on a weekly basis, Billieux said Wednesday.

Mississippi

JACKSON — Mississippi legislators voted late Wednesday to create grant programs for small businesses hurt by the coronavirus pandemic, using some of the \$1.25 billion in relief money that the federal government is sending the state. The total pricetag for the grants would be \$300 million.

If Republican Gov. Tate Reeves signs the proposal into law, a \$60 million program would provide \$2,000 grants for businesses that were forced to close by government orders and for child care centers.

The other \$240 million would be for grants ranging from \$1,500 to \$25,000. For the first 21 days, the only applications considered would be from businesses that did not initially receive aid from the federal Paycheck Protection Program.

The programs would be for businesses that existed before March 1 and have 50 or fewer employees. Businesses that work in partisan politics or in lobbying are not eligible to apply.

North Carolina

RALEIGH — A judge on Wednesday rejected the requests of several offenders and civil rights groups exhorting him to tell North Carolina corrections leaders to reduce the prison population further to protect inmates from COVID-19.

The denials from Superior Court Judge Vince Rozier came after he received an extensive report he demanded last week from prison officials on what wardens are doing to discourage the virus’ spread in the more than 50 prisons. The plaintiffs who are serving time behind bars have said in affidavits that they were worried for their health if they remained in prison.

Lawyers for the state argued in court documents that Gov. Roy Cooper’s administration was best equipped to protect the health and safety of prisoners and had responded vigorously.

The prison system has sent home several hundred more offenders that were otherwise imprisoned, blocked visitations and stopped taking in offenders from county jails.

More than 640 offenders in about a dozen prisons have tested positive for the coronavirus, and five of them have died. The Department of Public Safety said this week that more than 500 of them are now deemed to have recovered, based on government health guidelines, and are no longer in medical isolation.

South Dakota

SIOUX FALLS — The head of a Native American tribe said Wednesday that it will not comply with South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem’s demand to remove coronavirus checkpoints it set up on federal and state highways that run through its reservation.

Harold Frazier, the chairman of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, told Noem in a short letter that the tribe would consider her request to restrict checkpoints to tribal roads. But he made it clear to The Associated Press that he believes the tribe’s sovereignty allows it to operate checkpoints anywhere on the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation, which is in northern South Dakota. The checkpoints are essential to protecting the health of the people on the reservation, he said.

The Republican governor demanded that the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and the Oglala Sioux Tribe remove the checkpoints from federal and state highways, calling them illegal. The tribes began monitoring their borders last month in an effort to stop unnecessary visitors who could be carrying the coronavirus.

Noem on Friday threatened to sue the tribes if they didn’t disassemble the road checks. But this week, she tried a different tack, offering to meet if they would consider limiting the checkpoints only to tribal roads.

Ex-Navy pilot wins California House seat

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Mike Garcia grew up a single-minded kid from Southern California: He just wanted to fly fighter jets. His decision to enter national politics wouldn't come until decades later, after he had seen one California election too many.

A career as a Navy aviator would lead to a decade in the defense industry. But it was the 2018 elections that prompted Garcia to enter public life, as his home state moved deeper into Democratic-dominated government that he faults for job-crushing regulation and climbing taxes.

"I don't want my country to turn into what my state has become," says Garcia, who claimed a vacant U.S. House seat

Tuesday north of Los Angeles.

The political newcomer's win over Democrat Christy Smith marked the first time in over two decades that a Republican captured a Democratic-held congressional district in California.

What was supposed to be a tossup election ended up with Garcia holding a comfortable 12-point edge in an incomplete tally Wednesday.

Garcia appeared to benefit from enthusiasm among conservatives who saw a rare opportunity to seize a Democratic-held seat in California, while the electorate that turned out in the unusual special election skewed toward reliable, older Republican voters, even though the district has a Dem-

ocratic registration edge.

His Hispanic surname was likely a benefit in a district with a significant Latino population. His military service would play well in a district popular with veterans and Los Angeles police officers.

The son of a Mexican immigrant father, Garcia will go to Congress as a fresh face who campaigned as a supporter of President Donald Trump and railed against "socialist-style" policies coming from the Sacramento statehouse.

Smith delivered her congratulations, but said that she expected their roles to be reversed in November when the two meet in a rematch for the full House term that begins in January.

Ex-judge to see if Flynn should be held in contempt

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The judge presiding over Michael Flynn's criminal case appointed a retired jurist on Wednesday to evaluate whether the former Trump administration national security adviser should be held in criminal contempt.

The judge's order is the second signal in as many days registering his resistance to swiftly accepting the Justice Department's motion to dismiss all charges against Flynn.

In his order, U.S. District Judge Emmet Sullivan appointed former federal judge John Gleeson as an amicus curiae — or friend-of-the-court — and asked him to explore whether Sullivan should hold Flynn in "criminal contempt for perjury."

Flynn pleaded guilty, as part of special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investi-

gation, to lying to the FBI about conversations with the then-Russian ambassador to the United States during the presidential transition period.

As part of the plea, he had to admit in court, under oath, that he lied to the FBI and violated federal law.

Justice Department spokeswoman Kerri Kupec declined to comment on Sullivan's order.

In January, Flynn filed court papers to withdraw his guilty plea, saying that federal prosecutors acted in "bad faith" and broke their end of the bargain when they sought prison time.

Initially, prosecutors said that Flynn was entitled to avoid prison time because he had cooperated extensively with the government, but the relationship with the retired Army lieutenant general grew increasingly contentious in the months before he with-

drew his plea, particularly after he hired a new set of lawyers who raised misconduct allegations against the government.

But the Justice Department filed a motion last week to dismiss the case, saying that the FBI had insufficient basis to question Flynn in the first place, and that statements he made during the interview were not material to the broader counterintelligence investigation into ties between Russia and the Trump campaign.

Officials have said that they sought to dismiss the case in the interest of justice, upon the recommendation of a U.S. attorney who had been appointed by Attorney General William Barr to review the handling of the Flynn investigation.

But Sullivan, who has to approve the motion, made clear Tuesday that he wouldn't immediately rule on the request.

Burr steps aside as chairman of intelligence committee

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., temporarily stepped aside as chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee on Thursday after the FBI served a search warrant for his cellphone as part of an ongoing insider-trading investigation tied to the coronavirus pandemic.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell announced the move, saying he and Burr had agreed that it was in the committee's best interests.

FBI officials showed up at Burr's home with the warrant on Wednesday, two people familiar with the investigation said Thurs-

day, marking a significant escalation into the Justice Department's investigation into whether Burr broke the law with a well-timed sale of stocks before the coronavirus caused markets to plummet. The people spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss an ongoing investigation.

The search warrant was served on Burr's lawyers, and FBI agents went to Burr's home in the Washington area to retrieve the cellphone, a senior Justice Department official said. The decision to obtain the warrant, which must be authorized by a judge, was approved at the highest levels of the department, the official said.

His attorney said in a statement last month that the law is clear that any senator can participate in stock market trading based on public information "as Sen. Burr did." The attorney, Alice Fisher, said that Burr welcomed a review of the stock sales, "which will establish that his actions were appropriate."

Burr has denied wrongdoing but has also requested an ethics review of the stock sales. Burr is an amiable member of the Senate, and his quick call for an ethics investigation and willingness to cooperate with authorities appears to have bought him some goodwill among colleagues tapping down calls for him to step aside.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police stun suspect in firing of officer's gun

MD BALTIMORE — Baltimore police stunned a suspect accused of grabbing and firing an officer's gun Monday, the department said.

Officers responding to a disorderly conduct call in North Baltimore encountered the suspect, The Baltimore Sun reported, citing police. An officer and the suspect began to struggle, and the suspect grabbed the officer's department-issued weapon and fire off a single round, police said. The suspect was then stunned and taken into custody.

A department spokeswoman did not identify the suspect or say whether they were charged, the newspaper said.

Injured manatee gives birth at SeaWorld

FL ORLANDO — An injured pregnant manatee was rescued by crews from a Tampa Bay area marine laboratory and taken to SeaWorld in Orlando for treatment, officials said in a news release.

The manatee gave birth to a calf Tuesday at SeaWorld, the statement said.

Jess Blackburn, a stranding biologist at Mote Marine Laboratory & Aquarium, and Sarasota police marine patrol officer Michael Skinner responded to calls about a distressed manatee on Saturday in Siesta Key. She noticed the manatee was listing to one side and had both healed and fresh boat strike wounds, Blackburn said in the news release.

"Those kinds of wounds likely caused air to be trapped in the manatee's chest cavity, making it difficult for the animal to submerge efficiently," she said.

Crews from the Florida Fish

and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Mote, Sarasota police and the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office assisted in getting the manatee into a boat, which took it to shore, where a transport truck took it to SeaWorld.

9-year-old boy catches 80-pound sturgeon

TN HENDERSONVILLE — A 9-year-old boy in Tennessee became the third child in his family to catch a monster fish, reeling in an 80-pound sturgeon that outweighed him by far.

Coye Price was eager to catch something big after his 11-year-old sister Caitlin hooked a 40-pound striper and his 8-year-old sister Farrah reeled in a 58-pound blue catfish a while back, the Tennessee Wildlife and Resource Agency said Tuesday in a Facebook post.

Coye, who weighs just 55 pounds, was targeting catfish in Old Hickory Lake before he hooked the sturgeon. It took him 15 minutes to get the fish in the boat, where they weighed it and took some pictures before returning it to the water, the Tennessean reported.

Woman injures self in closed national park

WY MAMMOTH HOT SPRINGS — A woman illegally visited Yellowstone National Park while it's closed during the coronavirus pandemic and suffered burns Tuesday when she fell into a thermal feature, officials said.

She was reportedly backing up while taking photos and fell into a hot spring or hole where hot gases emerge near Old Faithful geyser, park spokeswoman Linda Veress said in an email.

Despite her injuries, the woman drove for roughly

50 miles until park rangers stopped her near Mammoth Hot Springs. She was flown to a hospital in Idaho Falls, Idaho.

Park officials did not release the woman's name or the extent of her injuries.

Judge to be sentenced to jail for 2nd DUI

CO DENVER — A Colorado judge is expected to be sentenced to a jail term for pleading guilty to a second DUI charge within two years.

Debra Gunkel, 62, pleaded guilty to violating the terms of her probation from a 2018 DUI case in Prowers County, KCNC-TV reported Monday.

The conviction would have been erased from the Baca County judge's record if she completed two years of probation, but Gunkel was arrested for driving while drunk in Kansas in August. Gunkel's probation was revoked after the charge was filed.

Jail time will be mandatory after her expected plea in June to the Kansas DUI charge.

US attorney: Man sold cocaine, left it on deck

NH CONCORD — A man pleaded guilty in New Hampshire federal court to distributing cocaine, once leaving the drug for pickup on his back deck, the U.S. attorney's office said.

According to court documents, Michael Baez, 39, of Pelham, sold cocaine to a cooperating individual on a number of occasions last year. Baez sold over 420 grams of cocaine, the documents said.

Baez is scheduled to be sentenced on Aug. 19.

"Time after time, Michael Baez pushed thousands of dollars' worth of cocaine from his home, where he once left the dangerous narcotic out on his

grill, on his back deck, ready for pickup," said Joseph Bonavolonta, special agent in charge of the FBI Boston Division.

Fugitive who escaped restraints is caught

RI PROVIDENCE — A Rhode Island man who freed himself from restraints and escaped police custody in January has been caught in Puerto Rico, federal authorities say.

David Marroquin was arrested Monday by U.S. Marshals after a brief foot chase, the Marshals Service said in a statement. Marroquin, 20, of Providence, was arrested on a breaking and entering charge on Jan. 18, but escaped from custody. Authorities developed information that he had fled to Puerto Rico.

Marroquin is being held pending extradition to Rhode Island to face several charges, including committing a crime of violence while in possession of a weapon, breaking and entering, conspiracy and escape.

Marroquin also had two outstanding bench warrants issued in January out of Rhode Island for failing to appear for a bail violation hearing.

Regulators might cut US catch of bluefish

MA BOSTON — Federal regulators are considering reducing the East Coast's harvest of bluefish to prevent overfishing.

Bluefish are popular gamefish that are also harvested commercially for food. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said the catch of the fish would be reduced by 25%, to about 2.8 million pounds, under the current plan.

From wire reports

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NASCAR ready for return to racing

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — NASCAR's season started with the Secret Service doing a security check on the firesuit-clad pole-sitter for the Daytona 500 and thousands of fans waiting hours in line to pass through a metal detector.

When the season resumes on Sunday some 13 weeks later, drivers will have their temperatures taken as they enter Darlington Raceway in South Carolina and they will be wearing masks as they leave their isolated motorhomes and make their way to their cars. There will be no fans allowed inside.

Faced with many of its teams falling into financial ruin, NASCAR is waving the green flag on a plan it believes allows the series to safely return to racing. Only essential personnel will be permitted into the infield with strict guidelines on social distancing, access and protective clothing.

There will be no one to boo reigning series champion Kyle Busch, no pre-race concert, no

pomp and probably no flyover.

The seven races so far announced in May are at Darlington and Charlotte Motor Speedway, tracks within driving distance from teams' North Carolina bases. Four are in the elite Cup Series and the other three are lower-tier Xfinity and Truck Series races.

NASCAR hasn't raced since March 8 so Wednesday night events at Darlington and Charlotte are the only way to cram in some of the missed events.

These races will be nothing close to the weekly traveling circus NASCAR typically stages and participants will be figuring out a new normal when they pull up to the gate at Darlington.

"Just the unknowns about the procedures — you can read about them all you want and we also heard through the teleconference we had with NASCAR about the protocols," said Daytona 500 winner Denny Hamlin. "Obviously there will be a huge microscope on how we're doing things, making sure it's done in a safe manner. For all

of us, it's just the unknown of making sure we're doing it the right way."

Much has changed since Joey Logano scored his second victory of the season — which has so far consisted of just four Cup races — at Phoenix in March. Kevin Harvick is still the points leader and Hamlin, Logano and Alex Bowman are locked into the playoffs as race winners.

Ryan Newman will be back in the field Sunday after his horrific crash on the last lap of the Daytona 500. He suffered a head injury that took him out of his Roush Fenway Racing Ford, but the long pause in the season gave him enough time to heal and receive medical clearance to race again.

Matt Kenseth has come out of retirement to drive for Chip Ganassi Racing, which fired Kyle Larson during the shutdown for using a racial slur during an online race. NASCAR is not running any practices or qualifying before Sunday's race, so Kenseth will be cold when he climbs into a stock car for the

first time since the 2018 season finale. At 48, he will be the oldest driver in the field.

NASCAR had hoped to announce a revamped 2021 schedule in April that included midweek races, more short tracks and road courses, and other efforts to shake things up. Those plans have been delayed as completing the 2020 jigsaw puzzle is now the priority; NASCAR said last week it won't race this year as scheduled at Chicagoland Speedway or on the road course in Sonoma, Calif. The spring race in Richmond, Va., also will not be rescheduled.

The series, which has seen attendance and ratings drops for several years, is desperate to get going and not just for the sake of its hard-hit teams. NASCAR has issued two rounds of layoffs during the pandemic — cuts last week decimated staffing at many race tracks — and those still employed took pay cuts, furloughs or forced vacation.

Teixeira dominates Smith in UFC's second event back

Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Glover Teixeira dominated Anthony Smith and finally stopped him with punches early in the fifth round Wednesday night, earning an upset victory to cap the UFC's second show since returning to action amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Heavyweight veteran Ben Rothwell grabbed an entertaining split-decision victory over Ovince Saint Preux, and Drew Dober stopped fellow light-weight contender Alexander Hernandez with a second-round barrage of punches during the second of three UFC cards in eight days at a fan-free VyStar Veterans Memorial Arena.

The promotion returned to action last Saturday with UFC 249 after an eight-week hiatus. The UFC established extensive

protocols for health and safety in its return, and veteran fighter Jacare Souza was pulled off last weekend's show after he tested positive for COVID-19 along with two cornermen.

The second show went off without a positive COVID-19 test, and more masks were visible on UFC personnel inside and outside the cage Wednesday. Middleweight Karl Roberson's bout with Marvin Vettori was scrapped when Roberson was hospitalized overnight after he fell ill, but the illness was related to his weight cut and not coronavirus, according to the UFC.

The UFC's third show in Jacksonville is Saturday night on ESPN Plus, headlined by veteran heavyweights Alistair Overeem and Walt Harris.

The UFC hopes to begin holding fight cards back home in Las

Vegas later this month, but is waiting for clearance from the Nevada Athletic Commission.

The 40-year-old Teixeira (31-7) was shockingly dominant in his fourth consecutive victory. The light heavyweight took control with strikes in the second round, and almost finished Smith several times while dominating the ensuing two rounds. Teixeira finally ended it 1:04 into the final round, earning his first stoppage by punches since 2017.

Smith (33-15) was in the cage for the first time since he had to fight an intruder in his family home in Nebraska last month. He lost a close fight to Jon Jones for the light heavyweight title last year, and Teixeira was superior after the opening minutes.

The 38-year-old Rothwell (38-12) punctuated his 50th

professional bout with a back-and-forth meeting with Saint Preux (24-14), a former light heavyweight title contender who moved up to heavyweight after losing three of his past five fights. Rothwell improved to 2-2 since returning from a two-year doping suspension.

Dober (23-9) is a training teammate of Justin Gaethje, who won the UFC interim light-weight title with an electrifying stoppage of Tony Ferguson in UFC 249.

Andrei Arlovski, the UFC's 41-year-old career leader in heavyweight victories, won a decision over Philippe Lins for his second victory in seven fights.

Earlier, Ricky Simon picked up the biggest win of his UFC career with a split-decision victory over veteran Ray Borg.

10 of NBA's 30 teams hold workouts

Associated Press

MIAMI — The NBA is now one-third of the way back, at least in terms of voluntary workouts.

With Miami reopening its doors Wednesday, 10 of the league's 30 teams have gone forward with on-court individual workouts — the first permitted sessions since the league ordered teams to close their training facilities as part of the coronavirus pandemic response about two months ago.

Besides the Heat, the other teams that have opened so far are Portland, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Denver, Atlanta, Indiana, Sacramento, Toronto and Utah. More are expected in the coming days; among them, Orlando is close, and the Los Angeles Lakers are targeting Saturday.

And while there still is no decision about whether the season can resume — NBA

Commissioner Adam Silver, according to a person with knowledge of the situation, has told the league's players he expects to make that call by mid-June at the latest — getting back to some semblance of work is generally being considered a positive step.

"We're kind of just feeling it out, playing it by ear, taking it day by day," said Toronto assistant coach Brittini Donaldson, who was in the gym with Raptors wing Malcolm Miller when the reigning NBA champions opened their facility again Monday. "Hopefully, you know, in a week we can start ramping it up a little more. But to start we're just keeping it very basic, very simple."

The league has very strict rules about these workouts; no head coaches can be involved, no more than four players can be in the facility at a time — the Raptors are limiting it to one player — and intense safety

precautions must be taken before, during and after the sessions. When Donaldson was throwing passes to Miller, she did so while wearing a mask and gloves.

Heat captain Udonis Haslem was one of Miami's players to report back to work on Day 1 at their facility, though it wasn't his top priority. He was sporting a customized mask with the team's logo earlier Wednesday when he appeared at a food distribution drive that he helped organize near downtown Miami.

"This is first," Haslem said at the food drive. "This is most important."

Haslem said the workout started well, then he began to fade a bit toward the end. Like most NBA players, he's been doing individual workouts during the league's hiatus but said nothing replicates what it takes to get through an on-court workout.

Meanwhile, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis let professional leagues know that the Sunshine State is ready to welcome them all if needed.

With Orlando often mentioned as a potential centralized site if the NBA resumes play, and it was one of the sites Silver told players late last week that is under consideration, DeSantis said Wednesday that the state is putting a premium on the value of professional sports.

"Professional sports are going to be welcome in Florida," DeSantis said. "That may not be the case in every other state in this country, as we've seen. And so what I would tell commissioners of leagues is, if you have a team in an area where they just won't let them operate, we'll find a place for you here in the state of Florida, because we think it's important and we know that it can be done safely."

PGA Tour plans constant testing, limited access

Associated Press

Players, caddies and key staff around them will be tested once a week for the new coronavirus, and everyone at the golf course will have their temperatures taken every day when the PGA Tour returns next month and tries to show it can resume its season with minimal risks.

Testing was a big part of the process outlined Wednesday that revealed significant changes to how tournaments are conducted.

No pro-ams. No spectators for at least a month, perhaps longer. No family members. No dry cleaning. And social distancing everywhere from the clubhouse to the practice range.

"Our goal is to minimize risk as much as possible, with the full understanding that there is no way to eliminate all of the risk," said Andy Levinson, senior vice president of tournament administration for the

tour. "But one of the best ways we can do that, to reduce the likelihood of exposure, is by limiting the number of people we have on site and limiting access to certain areas, keeping groups separated."

It starts June 8-14 at Colonial with the Charles Schwab Challenge in Fort Worth, Texas.

Testing and social distancing was the backbone of the 37-page presentation titled "Return to Golf Events." The idea is to keep players and essential staff in a bubble, and those estimated 400 people would be tested for COVID-19. Players would have a designated hotel unless they had other options the tour approved. Charter flights were made available for \$600 a seat (\$300 for caddies), and another test would be required before they fly and when they land in a new city for the next tournament.

Everyone on site will have thermal readings and a health

questionnaire daily.

"We're not going to play if we can't do it in a safe and healthy environmental for all our constituents," said Tyler Dennis, the tour's chief of operations.

And the tournament won't shut down if someone tests positive. Such a player would have to withdraw immediately and self-isolate for at least 10 days, provided there are no subsequent symptoms and he gets two negative test results 24 hours apart.

"That was the No. 1 concern," said Russell Knox, who serves on the Player Advisory Council. "Nobody wants to go through that in a hotel. You're going to be away from your family and someone will knock on the door every few hours with food."

He also said that was a key message from Commissioner Jay Monahan: Risks remain and everyone has to sacrifice something from what had been a comfort-driven lifestyle.

The tour said it would pro-

vide a stipend to pay for costs associated with anyone having to self-isolate.

The tour also is providing masks for whoever wants them and will cover the costs of all testing each week, whether it's the RT-PCR nasal swab test or thermal screening. Each tournament picks up the tab for hand sanitizer stations and a hygiene plan on site.

Results from the nasal swab typically take a couple of days, and the tour is hopeful of using local labs when available for a quicker turnaround. Players can practice on the course but do not have access to facilities on site until the test results are back.

On the golf course, players are to handle their own clubs and let their caddies rake bunkers and remove the pins, wiping down both after they're done with them.

Another change: No shaking hands after the round.