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Navy still seeing ship maintenance delays

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — In four years, one ship maintenance center was only able to complete three out of 24 ship repairs on time, despite a new contracting strategy aimed at improving delays, according to a new report.

The Navy's new method for issuing contracts for ship maintenance — called the Multiple Award Contract, Multi-Order approach — had some potential benefits compared to the previous strategy such as increased competition and controlling costs through fixed-price deals, according to a 61-page report by the Government Accountability Office.

However, delays in maintenance schedules continue to be a concern.

Navy leadership has said one of the top priorities for the service is to increase the number of its battle force ships from 299 to 355 or more by 2030, but its maintenance backlogs make it difficult to keep on top of the needs of the fleet now.

Senators on the Senate Armed Services Committee in December raised these concerns after another GAO report stated

Navy vessels in the past five years have spent an additional, unplanned 33,700 days, or about 90 years, docked at shipyards for maintenance.

“My fear is that as the Navy grows, the maintenance capacity will not keep pace, the end result will be a larger fleet, but fewer ships ready for operational tasking,” Sen. David Perdue, R-Ga., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee sub-panel on seapower, said during the December hearing about maintenance delays.

The GAO report issued last week studied schedules for 41 completed ship repairs between April 2015 to April 2019 at three maintenance centers where the new contract strategy is implemented: the Mid-Atlantic Regional Maintenance Center in Norfolk, Va.; the Southwest Regional Maintenance Center in San Diego, and the Southeast Regional Maintenance Center in Mayport, Fla.

The mid-Atlantic center had the worst performance out of the three centers, only completing three out of 24 ship maintenance availabilities on time during this period. The southeast center completed three out of seven ship availabilities on time and the southwest center completed six out of

10 availabilities on time.

One reason for the increased delays was unplanned work, which requires changes to the contract. The unplanned work refers to “growth work” or issues found during the maintenance period and new work added by the Navy. Changing the contract after it is awarded for the unplanned work using the MAC-MO contract strategy is more difficult and time consuming, according to the report, citing interviews with Navy officials.

One case study cited in the report was for the dock landing ship USS Whidbey Island, which started work August 2017 with a planned completion date for May 2018. Not only was there growth work and new work added to the maintenance period, but the maintenance team had to negotiate more than 800 requests for contract changes with the contractor that caused delays, according to the report. The work was finally completed December 2019, more than 18 months late.

The GAO report also found the Navy has worked to mitigate the delays caused by the new contract strategy and is using lessons learned from the process.

Across military, thousands deferring plans to leave

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Army Sgt. Antonio Gozikowski was planning to leave the military next month and head to college.

After serving for six years, the dental assistant's goal was to become a dentist, and then return to the Army in a few years with his expanded medical skills. But now, with the coronavirus forcing universities to consider virtual or reduced schooling this fall, he decided to take advantage of a new Army program and extend his military service for six more months.

Across the military, uncertainty about future jobs or college opportunities is driving

more service members to reenlist or at least postpone their scheduled departures. As unemployment, layoffs and a historic economic downturn grip the nation, the military — with its job security, steady paycheck and benefits — is looking much more appealing.

“Everything from elementary schools to universities is closing down and there's no saying how it's going to go when the fall semester opens,” said Gozikowski, adding that he's hoping schools start opening up for spring semester. “This is like a safety net. I have a source of income and I'll be able to continue working.”

Gozikowski, who is from Cherry Hill, N.J., and is serv-

ing at Fort Hood, Texas, is one of hundreds of service members who are taking advantage of newly developed, short-term extensions being offered by the military.

As of last week, the Army had already exceeded its retention goal of 50,000 soldiers for the fiscal year ending in September, reenlisting more than 52,000 so far. And the other services have also met or are closer than planned to their target numbers. The influx of people reenlisting will offset any shortfalls in recruiting, which has been hampered by the outbreak. And that will help the services meet their total required troop levels for the end of the year.

“We're hiring,” said Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy. “Like anything, market dynamics come into effect and people will see where the opportunities lie.”

The Air Force is already expecting to fall short of its recruiting goal by as much as 5,800 as a result of the virus. And that gap, the Air Force said, could be filled by service members who decide to reenlist or extend their service.

So far, the number of Air Force personnel who have withdrawn their requests to leave the service or have asked to extend their enlistment is 700 more than last year at this time, including 230 pilots and medical staff.

Civilian deaths, injuries rise in Afghanistan

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Civilian casualties in Afghanistan rose sharply last month, the United Nations said Tuesday, even as U.S. troops begin to withdraw under a deal with the Taliban meant to bring peace to war-weary Afghans.

Taliban attacks in April killed or injured more than 200 civilians, marking a 25% increase from the same month last year. Government forces were responsible for 170 civilian casualties during that time, up nearly 40% compared to April 2019, data released by the U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan show.

Violence has continued to rise in May, including the unclaimed attack by gunmen on a maternity ward at a Kabul hospital, in which mothers and newborns were killed,

UNAMA said.

Attacks on civilians, health care personnel and medical facilities could amount to war crimes, it warned as it called for renewed efforts to get the Taliban and Afghan government to negotiate — a key provision of the Feb. 29 U.S.-Taliban deal.

Since the start of April, the Taliban have abducted 15 health care workers and Afghan government forces have threatened medical staff and stolen hospital supplies, UNAMA said.

“Any incidents affecting people, places and supplies necessary for health care provision can have serious and wide-ranging consequences, particularly during the COVID-19 crisis,” it said.

The coronavirus is confirmed to have infected around 7,000 people throughout Afghanistan as of Tuesday, and 170 have

died from related illness, according to the Afghan Health Ministry.

Besides the attack on the maternity ward, in which 24 people died, major incidents in May included a suicide attack on a funeral in Nangarhar province, a truck bombing in Gardez and an airstrike by government forces in Balkh, where civilians were being forced by the Taliban to destroy a road to prevent Afghan troops from using it, UNAMA noted.

Nearly 90 people died in those four attacks alone, it said.

Citing insurgent attacks, President Ashraf Ghani last week ordered the military to resume offensive operations against the Taliban, which had been suspended for over two months in a bid to advance peace efforts.

Zubair Babakarkhail contributed to this report.

Trump: US ‘never really fought to win’ in Afghanistan

The Washington Post

President Donald Trump on Monday declared that the United States had “never really fought to win” in Afghanistan, except early in the nearly two-decade-long war, making a sweeping statement about military efforts as thousands of U.S. troops continue to serve, and sometimes die, in counterinsurgent operations there.

In a series of tweets, the president pushed back against a May 17 Wall Street Journal editorial cautioning against abrupt decisions regarding Afghanistan, where U.S. officials are seeking to facilitate a peace deal between Taliban militants and the Afghan government ahead of a planned reduction in U.S. forces.

“Could someone please explain to them that we have been there for 19 years,” Trump wrote. “The Taliban is mixed about even wanting us out. They make a fortune \$\$\$ out of having us stay, and except at the beginning, we never really fought to win.”

“We are more of a police force than the mighty military that we are, especially now as rebuilt. No, I am not acting impulsively!” he said.

Since the war began in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, more than three-quarters of a million Americans have deployed to Afghanistan, and more than 2,300 U.S. troops have died.

Over the past year, the military mission has focused on pummeling militants with

airstrikes and supporting Afghan forces in an effort to induce the Taliban to embrace political talks outlined in a Feb. 29 U.S.-Taliban deal. That deal halted U.S. attacks on the Taliban and outlined a path toward an American departure.

While officials have acknowledged that the war has been locked in an extended stalemate and that many hard-won battlefield gains have not been sustained, Trump’s commentary was unusual for a commander in chief. Typically, presidents have heaped praise on military efforts, no matter their outcome. At other moments, Trump has also lauded the military effort in Afghanistan, including during a surprise Thanksgiving visit last year.

Destroyer brings upgraded missile defense to Rota

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The destroyer USS Roosevelt has arrived at its new homeport in Rota, Spain, bringing with it enhanced missile defense capabilities and the ability to embark two helicopters, the U.S. Navy said.

The destroyer came to Rota on Saturday after taking part in an exercise earlier this month that involved U.S. surface ships maneuvering in the Barents Sea for the first

time since the Cold War.

The drills in the waterway north of Finland and Russia were part of a Navy effort to bolster its presence in the broader Arctic region, where Russia has invested heavily in recent years and China has also declared itself a power with economic interests.

The Roosevelt, formerly homeported at Mayport, Fla., is also the first destroyer in Rota able to deploy with two embarked MH-60R Sea Hawk helicopters. Having MH-60Rs on board boosts anti-submarine and surface warfare capabilities, Lt. Cmdr.

Benjamin T. Harris, an air operations officer, said in a statement.

Not to be mistaken for the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, which has been docked in Guam for weeks after a coronavirus outbreak, the destroyer is named after President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his wife, Eleanor. It is replacing the USS Carney, which had been in Rota since 2015 and will head to Mayport, as part of a Navy plan to gradually rotate the four Rota-based destroyers.

Navy fires top enlisted recruiter amid probe

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Navy officials fired the service's top enlisted recruiter, questioning his judgment after the completion of an investigation that included whether a crime was committed, officials said Monday.

Master Chief Petty Officer Franklin Tiongco was removed last week from his position as the Navy's national chief recruiter over a "loss of confidence in his judgment," Cmdr. Lara Bollinger, a spokeswoman for Naval Recruiting Command, said Monday in a statement.

"This relief and reassignment is a measure to safeguard [Navy Recruiting Command's] mission accomplishment and to protect the integrity of the legal process," Bollinger said. Navy leadership was reviewing the matter and had made "no official determination of guilt or innocence."

Navy officials declined to provide any additional details about the case, which included a Naval Criminal Investigative Service probe. They would not say what led the Navy to lose confidence in Tiongco or whether he was expected to be charged with a crime.

The national chief recruiter serves as the top enlisted recruiting adviser to the Navy Recruiting Command chief and provides guidance to 4,550 recruiters in the U.S., according to the Navy. Tiongco had served in that role since 2017.

Tiongco enlisted in the Navy in 1991 and served aboard the guided-missile cruiser USS Normandy before he was released from active duty in 1994, according to a biography provided by the Navy. He was recalled to active duty in 1995 as a Navy Reserve canvasser recruiter. Since then, he has served in a variety of recruiting positions across the U.S.

It was not immediately clear where Tiongco had been reassigned.

Navy relieves Philippine Sea skipper after Va. fuel spill

By JOSEPH DITZLER
Stars and Stripes

The commander of a guided-missile cruiser that dumped 4,000 gallons of diesel fuel into a Virginia river on May 7 was relieved of duty "due to a loss of confidence in her ability to command," according to news accounts and a Navy statement.

Capt. Erica Hoffmann, a New York native and Naval Academy graduate, had commanded the USS Philippine Sea since April 2019. She was relieved Monday by Rear Adm. Richard Cheeseman, commander of Carrier Strike Group 2, the Navy statement said.

The Philippine Sea was moored at Naval Weapons Sta-

tion Yorktown when the fuel was released into the York River, according to Virginia TV station WVBT-TV. Most of the fuel was contained using booms, a fuel vacuum and absorbent material, the station reported.

The Navy announcement did not connect Hoffmann's firing to the spill. "Many factors weigh into a decision to relieve a commanding officer due to loss of confidence," wrote Lt. Cmdr. Richlyn Ivey, a spokeswoman for Naval Forces Atlantic, in an email Tuesday to Stars and Stripes.

Commissioned in 1996, Hoffmann held a number of billets aboard Navy warships, including reactor officer on the

aircraft carrier USS George Washington and executive officer aboard the guided-missile frigate USS Samuel B. Roberts. She has served in several conflicts and as an instructor at the Navy's school for surface warfare officers.

Hoffmann will be temporarily reassigned to the U.S. 4th Fleet command staff.

Command of the Philippine Sea falls temporarily to Capt. Robert Thompson of Naval Surface Force Atlantic until a permanent relief is named, according to the Navy.

The Philippine Sea is part of the strike group attached to the carrier USS George H.W. Bush and is based at Naval Station Mayport, Fla.

Beer rating app could pose security threat

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

Tapping into a beer rating app allowed researchers to track military and intelligence personnel, including some who checked in at a military base that hosts a CIA training facility known as "the farm."

Users of Untappd, a smartphone app for beer lovers, also posted photos that showed debit cards, military ID cards, locations of fighter jets and possibly sensitive military documents, the open-source research and investigative journalism group Bellingcat reported Monday.

The app encourages users to log what they're drinking and where, and lets them rate their favorite sudsy drinks and discover new ones. Using their phone's geolocation, they can check in to drinking establishments or discover other nearby bars and restaurants.

But with some creativity and "a little bit of digging," those interested in snooping can use those same features to discover

military posts and other sensitive sites, as well as the people who frequent them.

"Examples of users that can be tracked this way include a U.S. drone pilot, along with a list of both domestic and overseas military bases he has visited, a naval officer, who checked in at the beach next to [Guantanamo Bay's] detention center as well as several times at the Pentagon, and a senior intelligence officer with over seven thousand check-ins, domestic and abroad," wrote Foeke Postma, a Bellingcat researcher and trainer who authored the report. "Cross-referencing these check-ins with other social media makes it easy to find these individuals' homes."

Untappd shows nearly 600 unique visitors on its Ramstein Air Base, Germany, page who have rated more than 2,600 beers — not including other establishments on base that have their own pages.

One user highlighted in the report checked in at the Duck and Cover bar at the U.S. Em-

bassy in Kabul and the NATO coalition's military headquarters in the Afghan capital. Another user checked in three times at Camp Peary, the CIA's covert training facility in Williamsburg, Va. The user posted photos showing features of the base that could be matched to a satellite image for geolocation.

The Defense Department provides broad social media guidance to its personnel but does not generally focus it on specific platforms or applications, said Lt. Col. Uriah Orland, a Pentagon spokesman.

"Social media platforms pose numerous threats to DoD personnel due to the collection and aggregation of location and personal information, in addition to information posted by social media users," Orland said via email.

Bellingcat found in earlier research that military users were unwittingly sharing potentially sensitive location data through fitness apps, leading the Pentagon to restrict their use in operational areas.

Global fears as cases spike in some countries

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Coronavirus cases are spiking from India to South Africa and Mexico in a clear indication the pandemic is far from over, while Russia and Brazil now sit behind only the United States in the number of reported infections.

The surges come as much of Asia, Europe and scores of U.S. states have been easing lockdowns to restart their economies as new infections wane. U.S. auto-workers, French teachers and Thai mall workers are among hundreds of thousands of employees back at work with new safety precautions.

Russia reported a steady rise in new infections Tuesday, and new hot spots have

emerged across the nation of about 147 million. Russia registered nearly 9,300 new cases in the last 24 hours, bringing the total to almost 300,000 infections, about half of them in Moscow. Authorities say over 2,800 people with COVID-19 have died in Russia, a figure some say is surely higher.

Some experts argue Russian authorities have been listing chronic illnesses as the cause of death for many who tested positive for the virus. Officials angrily deny manipulating statistics, saying Russia's low death toll reflects early preventive measures and broad screening. Nearly 7.4 million tests have been conducted.

In Russia's second-largest city of St. Petersburg, a virus hot spot, all burials now must be with closed coffins as a precau-

tion, irrespective of the cause of death. Previously the measure applied only to COVID-19 deaths.

Russia's caseload is second only to that of the U.S., which has seen 1.5 million infections and over 90,000 deaths. The country's prime minister, Mikhail Mishustin, resumed work Tuesday after a bout of coronavirus.

Cases are still rising across Africa, where all 54 nations have seen confirmed infections for a total of over 88,000 cases and 2,800 deaths, according to the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

South Africa has the highest number of cases at over 16,400 and nearly 290 deaths.

Trump says he's been taking hydroxychloroquine

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The White House hurried Tuesday to defend President Donald Trump's decision to take a malaria drug to protect against the coronavirus, despite warnings from his own government that it should only be administered for COVID-19 in a hospital or research setting due to potentially fatal side effects.

Trump told reporters a day earlier that he has been taking the drug, hydroxychloroquine, and a zinc supplement daily "for about a week and a half now," after two White House staffers tested positive for the coronavirus. Trump has spent months pushing hydroxychloroquine as a potential cure or preventive drug for COVID-19 against the cautionary advice of many of his administration's top medical professionals. The drug has the potential to cause

significant side effects in some patients and has not been shown to combat the new coronavirus.

Amid concerns from some public health experts that Trump's example could send more people to misuse the drug, White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany said Tuesday that "tens of millions of people around the world have used this drug for other purposes," including malaria prophylaxis. She emphasized that "any use of hydroxychloroquine has to be in consultation with your doctor. You have to have a prescription. That's the way it must be done."

The drug is also prescribed for some lupus and arthritis patients.

At the White House, Trump said his doctor did not recommend hydroxychloroquine to him, but that he requested it from

the White House physician.

"I started taking it, because I think it's good," Trump said. "I've heard a lot of good stories."

The White House physician, Dr. Sean Conley, said in a statement released through the press office that, after "numerous discussions" with Trump about the evidence for and against using hydroxychloroquine, "we concluded the potential benefit from treatment outweighed the relative risks."

The Food and Drug Administration warned health professionals last month that the drug should not be used to treat COVID-19 outside of hospital or research settings, due to sometimes fatal side effects. Regulators issued the alert for the drug, in part, based on increased reports of dangerous side effects made to U.S. poison control centers.

House liberals demanding cuts to military spending

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Twenty-nine of the House's most liberal Democratic members called Tuesday for the yearly national defense authorization bill to cut military spending — a declaration, they said, that is meant to focus federal resources on the coronavirus pandemic.

The demand, however, stands to greatly complicate the Democratic-controlled House's ability to advance the National Defense Authorization Act, one of the most consequential must-pass bills that Congress assembles each year. It is likely to

generate objections from Republicans and more moderate Democrats alike — and create headaches for Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and her leadership team.

The signers are almost all members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, including lead authors Reps. Barbara Lee, D-Calif., and Mark Pocan, D-Wis., who have long called for lower levels of Pentagon spending to free more resources for domestic spending. But the pandemic, they argue, presents a new imperative for defense cuts.

"Right now, the coronavirus is our greatest adversary," said a draft of the letter

circulated to House offices and obtained by The Washington Post. "We must remain focused on combating the coronavirus and not on increasing military spending that already outpaces the next 10 closest nations combined ... At some point, spending more than every other nation on Earth must be enough."

The letter is addressed to House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith, D-Wash., and Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-Texas, the panel's top Republican, and it comes as the committee launches the annual process of assembling the defense bill and forwarding it to the House floor.

Regulators sat on complaint as virus grew

Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa — Safety regulators declined to inspect an Iowa pork plant despite a complaint alleging that workers were exposed to the coronavirus in crowded conditions — a decision that critics said allowed a burgeoning outbreak to grow unabated.

The April 11 complaint to the Iowa Occupational Safety and Health Administration said that employees at the Tyson Foods processing plant in Perry were spreading the virus as they worked “elbow to elbow.” The complaint alleged that social distancing was near impossible in production areas and the cafeteria.

Workers and regulators had reason to be alarmed. The Tyson plant in Columbus Junction was idled days earlier due to an outbreak that infected hundreds of workers, and it had been rerouting hogs to Perry for slaughter. Other meat plants nationwide were reporting outbreaks and closures.

But Iowa OSHA took nine days to seek a response from Tyson, and it was eight more days before it heard back, according to documents obtained by The Associated Press under the open records law. The agency determined April 28 that Tyson’s voluntary efforts were “satisfactory” and closed the case without an inspection.

Alabama

GULF SHORES — Large crowds have returned to Alabama beaches as the state loosened restrictions on restaurants and social gatherings.

WKRK-TV reported that beaches are seeing sizable crowds. Alabama beaches opened this month after being closed for six weeks. The state last week allowed restaurants to reopen dining rooms if social distancing measures were being followed.

Lulu’s restaurant, the massive beach restaurant owned by Jimmy Buffett’s sister, seated more than 100 guests in the first 30 minutes, WKRK reported.

California

SAN DIEGO — California’s second-largest county wants to run through the door opened by Gov. Gavin Newsom to allow faster reopening of the state’s economy and might offer itself as a test of whether to go even farther.

San Diego County supervisors were scheduled to vote Tuesday on a detailed proposal for moving deeper into phase two of Newsom’s four-stage reopening, which would include allowing diners in restaurants.

Some restaurants could reopen Wednesday “if we get the green light” from the governor, Supervisor Dianne Jacob said.

A few rural Northern California counties with few coronavirus cases have defied Newsom’s March stay-at-home order and reopened salons and restaurants, but San Diego County officials said that they are confident they can become the first county to receive state permission for phase three.

Kansas

MISSION — Another batch of Kansas businesses began to reopen Monday, even as the coronavirus claimed another life at the state’s largest prison and concerns loomed that gatherings during the upcoming Memorial Day weekend could further spread the disease.

Dr. Lee Norman, the top administrator at the state health department, urged people to remain cautious as barbershops, hair salons, nail salons, tattoo parlors, tanning salons, gyms and fitness centers opened their doors. He noted that at least one gathering at Lake Perry near Topeka had fueled an outbreak.

Gov. Laura Kelly, who is expected to discuss the state’s reopening Wednesday during a White House meeting with President Donald Trump, had already allowed the resumption of dine-in eating and “non-essential” retail operations, with some restrictions. But limits on public gatherings of 10 or fewer people will remain

in place, rather than being increased to 30 on Monday, as originally planned, amid concerns about the ongoing spread of the virus.

North Carolina

RALEIGH — The North Carolina Department of Transportation told its employees to take unpaid time off until the end of June to help the department save money as part of cost-cutting measures during the coronavirus pandemic.

The department’s 9,300 employees will have until June 26 to take 20 hours of unpaid time off, Transportation Secretary J. Eric Boyette wrote in an email to employees on Monday.

The furloughs will also affect the department’s executive and senior leadership teams, who will take unpaid leave this week and next week before other employees begin their furlough requests on May 30, news outlets reported.

Oregon

SALEM — The Oregon Supreme Court late Monday halted a rural judge’s order earlier in the day that had tossed out statewide coronavirus restrictions imposed by Democratic Gov. Kate Brown.

Baker County Circuit Judge Matthew Shirtcliff had ruled that Brown erred by not seeking the Legislature’s approval to extend the stay-at-home orders past a 28-day limit. The Supreme Court’s ruling stays Shirtcliff’s decision pending review by the high court justices. In a statement, Brown praised the Supreme Court action.

“There are no shortcuts for us to return to life as it was before the pandemic. Moving too quickly could return Oregon to the early days of the crisis, when we braced for hospitals to be overfilled,” she said.

The lower court judge had issued his opinion in response to a lawsuit filed earlier this month by 10 churches around Oregon that argued that the state’s social distancing directives were unconstitutional.

Pennsylvania

HARRISBURG — Pennsylvania’s death toll from the COVID-19 outbreak has passed 4,500 and about 63,000 people have been infected, the state Health Department said Monday.

Officials added 87 deaths to the tally after 61 were announced Saturday and 15 on Sunday. More than 3,000 deaths from the coronavirus pandemic in Pennsylvania have been residents of nursing homes or personal care facilities.

Gov. Tom Wolf has begun relaxing social distancing and business closure guidelines, with more than half of the state’s 67 counties currently in the “yellow” zone that permits some businesses to operate. Twelve more counties are scheduled to be reclassified as yellow on Friday.

South Carolina

COLUMBIA — One of South Carolina’s major universities has a back-to-campus plan that cancels fall break next semester and ends in-person classes before Thanksgiving to avoid getting caught in a second wave of coronavirus infections.

Also on Monday, Gov. Henry McMaster agreed to give the General Assembly final approval on spending \$1.9 billion in federal COVID-19 relief money, but asked lawmakers to act quickly after he and his emergency group responding to the pandemic issue their list of recommendations shortly.

The University of South Carolina said that by not including the typical four-day October break, students won’t be as likely to travel and potentially bring viruses back with them from far away places.

The decision to no longer have classes meet in person after Thanksgiving and have the final days of the semester and exams online is in anticipation of a second wave of coronavirus cases as the weather turns colder, university president Bob Caslen said Sunday in an open letter to the campus.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Ex-girlfriend arrested after tire slashing

NM ARTESIA — A New Mexico woman is facing charges after police said that she slashed the tires of her ex-boyfriend's father in a possible fit of revenge.

The Carlsbad Current-Argus reported that Natasha Atkinson was arrested Wednesday following reports of the tire slashing and an attempted stabbing last month.

According to a criminal complaint, an eyewitness reported seeing Atkinson, 38, crouching near the victim's passenger-side tires and slashing them. The complaint said that the eyewitness told police he saw the victim confront Atkinson after the slashing.

She was charged with injuring or tampering with a motor vehicle and aggravated assault with a deadly weapon.

Watch sale nearly leads to theft and shooting

CA SANTA ANA — California authorities arrested a man who told police that he fired his weapon but failed to hit a person who tried to steal a watch while they were negotiating its sale.

The Orange Police Department arrested the watch seller on suspicion of discharging a firearm in a negligent manner and possession of a firearm, The Orange County Register reported Saturday.

Police in the city 31 miles southeast of Los Angeles responded to a report of a shooting around 7:30 p.m. Friday, Orange police Sgt. Phil McMullin said. The suspect, who was not identified, told police that he met a potential buyer for the watch after setting up the exchange through an online marketplace.

The suspect told officers the

person took the watch that he was attempting to sell for more than \$7,000. The seller fired a gun but did not harm the person before recovering the watch, he said.

Car slams into closed corner store, killing 2

PA VALENCIA — A car slammed into a convenience store in western Pennsylvania, killing two women and injuring one other, authorities said.

Officer Conrad Pfeifer of the Middlesex Township police department said Patricia Collins, 36, who was in the back seat, was pronounced dead Sunday at UPMC Presbyterian. Kimberly Young, 39, the front seat passenger, died at the scene.

Police said the car was traveling down Dwellington Drive in Middlesex Township at high speed and witnesses reported that it went airborne before crashing through the front window of the closed CoGo's at about 12:10 a.m. Sunday, ending up entirely inside the store.

The 37-year-old driver was taken to UPMC Mercy in Pittsburgh with injuries described as moderate, police said. Pfeifer said alcohol is believed to have been a factor in the crash.

Man arrested after fleeing police in chase

NE CASS COUNTY — An Iowa man is facing several charges after fleeing from police in a chase in southeast Nebraska.

The Cass County Sheriff's office said that the chase reached speeds of up to 130 mph on U.S. Highway 75 on Friday morning. The 55-year-old Council Bluffs man stopped briefly after deputies pulled him over around 11:40 a.m. before fleeing northbound. The driver's 2005 Ford Crown Victoria wound up in a

ditch.

The sheriff's office said that the man was arrested on suspicion of drunken driving, fleeing to avoid arrest, reckless driving and several other charges.

Freezing temperatures damage fruit crops

MI CHARLOTTE — Fruit growers are assessing the damage on their orchards after temperatures plunged below freezing in south-central and southwest Michigan, threatening tender blooms on apple, peach and other fruit trees.

Last weekend's morning freeze was the worst of its type since one that hit the area in May 2002, according to the Lansing State Journal. Cold, dry air blowing in from Canada dropped temperatures into the low- to mid-20s for nearly nine hours.

Mark Longstroth, a fruit educator at Michigan State University, said that fruits that bloom early were hurt the most in all likelihood.

Man charged after 120 mph chase

ME FALMOUTH — A Houlton man faces numerous charges after a highway chase that involved speeds of up to 120 mph, state police said Sunday.

Michael Pierce, 43, was charged Saturday with endangering and driving with a suspended license.

Police initially tried to stop Pierce's car in Sabattus after getting multiple calls of a southbound vehicle driving erratically and speeding on the Maine Turnpike. The car continued weaving in and out of the breakdown lane before stopping in Falmouth.

Rare bacteria found on flowers in greenhouses

MI LANSING — Dozens of Michigan greenhouses destroyed a popular geranium after cuttings were found to be infected with rare bacteria that could threaten U.S. food crops.

The infected cuttings of Fantasia Pink Flare geraniums imported from Guatemala went nationwide, but Michigan was the hardest hit, said Elizabeth Dorman, a plant pathology lab manager at the state agriculture department. In Michigan, 41 facilities imported the geraniums. A grower notified authorities after noticing a strange wilt on the flowers, the Lansing State Journal reported.

Authorities ordered greenhouses to destroy the Fantasia Pink Flare and disinfect their facilities to prevent any spread.

Teen accused of arson at local grade school

DE BRIDGEVILLE — Authorities in Delaware arrested a 14-year-old boy accused of intentionally setting fire to a structure at an elementary school, causing damage estimated at \$80,000, according to the State Fire Marshal's Office.

State Fire Marshal deputies charged the teenager with second-degree arson this week, the agency said in a statement obtained by news outlets.

Authorities were called to the Bridgeville elementary school on April 30 and found a maintenance storage building on fire. No injuries were reported.

The boy was also charged with third-degree burglary, second-degree criminal trespassing and criminal mischief, officials said. He was released to a parent pending a bond hearing.

From wire reports

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NFL hopefuls ponder threat of lost year

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Joe Burrow was a competent if unspectacular quarterback as a backup at Ohio State and during his first season after transferring to LSU. In 2019, he transformed into Super Joe.

Imagine if a pandemic had shortened or wiped out that last, golden season for Burrow, who won the Heisman Trophy and led LSU to the national championship. Would he still have emerged as the first overall NFL Draft pick who is now being hailed as the savior of the woeful Cincinnati Bengals?

These times have brought an extra level of anxiety for current college players hoping for a Burrow-like season or at least one that will raise their profile with NFL scouts. The virus threat did away with spring football and in-person workouts on campus. And nobody can say yet what the 2020 season will look like, or if there will be one at all.

"It's a nightmare, to be honest with you," said Ohio State's Josh Myers, a second-team All-Big Ten center last year and an NFL prospect. "That's time we can never get back."

"It's a critical (year) for development, getting that much more experience and elevating

our games to an even higher level," said Myers, a fourth-year junior. "So even the thought of not playing this season is terrifying and absolute worst-case scenario."

There are examples all over the NFL of how important one college season can be. Dwayne Haskins Jr. — who beat out Burrow as the starter at Ohio State, leading Burrow to transfer — went from backup to one-year superstar in 2018. He threw for 50 touchdowns and led the Buckeyes to a 13-1 record and Rose Bowl victory. The 15th overall pick in the 2019 draft, he is now the presumptive starter for the Washington Redskins.

For Burrow's part, he acknowledged becoming a different and far better player in one year.

"I wasn't very good my junior year," he said. "You know, it's pretty simple. I worked really hard to get better."

Burrow didn't have the challenge of being sheltered at home for a long stretch, missing spring practice and being left to his own devices to work out, eat right and study film in preparation for a season that might not happen.

Penn State tackle Will Fries announced in December he

would return for a fifth year, long before the pandemic changed everything. He insisted he doesn't regret the decision.

"I mean, there's nothing I can do about it," said Fries, who was All-Big Ten honorable mention in 2019. "At the end of the day, I can't worry about it. All I can do is just get myself better every day."

Myers and fellow Ohio State lineman Wyatt Davis, an All-American who passed up the draft to come back for a fourth year, are unequivocal about their need for a 2020 season, whether it involves playing in empty stadiums, extreme quarantining and even signing a waiver of liability.

"I was looking so forward to this season, because I felt like last season I was just barely breaching the surface," said Davis, the grandson of late Pro Football Hall of Fame defensive end Willie Davis of the Green Bay Packers. "I know this is a very big year for me."

Since shutdowns interrupted spring football practices in March, coaches around the country are trying to stay on top of their squads with video meetings and calls. Still, it's mostly left to players who are 18, 19 and 20 years old to keep

themselves in game shape and act right.

That thought worries Mickey Marotti, the Ohio State strength and conditioning guru who usually oversees offseason workouts.

"When you lay in bed (at night), you're just like, 'Oh I hope everyone is doing what they're supposed to do,'" he said.

College football teams typically start preseason workouts in early August. Some Power Five schools, including LSU, are making plans to reopen their on-campus facilities to players next month without a firm plan in place to bring students back to campus this fall. The NCAA says campuses will have to be open before fall sports can commence.

Mike Hart, Michigan's all-time leading rusher who now coaches running backs at Indiana, said players who ultimately have the mental toughness to play beyond college will get there and be ready to play whenever the opportunity arises.

"If you want to play in the NFL, this is really an NFL schedule," said Hart, who spent three seasons with the Indianapolis Colts. "This is what it's like. You train on your own. You have to be on your own."

Devils' Schneider says players worried about deadline

Associated Press

Veteran New Jersey Devils goaltender Cory Schneider said Monday that a growing number of players are concerned the NHL will announce a "drop-dead" deadline for returning to play as the coronavirus pandemic lingers with summer coming up fast.

The 34-year-old Schneider said some Devils are apprehensive because the NHL has said it would take three weeks of training before allowing games. That would take any restart into June.

"I think that's everyone's con-

cern right now," said Schneider, the team's union representative. "It's a lot of guys asking is there a drop-dead date? What's the date that it's just too late, that you can get a semblance of a season or a playoff?"

A late restart has the potential to cause a delay in the start of the 2020-21 schedule. Schneider said it doesn't make sense to restart the season if the hiatus goes into June and July. The Stanley Cup is typically awarded in early to mid-June.

The NHL paused the season on March 12. League spokesman John Dellapina said last

week officials are not publicly

discussing any deadlines.

"We are following the guidance of medical experts and government authorities regarding when we can open club facilities," he said.

The NBA, which stopped its season just before the NHL, cleared the way to open team practice facilities for individual voluntary workouts beginning May 8. The NFL is allowing teams to open their club headquarters to a limited number of personnel starting Tuesday. Both leagues have required state approval for such moves.

The Devils have a 28-29-12 record and 68 points, last in

the Metropolitan Division. Schneider said he wants to play but is concerned about returning for six or seven meaningless games. Players would have to isolate themselves but still increase their risk to possible infection — and injuries.

"Is it worth it for us to spend five, six weeks to do something that ultimately won't matter?" Schneider asked. "Personally, I would like to at least get out and get that feeling again. Nine or 10 months is a long time to not have played a game and not really ramp it up in that sense. My hope is that we get a chance to come back and play."

USGA: US Open won't hold qualifying

Associated Press

The U.S. Open might feel more like a closed shop this year.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which already has postponed the U.S. Open at Winged Foot from June to September, has forced the USGA to do away with qualifying for the first time since 1924.

Open qualifying is the hallmark of golf's second-oldest championship. The USGA often points out that typically half of the 156-man field has to go through either 36-hole qualifying or 18-hole and 36-hole qualifying.

It even invested in a marketing campaign that was rolled out in February titled, "From Many, One," to illustrate that more than 9,000 people apply to play in the U.S. Open, eventually yielding to one winner.

The USGA did not announce Monday how other players would become exempt.

Among those who have yet to qualify is Phil Mickelson, a runner-up six times in the only major he hasn't won.

Mickelson said in February he would not ask the USGA for an exemption, and that if he didn't qualify or become exempt, he wouldn't play. Winged Foot is where Mick-

elson made double bogey on the final hole in 2006 to lose by one.

The field presumably will be smaller because of the later date, though the USGA did not mention the field size in its April 6 announcement that the U.S. Open was moving to Sept. 17-20 at Winged Foot, in Mamaroneck, N.Y.

"As you can imagine, this was an incredibly difficult decision, as qualifying is a cornerstone of USGA championships," said John Bodenhamer, senior managing director of championships for the USGA. "We take great pride in the fact that many thousands typically enter to pursue their dream of qualifying for the U.S. Open and we deeply regret that they will not have that opportunity this year."

Bodenhamer said no qualifying provides "the best path forward" to holding the U.S. Open.

The USGA said there would not be qualifying for three other championships it will hold this year — the U.S. Women's Open (moved to December in Houston) and the U.S. Amateur and U.S. Women's Amateur, both still scheduled for August.

The U.S. Open, which dates to 1895, had so many players wanting to compete in

the years after World War I that it introduced qualifying in 1924. Then, it went to two stages of qualifying in 1959 — 18-hole local qualifying and 36-hole sectional qualifying.

Ken Venturi in 1964 and Orville Moody in 1969 are the only U.S. Open champions who got through both stages. Lucas Glover in 2009 was the last U.S. Open champion to go through 36-hole qualifying.

The USGA had 108 local qualifiers planned in 45 states and one in Canada, followed by 12 sectional qualifiers — nine in the U.S., one each in Canada, England and Japan.

When the U.S. Open was postponed, 50 players were exempt through various categories, such as past champions the last 10 years or top 10 from last year's U.S. Open, major champions from the last five years and the top 30 players who reached the Tour Championship last year.

The pandemic shut down golf on March 13, two months before the top 60 in the world ranking would have been exempt for the U.S. Open.

Sources: New Rooney Rule requires more interviews

Associated Press

The NFL is amending the Rooney Rule to require more interviews of minority candidates for head coaching and coordinator positions, two people familiar with the decision told The Associated Press.

Reacting to a lack of diversity progress in hirings for those jobs, the league will require teams to interview at least two minority candidates from outside the organization for head coach openings. At least one minority candidate must be interviewed for a coordinator's spot, the people told the AP on condition of anonymity Monday because the NFL has not announced the rule additions.

The rule, named after the late Dan Rooney, who owned the Pittsburgh Steelers, was adopted in 2003. It has had some impact, but in the recent spate of coach hirings, few have gone to minority candidates.

During a Super Bowl week news conference, Commissioner Roger Goodell said changes were needed to the rule. Those changes are coming now.

Team owners will hold a conference call Tuesday that replaces the scheduled spring meeting in California. They will vote on two proposed resolutions that would allow assistant coaches to be interviewed at any time for coordinators' jobs elsewhere. The other proposal would use draft pick positioning as an incentive to hire more diverse candidates in the coach and general manager positions.

The changes and proposals were first reported by NFL Network.

"The Rooney Rule does not force someone or cannot mandate that someone gets hired," NFL Executive Vice President of Football Operations Troy Vincent told the AP last season. "What it does is mandates

that there is a diverse slate of prospects.

"Many will say it's not about a number just because of the number of men of color that play, there should be a certain number of head coaches or general managers or (team) presidents," added Vincent, who is black.

Team presidents and other top-level executive posts are being addressed with these changes.

"We've got to look at the entire landscape," Vincent said. "We should be looking at diversity among all disciplines in our sport."

After the 2018 season, eight head coaches lost their jobs. Only one opening was filled by a minority candidate, Brian Flores in Miami.

Following last season, five jobs came open and one minority, Ron Rivera, was hired, by Washington. The NFL has only two general managers of color,

Andrew Berry in Cleveland and Chris Grier in Miami.

Tony Dungy, the first African American head coach to win a Super Bowl and a strong advocate for diversity in the NFL, believes the spirit of the Rooney Rule has not been adhered to in recent years.

"What I think has happened is people have said, 'Let me interview a minority candidate to satisfy the rule, and then I can get on with this hiring process or hire who I want to,'" the Pro Football Hall of Fame coach said. "The whole point of it was to slow down the process, take your time, get the best candidate and make a decision."

"There's so much pressure now on all of them to do it quickly, get the No. 1 candidate, put together a staff. Nobody wants to take their time. That is the major problem. You get people interviewed who may not fit what the team may be looking for."