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Vote counting continues in key states

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Democrat Joe Biden pushed closer Thursday to the 270 Electoral College votes he needed to win the White House, securing victories in the “blue wall” battlegrounds of Wisconsin and Michigan and narrowing President Donald Trump’s path to reelection.

With a handful of states up for grabs, Trump tried to press his case in court in some key swing states. In spite of the aggressive Republican move, the flurry of court action did not seem obviously destined to impact the election’s outcome.

Two days after Election Day, neither candidate had the votes needed to win the White House. But Biden’s victories in the Great Lakes states left him at 264, meaning he was one battleground state away — any would do — from becoming president-elect.

Trump, with 214 electoral votes, faced a much higher hurdle. To reach 270, he needed to claim all four remaining battlegrounds: Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Georgia and Nevada.

With millions of votes yet to be tabulated,

Biden already had received more than 71 million, the most in history. At an afternoon news conference Wednesday, the former vice president said he expected to win the presidency but stopped short of declaring victory.

“I will govern as an American president,” Biden said. “There will be no red states and blue states when we win. Just the United States of America.”

Trump, in contrast, was escalating his efforts to sow doubt about the outcome of the race. A day after he falsely claimed that he had won, he voiced support Thursday for ceasing the tallying of legally cast votes in a tweet, saying, “STOP THE COUNT!” He later falsely asserted that ballots received after Election Day “will not be counted,” a move that if implemented would affect military ballots, as his campaign propagated unsupported allegations of fraud.

Elections are run by individual state, county and local governments and Trump’s public comments have no impact on the tallying of votes across the country.

Trump’s campaign engaged in a flurry of legal activity to try to improve the Repub-

lican president’s chances and cast doubt on the election results, requesting a recount in Wisconsin and filing lawsuits in Pennsylvania, Michigan and Georgia. Statewide recounts in Wisconsin have historically changed the vote tally by only a few hundred votes; Biden led by more than 20,000 ballots out of nearly 3.3 million counted.

Biden had an edge nationally over Trump after victories in Wisconsin and Michigan, key Midwestern battleground states. Contests in Georgia, Pennsylvania, Nevada and North Carolina were tight with votes still being tabulated.

The Trump campaign said it was confident the president would ultimately pull out a victory in Arizona, where votes were also still being counted, including in Maricopa County, the state’s most populous area. The AP has declared Biden the winner in Arizona and said Thursday that it was monitoring the vote count as it proceeded.

“The Associated Press continues to watch and analyze vote count results from Arizona as they come in,” said Sally Buzbee, AP’s executive editor. “We will follow the facts in all cases.”

US reaches another record high for virus cases

Associated Press

New confirmed cases of the coronavirus in the U.S. have climbed to an all-time high of more than 86,000 per day on average, in a glimpse of the worsening crisis that lies ahead for the winner of the presidential election.

Cases and hospitalizations are setting records all around the country just as the holidays and winter approach, demonstrating the challenge that either President Donald Trump or former Vice President Joe Biden will face in the coming months.

Daily new confirmed coronavirus cases in the U.S. have surged 45% over the past two weeks, to a record 7-day aver-

age of 86,352, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. Deaths are also on the rise, up 15% to an average of 846 deaths every day.

The total U.S. death toll is already more than 232,000, and total confirmed U.S. cases have surpassed 9 million. Those are the highest totals in the world, and new infections are increasing in nearly every state.

Several states on Wednesday reported grim numbers that are fueling the national trends. Texas reported 9,048 new cases and 126 deaths, and the number of coronavirus patients in Missouri, Nebraska and Oklahoma hospitals set records. About a third of the new cases in Texas happened in hard-hit El Paso, where a top health official said

hospitals are at a “breaking point.”

Public health experts fear potentially dire consequences, at least in the short term.

Trump’s current term doesn’t end until Jan. 20. In the 86 days until then, 100,000 more Americans will likely die from the virus if the nation doesn’t shift course, said Dr. Robert Murphy, executive director of the Institute for Global Health at Northwestern University’s Feinberg School of Medicine, echoing estimates from other public health experts.

“Where we are is in an extremely dire place as a country. Every metric that we have is trending in the wrong direction. This is a virus that will continue to escalate at an ac-

celerated speed and that is not going to stop on its own,” said Dr. Leana Wen, a public health expert at George Washington University.

Dr. Susan Bailey, president of the American Medical Association, said there are things Americans can do now to help change the trajectory.

“Regardless of the outcome of the election, everyone in America needs to buckle down,” Bailey said.

“A lot of us have gotten kind of relaxed about physically distancing, not washing our hands quite as often as we used to, maybe not wearing our masks quite as faithfully. We all need to realize that things are escalating and we’ve got to be more careful than ever,” she said.

GOP retains power in states despite Democratic advance

Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — After a costly and intense political battle for control of state capitols, the composition of state legislatures and governors' offices will look a lot like it did before Tuesday's elections.

That means Republicans will again control significantly more states than Democrats, giving the GOP greater power over the once-a-decade task of redrawing congressional and legislative districts based on census results as well as a continued platform to push for conservative economic and social policies.

"When you look at state legislative races, a lot of money got spent, a lot of turnout was had and yet the end result was pretty much where we started,"

said Wendy Underhill, director of elections and redistricting at the National Conference of State Legislatures. "This was a status quo election."

Heading into Tuesday, Republicans had full control of 29 state legislatures compared to 19 for Democrats. The GOP also held 26 governors' offices while the Democrats had 24.

The GOP governors' count grew by one as Montana voters elected U.S. Rep. Greg Gianforte to succeed term-limited Democratic Gov. Steve Bullock. Republicans also appeared to flip control of the New Hampshire House and Senate, according to tracking by the NCSL and national Republican and Democratic groups.

Control of the Republican-led Arizona House and Senate — which ranked among the

Democrats' top prospects for flipping chambers — remained undecided because of some close races.

If the Arizona chambers don't flip, the 2020 elections could produce the smallest number of changes in chamber control since the 1944 general election, Underhill said.

Democrats, who began the campaign cycle with a "flip everything" motto, acknowledged their disappointment while pinning the blame partly on their failures of a decade ago. In the 2010 elections, Republicans flipped 21 legislative chambers while sweeping into office in many state capitols. They then used that newfound power in some states to draw voting districts that benefited GOP candidates in future elections.

Protesters arrested in Seattle and Portland

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Police in Seattle and Portland, Ore., arrested more than a dozen people as hundreds took to the streets to demand a full count of all presidential election votes and a halt to President Donald Trump's court challenges to stop counts in some key battleground states, officials said.

Seven people were arrested on Capitol Hill in Seattle and one person who was being arrested for allegedly damaging property was taken to a hospital after "experiencing a medical episode," police said in a statement early Thursday. Others were arrested on suspicion of obstruction, pedestrian interference, property damage, resisting arrest and assaulting an officer.

In Portland, protesters smashed windows at businesses, hurled objects including a Molotov cocktail at officers and police made at least 10 arrests, according to a statement from the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office.

Officers seized multiple firearms, ammunition, a knife, commercial and consumer grade fireworks, body armor and gas masks from people who were arrested, a sheriff's office statement said. One of the people who was arrested had a rifle with a magazine of ammunition, an improvised explosive device, a knife and was wearing a ballistics vest, the sheriff's office said.

Gov. Kate Brown had activated the use of the state National Guard to help local law enforcement manage unrest related to the election, the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office said. Brown said previously that she would keep state troopers, sheriff's deputies and police officers under a unified command into Friday in Portland.

Undecided races have Senate in limbo

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Control of the Senate hung in the balance Thursday, a cliffhanger after Republicans trounced Democratic challengers in crucial states but failed to lock down the seats needed to retain their tenuous majority.

At least one race in Georgia is headed to a January runoff. Contests in three other states remain undecided, leaving the chamber now deadlocked at 48-48. An outcome may not be known until the new year.

With the presidential race between President Donald Trump and Democrat Joe Biden also undecided, the Senate is in limbo because the vice president of the eventual winner's party would serve as a tie-breaker in a split chamber.

"We're waiting — whether I'm going to be the majority leader or not," Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said Wednesday.

That was still the case Thursday.

The counting continued in Georgia, where GOP Sen. David Perdue was trying to hold off Democrat Jon Ossoff in a multi-candidate race that could also go to a runoff if neither candidate clears the 50% threshold to win.

There already is a Jan. 5 runoff in the state's

other Senate race. GOP Sen. Kelly Loeffler will face Democrat Raphael Warnock, a Black pastor at the church where the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. preached, after they emerged as top vote-getters, but failed to clear the majority threshold.

In North Carolina, GOP Sen. Thom Tillis hoped to prevail over Democrat Cal Cunningham, whose sexting affair with a public relations specialist has clouded the race.

Republicans were confident they would keep Alaska, where GOP Sen. Dan Sullivan was challenged by Democratic newcomer Al Gross, a doctor.

Democrats faced long but not fully impossible odds to take a slim majority after a disappointing election night when Republicans defeated multiple challengers.

In Michigan, Democrats were spared a loss when Sen. Gary Peters withstood a strong challenge from Republican John James, a Black Republican businessman. But Republicans held on to Susan Collins in Maine and other key seats.

McConnell, who secured a seventh term for himself in a costly campaign against Democrat Amy McGrath, a former fighter pilot, has said he felt "pretty good" about the remaining contests.

But Democrats remained hopeful.

McConnell: New stimulus bill top priority

The Washington Post

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said Wednesday that a new economic stimulus bill should be completed before the end of the year and will be the focus when the Senate returns to session next week.

McConnell, R-Ky., also said that state and local aid — a longtime Democratic demand — could be part of the legislation.

McConnell made his comments at a news conference in Kentucky a day after the election, and following his own reelection to a seventh term in the Senate.

“We need another rescue package. The Senate goes back into session next Monday. Hopefully the partisan passions that prevented us from

doing another rescue package will subside with the election. And I think we need to do it and I think we need to do it before the end of the year,” McConnell said.

“It’s a possibility we will do more for state and local governments,” McConnell said.

Although Republicans appear poised to retain their Senate majority — confounding Democrats’ hopes — McConnell was circumspect on that, saying it was not yet clear whether he would be returning as majority leader or minority leader. He acknowledged that “We’re in a pretty good position” in key races that could be decided by the end of the day.

McConnell’s comments could open the door to a new phase in economic relief talks that have sputtered off and on for months. Most recently the

key players have been House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, who spent many hours negotiating around an approximately \$2 trillion package that McConnell and Senate Republicans viewed as too costly.

McConnell mostly watched those talks from the sidelines. At one point last month, McConnell warned White House officials against pursuing a stimulus bill before the election, saying it could imperil the GOP majority.

While criticizing Pelosi’s demands, McConnell did try to advance a much smaller bill on the Senate floor that had no state or local aid at all, but he was blocked by Democrats.

The small McConnell bill also omitted \$1,200 checks to individuals — even though Mc-

Connell has said he favors sending out another round of those, and Democrats and Trump also favor doing so.

McConnell’s comments on Wednesday suggested a new focus on the issue. Congress has not acted to provide any new economic aid since the spring when lawmakers rushed through four bipartisan bills totaling around \$3 trillion.

The coronavirus is not going to go away “until we kill it, so that’s job one. We’ve already allocated an enormous amount of money toward testing, treatment and vaccines. We may need to do more in the next rescue package because ultimately you got to kill the [virus] before we get back to normal because there’s no other way to get back to normal,” McConnell said.

China proposes police law revision on foreign ships

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

The China coast guard would be allowed to use weapons against foreign ships in its waters under a proposed revision to its maritime police law, according to a translated version of the document.

China’s National People’s Congress last month drafted the revised law, which has yet to be enacted, according to a Wednesday report by the Chinese legislation blog NPC Observer.

The coast guard would be authorized to use weapons “in the case of unlawful infringement by a national organization or individual,” according to the translated draft. It also OKs “all necessary measures to stop the infringement and eliminate the danger on the spot.”

China routinely accuses the U.S. of infringing on its sovereignty by sending naval vessels through contested waters. Those freedom-of-navigation operations challenge Chinese

claims in the South China Sea that are unrecognized by international law. The Navy regularly sends its vessels within 12 nautical miles of the Spratly and Paracel islands, areas China claims as territorial waters, but the U.S. considers open to international passage.

“[The U.S.] violated Chinese laws and relevant international laws, infringed upon China’s sovereignty, and undermined peace, security and order of the relevant waters,” Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lu Kang said after the USS McCampbell sailed through the Paracel Islands in 2019.

The proposed legislation comes as the China Coast Guard this week broke its record for the number of days spent in one calendar year near the Senkaku Islands, which Japan controls but are also claimed by China and Taiwan. As of Tuesday, the Chinese coast guard this year has spent 284 days in the waters surrounding the rocky islets, Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato said Monday.

Watchdog: Rise in attacks risks Afghan peace deal

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Attacks by enemy forces in Afghanistan were up by half in the three months ending in September compared to the previous quarter, a report by a U.S. government watchdog agency said Thursday.

The spike in Taliban violence was “not consistent with” a deal reached by the insurgents and the U.S. in February that spells out conditions the Taliban have to meet if U.S. troops are to fully withdraw from the country by May 2021, the head of U.S.-led forces in Afghanistan, Gen. Scott Miller, was quoted as saying in the report by the Special Investigator General for Afghanistan Reconstruction.

Among those conditions is an obligation on the part of the Taliban to not threaten the security of the United States and its allies, including an unwritten agreement that the insurgents will not attack American or coalition personnel in Af-

ghanistan, the report said.

But in August the insurgents may have twice targeted U.S. military installations in Afghanistan, it said, citing a New York Times report. The attacks are reported to have caused no casualties, but would have violated the February deal, it said.

They also undermined peace talks that began last month between the insurgent group and the Afghan government. Those talks, which were supposed to begin in March, were another condition of the February deal.

The Taliban have also not severed ties with al-Qaida, as called for in the deal, the report said, citing a Defense Department assessment.

American officials have consistently said U.S. troop reductions in Afghanistan are conditional on whether the Taliban fulfill commitments they made under the deal. Failing to do so “could impact whether the United States executes the planned full withdrawal of U.S. forces” and affect future financial assistance, the report said.

Small drop seen in US unemployment claims

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans seeking unemployment benefits fell slightly last week to 751,000, a still-historically high level that shows that many employers keep cutting jobs in the face of the accelerating pandemic.

A surge in cases and Congress' failure to provide more aid for struggling individuals and businesses are threatening to deepen Americans' economic pain. Eight months after the pandemic flattened the economy, weekly jobless claims still point to a stream of layoffs. Before the virus struck in March, the weekly figure had remained below 300,000 for more than five straight years.

Thursday's report from the Labor Department said the number of people who are continuing to receive traditional unemployment benefits declined to 7.3 million. That figure shows that some of the unemployed are being recalled to their old jobs or are finding new ones. But it also indicates that many jobless Americans have used up their state unemployment aid — which typically expires after six months — and have transitioned to a federal extended benefits program that lasts an additional 13 weeks.

California

SAN FRANCISCO — Health officials in San Francisco said Wednesday that residents who travel outside the area during the upcoming holiday season may be asked to quarantine when they return home to try to prevent a spike in coronavirus cases.

San Francisco officials said they are recommending a two-week quarantine for people who interact with others from outside their households at less than 6 feet of distance and without masks. They are discussing whether to issue a regional advisory with five other Bay Area counties.

The proposal comes as California has seen coronavirus cases inch up recently, though the infection rate in the nation's

most populous state remains much lower than the country as a whole.

The goal would be to prevent a rise in infections in the Bay Area, which has lower case and infection rates than many areas in Southern California. San Francisco, for example, has a positivity of less than 1%, compared with 3.3% for the state, which state health officials said is about half that of the nation overall.

Indiana

INDIANAPOLIS — The day after a landslide reelection victory, Republican Gov. Eric Holcomb said he's not making any changes to his policy on handling COVID-19, a major point of contention on the campaign trail.

There's "no truth" to rumors that Indiana will shut down again after the election, he said during a Wednesday afternoon briefing on the pandemic. That includes no changes to the state's economy, and no statewide closure of schools.

Holcomb won a second term as governor on Tuesday, defeating Democrat Woody Myers, a former state health commissioner. Myers had called for tougher anti-virus actions as Indiana's COVID-19 hospitalizations, deaths and new infections climbed steeply since nearly all state restrictions were lifted in September. Alternatively, some conservatives called Holcomb's coronavirus actions excessive and, instead, backed Libertarian candidate Donald Rainwater.

The governor has continued to resist calls for reinstating coronavirus limits, however, emphasizing Wednesday the preference for health officials to address virus spread at the county level and adding that "we just don't make decisions based on politics."

Massachusetts

BOSTON — Even though the city of Boston's coronavirus test positivity rate fell to 7.2% for the week ending last Friday, down from 8% the prior week,

residents should not be lulled into thinking the current outbreak is under control, Mayor Marty Walsh said Wednesday.

He urged residents to follow new guidelines issued by Gov. Charlie Baker earlier this week, including staying at home after 10 p.m. except for essential activities including work, wearing masks whenever in public and avoiding large gatherings.

While the new regulations may hurt restaurants and other businesses, they could prevent worse long-term consequences. He reminded restaurants that they could contact the city's small business office for help in setting up takeout and delivery operations and for protective equipment.

Tennessee

NASHVILLE — Tennessee is offering drive-thru COVID-19 testing Saturday in rural areas in each of the three grand divisions. The testing sites will be open from 9 a.m. to noon local time and will stay open until everyone in line has received a test, according to a news release from Gov. Bill Lee's Unified Command Group.

The testing will take place in the Houston County EMS Station in Erin, Fire Station number 3 in Martin, the Macon County Fairground in Lafayette, the Maury County Health Department in Columbia, Campbell County's Jellico High School and the Monroe County Health Department in Madisonville.

Tennessee National Guard medics and Tennessee Department of Health personnel will staff the testing sites. Participants should receive their test results within 72 hours. Information will be provided at the testing locations on what participants can expect after being tested.

Vermont

MONTPELIER — The state's top health official is advising Vermonters not travel for the holidays if they can avoid it, and said any visitors from outside the state, includ-

ing returning college students, will need to quarantine amid a rise in coronavirus cases in parts of the country, including the Northeast.

"We know that social gatherings often among trusted family and friends are a driving force behind much of the virus' spread right now across the nation," Vermont Health Commissioner Dr. Mark Levine said Tuesday during the state's bi-weekly virus briefing. "Adding the element of travel to the mix only adds to the risk."

Any out-of-state visitors that Vermonters are inviting to their homes should wear a mask in common places, use a separate bathroom, eat separately, stay 6 feet apart and otherwise not be in close contact with other household members, he said.

Vermonters who leave the state need to quarantine when they return so plan ahead, he said.

Wisconsin

MADISON — Days after choosing to hear an expedited challenge to Gov. Tony Evers' statewide mask mandate, the conservative-leaning Wisconsin Supreme Court on Wednesday declined to consider reinstating his limits on public gatherings, deferring to a lower court to decide if the restrictions are legal.

Evers' administration issued an order in early October that limited the size of indoor public gatherings to 25% of a building or room's occupancy or 10 people in places without an occupancy limit. The order was designed to curb the spread of COVID-19.

The powerful Tavern League of Wisconsin filed a lawsuit challenging the order, arguing it would drive bars and restaurants out of business. A Sawyer County judge blocked it on Oct. 14 only to have a Barron County judge reinstate it five days later. That sparked an appeal from The Mix-Up bar in Amery and Pro-Life Wisconsin, which argues that the capacity restrictions limit its fundraising gatherings.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man accused of setting girlfriend on fire

FL FORT LAUDERDALE — A woman is in critical condition with burns over her entire body after being set on fire by her boyfriend in her South Florida home, sheriff's officials said.

A neighbor heard the woman screaming for help on Monday afternoon and called 911. Police said she was burned everywhere but the soles of her feet and a spot on her ankle, news outlets reported.

Noe Jimenez-Cortes, 40, was charged with attempted murder and arson, and was ordered held without bond in the Broward County jail.

During a bond hearing on Tuesday, Broward Assistant State Attorney Alix Buckelew said that Jimenez-Cortes already had a bus ticket to Mexico when he was arrested. He was ordered to surrender his passport, officials said.

Police find birds in 'filthy enclosures'

IA DES MOINES — A Des Moines woman has been arrested after being accused of keeping 11 exotic birds in deplorable conditions, officials said.

Deborah Barber, 63, faces charges of four counts of animal neglect, the Des Moines Register reported. She was arrested Tuesday after police conducted a search of her home in late October and discovered the living conditions of the birds.

Three Moluccan cockatoos, four Goffin's cockatoos, two Amazon parrots and two cockatiels were rescued from Barber's home, according to Animal Rescue League of Iowa spokesperson Stephanie Filer. The birds were found in "filthy enclosures" and were suffering from health problems, includ-

ing one that had self-mutilation wounds caused by stress, Filer said.

Health system data breach affected 23K

VA CHESAPEAKE — A health care system based in Virginia said its third-party vendor experienced a data security breach earlier this year that affected more than 23,000 patients, donors and employees of the system.

Chesapeake Regional Healthcare announced Tuesday that they have informed the people affected by the data breach against its fundraising and data hosting vendor, Blackbaud, in February. The breach may have also reoccurred until May 20.

The health care system said in a statement that they were told about it in September.

The vendor said there is no evidence that any of the data was misused or disseminated.

Prison guard fired amid drug allegations

SC COLUMBIA — A guard at a South Carolina prison has been fired following her arrest on drug trafficking charges, the state Department of Corrections said.

Ashley Nickole Williams, 33, of Greenwood, was fired after her Saturday arrest, the department said in a news release Monday.

Williams worked as a correctional officer at McCormick Correctional Institution, a high-security prison located about 80 miles west of Columbia, The State reported. Last Friday, she was searched as she entered and investigators found four packages filled with substances that tested positive for methamphetamines, marijuana and cocaine. The drugs

were in food containers, according to arrest warrants.

Ex-eBay directors face harassment charges

MA BOSTON — Two former eBay Inc. employees were indicted Tuesday by a grand jury on charges that they participated in a campaign to terrorize a Massachusetts couple that included threats and disturbing deliveries of things like live spiders sent to their home.

James Baugh, 45, who was eBay's senior director of safety & security, and David Harville, 48, former director of global resiliency, were indicted on charges including stalking through interstate travel. They were among several former employees arrested in June in what authorities have described as a scheme to ruin the lives of the couple who ran a website that was critical of the company. Five other former employees have pleaded guilty in the case.

Authorities say the harassment campaign included anonymous deliveries of items like live insects, a funeral wreath, and a bloody pig face Halloween mask to their home. The employees also planned to break into the couple's garage to install a GPS device on their car, prosecutors said.

Principal suspended after hijab controversy

KS JUNCTION CITY — A Kansas high school principal has been suspended indefinitely after a student complained last month that she had been asked to remove her head scarf, known as a hijab, while walking in the school hallway.

The Geary County School Board voted Monday night to suspend Junction City High School principal Melissa Sharp,

with pay, after reviewing an investigation into the incident.

On Oct. 21, the student complained that a hall monitor asked her to remove the hijab. When she refused she was sent to Sharp's office. The student said Sharp asked her to write a couple of sentences of explanation about the hijab, to avoid any future conflicts, KSNT reported.

Several students staged a peaceful protest outside the school after the incident. Two days later, Sharp sent an email to parents denying that the student was asked to remove her hijab and reminding parents of the school's dress code.

Drought damaged farm's Christmas trees

RI TIVERTON — A Rhode Island Christmas tree farm where visitors can cut their own tree won't open this holiday season, but it's not because of the coronavirus — it's because of drought.

"After a thorough inventory of our trees we have determined that the stress caused by this summer's drought has resulted in too much damage for us to have sufficient inventory of trees for our loyal customers," Tiverton-based Clarks Christmas Tree Farm wrote in a message on its website.

The business plans on reopening in time for the 2021 Christmas season.

"While there is a normal sloughing off of interior needles in fir trees — similar to deciduous trees losing leaves — the drought has caused an increase in yellowing that will continue as trees are harvested and brought home this winter. Some younger trees are a complete loss, but the larger trees should recover assuming normal rainfall next year," the farm posted.

From wire reports

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Defense remains question for Clemson

Associated Press

Clemson has proven it has a capable young replacement for Heisman Trophy contender Trevor Lawrence. The top-ranked Tigers, though, are still searching for consistent answers for a banged-up, depleted defense that is set to face its biggest test Saturday at No. 4 Notre Dame.

Clemson (7-0, 6-0 Atlantic Coast Conference) rallied from 18 points down with freshman DJ Uiagalelei replacing Lawrence, who had tested positive for COVID-19 and will miss the showdown against the Fighting Irish (6-0, 5-0 ACC) on Saturday night.

It won't matter who starts at quarterback if the Tigers can't get their defensive issues under control.

Clemson has given up 49 points the past two weeks in wins over Syracuse and Boston College after allowing 60 combined over the first five games.

Much of that is due to injuries to critical players like linebacker James Skalski, who Tigers coach Dabo Swinney said is the "heart and soul" of

the defense.

Clemson has also played without injured starting linebacker Mike Jones Jr. and three starters on the defensive line: tackles Tyler Davis and Jordan Williams and end Justin Foster.

Skalski has a groin injury and is expected to miss additional games. Skalski will travel to Notre Dame, Swinney said, using his senior voice to aid the Tigers.

Swinney wasn't sure yet Tuesday who, if any, of Clemson's injured veterans had made enough progress to play.

Safety Nolan Turner said the team has done well cross-training experienced players for multiple roles and developing younger newcomers to fill in.

"We've got a lot of guys who understand the defense and understand what we're trying to do. It's been good to see guys help make up for some of the injuries we have," Turner said.

Tigers defensive coordinator Brent Venables cringed discussing the big plays he watched his team allow the past two weeks. There was an 83-yard touchdown pass by

Syracuse and passes of 37 and 48 yards by Boston College early as it scored touchdowns on their first two possessions.

"We couldn't get out of our own way at times, that was obvious," said Venables, who's directed Clemson's defense since 2012. "It's a calamity of errors."

Mistakes that almost — but didn't — cost them wins.

Syracuse, which trailed 17-0, made it a one-possession game at 27-21 late in the third quarter before the Tigers pulled away for the 47-21 victory.

Things looked even more dire against BC, which led 28-10 in the opening half and gained 228 yards with scoring drives of 74, 75 and 75 yards.

Clemson, though, was able to right itself both times when it counted most.

A defensive scoop and score fumble return touchdown against Syracuse by cornerback Andrew Booth Jr. restored control for the team.

The Tigers' D again rose up in the second half against Boston College, holding the Eagles to 47 yards and zero points in Clemson's come-from-behind

win.

"It wasn't like we had all these magic calls," Venables said. "Our guys decided to have a will to win, a will to fight, a will to compete."

Venables knows determination alone won't be enough against the Fighting Irish, who've averaged more than 34 points and 437 yards a game this season.

"We still got a million things to be better at," Venables said.

Notre Dame coach Brian Kelly sees a Tigers defense loaded with depth and talent, whoever is out there.

"We're going to prepare for the No. 1 team in the country and the guys they roll out, they're going to be pretty good," Kelly said.

Linebacker Jake Venables, the defensive coordinator's son who's started for Skalski the last two weeks, believes his teammates understand the lapses can't continue.

"It's definitely a big blow" losing starters, the younger Venables said. "But the guys that have to step up, just have to step up and they've got to bring everybody with them."

AAC postpones Tulsa game amid outbreak at Navy

Associated Press

The American Athletic Conference has postponed the Tulsa at Navy game scheduled for Saturday because of positive COVID-19 cases and contact tracing at Navy.

The schools and conference made the announcement Thursday. It's the fourth FBS game this week and the 41st since Aug. 26 to be postponed or canceled. Earlier this week, Conference USA rescheduled seven games that have been postponed for mid-December.

A makeup date has not been announced. The Golden Hurricane and Midshipmen do not share a common open date the rest of the season, so the conference will "consider a number of options with regard to the playing of the contest."

Also Thursday, Minnesota announced defensive coordinator Joe Rossi would not coach this Saturday against Illinois because he had tested positive for COVID-19.

This is the fourth time that a Tulsa game has been postponed or canceled because of COVID cases. The team's game against Oklahoma State was pushed back a week to Sept. 19 because the Golden Hurricane had COVID issues. Tulsa was supposed to play Arkansas State on Sept. 26, but the Red Wolves couldn't put a two-deep lineup together. That game has not been rescheduled. The Golden Hurricane was set to play Cincinnati last month, but the Bearcats said they couldn't play, and the game was moved to Dec. 5.

"We knew that this season would be different in the face of the pandemic, and unfortunately has forced another weekend without football for our team," Tulsa athletic director Rick Dickson said. "I'm disappointed for our football student-athletes and coaches who continue to work and practice diligently, but it reinforces the challenge facing all programs."

Navy halted all football activities after positive COVID-19 cases among players and players being placed in quarantine after contact tracing determined they had high-risk contact with an infected person. The team did not specify the number of players affected.

"Protocols and guidelines are very comprehensive both at the Naval Academy and within

the American Athletic Conference," Navy athletic director Chet Gladchuk said. "An administrative decision has been made that clearly reflects the safety and welfare of all involved with both institutions."

In other college football news:

■ Louisville has paused all football activities and its Saturday game at Virginia has been postponed at least a week due to a spike in COVID-19 cases.

Cardinals athletic director Vince Tyra told reporters Wednesday the program has 10 players who have tested positive for COVID-19 and five players who were in quarantine because of contact tracing. Five support staff members also tested positive and two others are in quarantine.

Ravens await results of COVID-19 tests

Associated Press

The Baltimore Ravens have been considerably short-handed at practice this week after moving two starting offensive linemen to injured reserve and placing eight players on the COVID-19 reserve list.

Coach John Harbaugh can only hope the situation improves in time for Sunday's key AFC clash on the road against the Indianapolis Colts (5-2).

Coming off a 28-24 loss to the Pittsburgh Steelers that dropped the defending AFC North champions two games out of first place, the Ravens (5-2) will face the Colts without left offensive tackle Ronnie Stanley and right guard Tyre Phillips. Both players were placed on injured reserve Tuesday after sustaining ankle injuries against Pittsburgh.

Baltimore also must find a replacement for All-Pro cornerback Marlon Humphrey, who has tested positive for the

coronavirus and won't suit up. Following Humphrey's diagnosis, the Ravens put starting linebackers Patrick Queen, Matthew Judon and L.J. Fort on COVID-19 reserve, along with starting safety DeShon Elliott and reserve linebackers Malik Harrison and Tyus Bowser. Backup defensive back Terrell Bonds made the list, too.

The seven players who joined Humphrey on the list have been isolated. If they test negative for the virus through Saturday, they'll be able to participate in the final walk-through and will travel with the team in Indianapolis, Harbaugh said.

Until then, the Ravens will fill the void at practice with backups, several of whom previously watched the proceedings from the sideline.

"Same number of reps, same process," Harbaugh said Wednesday. "It creates opportunities for a few younger guys and for some guys to play some different spots. You look at it as

an opportunity to create versatility within the defense."

Despite Harbaugh's assertion, quarterback Lamar Jackson said Wednesday's session had a different feel.

"We love to have our brothers out there in practice and getting ready for a game with us," Jackson said. "Unfortunately we can't because of the COVID. I can't wait for our guys to get back."

Because of Humphrey's positive test, the Ravens will conduct team meetings this week virtually. The players on the COVID list were expected to attend those meetings and work out on their own.

If they return to action Sunday, how they'll perform is anyone's guess.

"It's impossible to predict," Harbaugh said. "You see guys who sometimes don't practice all week and they come out and play the best games of their careers. Other guys struggle. I don't spend a lot of time being

anxious about that because it's really kind of a waste of time."

Up until this week, the Ravens avoided the coronavirus and injuries to key players. But no team is safe, no matter what precautions are taken.

"We know that any given week you could be down a key player or key players," starting strong safety Chuck Clark said. "We've been working on that in weeks prior just in case something like this were to happen, because that's just what this 2020 season is."

And now, it's the Ravens' turn to deal with COVID-19.

"I don't think it's a challenge, honestly," Clark said. "It's the next-man-up type of thing. The communication is all the same."

Orlando Brown Jr. will move from right tackle to Stanley's spot and Patrick Mekari will likely get most of the action at right guard. On defense, nine-year veteran Jimmy Smith will probably start for Humphrey.

Two more Broncos go on reserve list, practice canceled

Associated Press

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. — The Denver Broncos placed starting defensive end Shelby Harris and practice squad offensive lineman Darrin Paulo on the COVID-19/reserve list Wednesday and canceled practice for the second time in six days.

Paulo tested positive for the novel coronavirus and Harris self-reported after coming into close contact with an individual who has the virus. Harris needs five consecutive days of negative tests in order to return to the team, putting his status for this weekend's game at Atlanta in jeopardy.

If he doesn't play Sunday, the Broncos would be able to add a player to the active roster for the game.

One of the Broncos' best defenders, Harris is the third player placed on the COVID-19/reserve list since Friday, when starting right guard Graham Glasgow announced he was infected with the virus.

Players and coaches reported to team headquarters Wednesday morning for their daily coronavirus tests and then went home to participate in virtual meetings. They were supposed to return in the afternoon for practice, but coach Vic Fangio canceled the on-field work after learning of Paulo's positive test and consulting with the league office.

The Broncos signed wide receiver Kendall Hinton, who was with the team in training camp, to take Paulo's place on their practice squad.

Earlier Wednesday, Fangio said he was confident his team is safe and feels the Broncos are insulated from a major coronavirus outbreak despite another player testing positive for COVID-19.

"There's always concern, but the thing I really feel good about is that none of the positive tests that we've had have originated from this building," Fangio said during a confer-

ence call with Denver media Wednesday morning.

"It's all happened in the guys' or the coaches' daily lives outside the building where they get it," Fangio said. "So, I actually feel better when everybody's here than I do when they're not here."

Fangio canceled on-field work after Paulo was added to the COVID-19/reserve list 24 hours after general manager John Elway and team president Joe Ellis tested positive.

"It was in consultation between us and the league and we just felt like it was the best thing to do in light of the number of (positive) tests that we've had recently," Fangio said.

Stafford on COVID list, still might play

DETROIT — Detroit Lions quarterback Matthew Stafford was placed on the Reserve/COVID-19 list, although his wife Kelly said on social media

he tested negative.

It was the second straight day the team gave a player the designation. The Reserve/COVID-19 list was created for players who either test positive or have been in close contact with an infected person.

The Lions announced Stafford's status on Wednesday after finishing practice. Earlier in the day, coach Matt Patricia said there was no requirement to shut down the team's training facility. Some NFL teams have closed their training centers after players and or staff members tested positive for COVID-19.

"There's no need for any of that, as far as our situation," Patricia said a couple hours before leading practice. "I can't speak to the future."

"Everybody across the country, especially in Michigan right now, with the cases going up, really no one knows what the next day is going to look like."

A year in pro golf like none other

The Masters being in November isn't only thing different as elite players will miss event

Associated Press

It's rare to have a player in the top 40 missing from the Masters, much less four of them.

Rarer still is to show up at Augusta National and notice who's missing.

That element won't change, especially with so much anticipation from waiting 18 months to hear: "Fore, please. Tiger Woods now driving." And with so much intrigue about chasing a green jacket two weeks before Thanksgiving.

The chase will not include Daniel Berger, the No. 13 player in the world.

Berger received more attention from being left off the November invitation list than if he had been playing in the Masters. It became a bigger story than necessary because he was holding out hope that his three months of great play this summer, including a victory at Colonial, might count toward a major that was supposed to be held in the spring.

With the Masters a week away, Berger has company among players in the top 40.

Viktor Hovland, a former U.S. Amateur champion from Norway, won the Puerto Rico Open and has relied on solid, steady golf to reach No. 24 in the world. Ryan Palmer is having a resurgent year with five top-10 finishes and two close calls. He is No.

33, his best world ranking in five years.

Not to be overlooked is Harris English, who was No. 373 in the world and had only conditional status when the previous season began. He had four top 10s in five events, never lost his touch after the three-month shutdown due to the coronavirus pandemic and played his way into the Tour Championship. And then he was fourth in the U.S. Open. Now he is up to No. 35 in the world.

All of them will be watching a Masters without spectators, without blooms, without roars and without them.

It couldn't be any other way.

This is the 2020 Masters, and it was meant to be played April 9-12 with a field of 96 players who began qualifying a week after Woods won his fifth green jacket. C.T. Pan won the RBC Heritage at Hilton Head to qualify for his first Masters. He will have waited 571 days to hear his name announced. Pan now is No. 169 in the world.

Would it have hurt to add one player?

Yes, if the player in question was Berger, because five other players since have won PGA Tour events that qualify them next year. And with limited daylight, Augusta National already is going to a two-tee start and still might not beat darkness.

Augusta National avoided what could have been messy with Collin Morikawa.

He was just outside the top 50 when he tied for ninth in the Arnold Palmer Invitational, moving into the top 50. A week later, the pandemic shut down golf, and the Masters used that March 17 world ranking to fill out the field.

Imagine if Morikawa had been a fraction of a point outside the top 50, and then won the PGA Championship at Harding Park. Is he in the Masters? The club never had to consider that scenario.

Even with the smallest field and the toughest qualifying criteria, the Masters gets the right field.

There was outrage in some media corners in 2012 when Ernie Els didn't qualify and wasn't extended a special invitation. Those typically are reserved for international players who don't have regular access to the PGA Tour. Els had his chances. He wound up winning the British Open that summer, and he had a Masters invitation for the following five years.

This is not a time for Berger, Hovland, Palmer and English to wonder what they're missing, because they were never part of the 2020 Masters. This is the time for them to celebrate what they've achieved to at least be part of the conversation, and to look forward to the next Masters. They earned it.

Johnson is back after COVID-19, 6 weeks off

Associated Press

HOUSTON — A six-week break going into the Masters was not what Dustin Johnson had in mind. He wasn't expecting to test positive for the coronavirus, either, and still wonders how it happened.

Johnson did find one positive to being the most prominent golfer to recover from COVID-19. Under CDC guidelines followed by the PGA Tour, he won't have to be tested for three months.

"I know I'm playing next week at the Masters," Johnson said Wednesday, adding that he would be "nervous for sure" if he had to wait for the test results before setting foot on Augusta National.

"I had no idea where I got it from," he said. "I thought about it and tried to figure it out. I had every person that I had been around ... every single one of them got tests. Not one person had it. The only thing I can figure is I got it in Vegas. I don't even know how I got it there."

That forced him to miss the CJ Cup at Shadow Creek and the Zozo Championship at Sherwood on a course where he is a member. And it cost him time in preparing for the final major of the year. He was among those who finished one shot behind Tiger Woods last year at the Masters.

Johnson was coming off a strong run of being runner-up at the PGA Championship,

winning by 11 shots at the TPC Boston, losing to a 65-foot birdie putt in a playoff at Olympia Fields and winning the FedEx Cup. He then tied for sixth in the U.S. Open at Winged Foot on Sept. 20.

That was his last competition until he teed off Thursday in the Houston Open.

Johnson is among 37 players at the Houston Open who are playing in the Masters — assuming they pass their tests for the coronavirus — while eight Masters champions are playing on the PGA Tour Champions in Phoenix. Also playing in Houston this week are Brooks Koepka for only the second time since August because of injuries, Jordan Spieth and Tyrrell

Hatton of England, who has risen to No. 10 in the world

For Johnson, it's a matter of playing catch-up.

"My health is good," he said. "The state of my game is undetermined."

He went two weeks from testing positive for the virus before he picked up a club again, which was a week ago Monday, and even that session didn't last very long because he had been away from golf for two weeks. That's rare for someone trying to get his game in top form for the Masters. Being isolated in Las Vegas sounded as if it were tougher than recovering from COVID-19.

"It wasn't that bad as far as I didn't get really sick," he said.