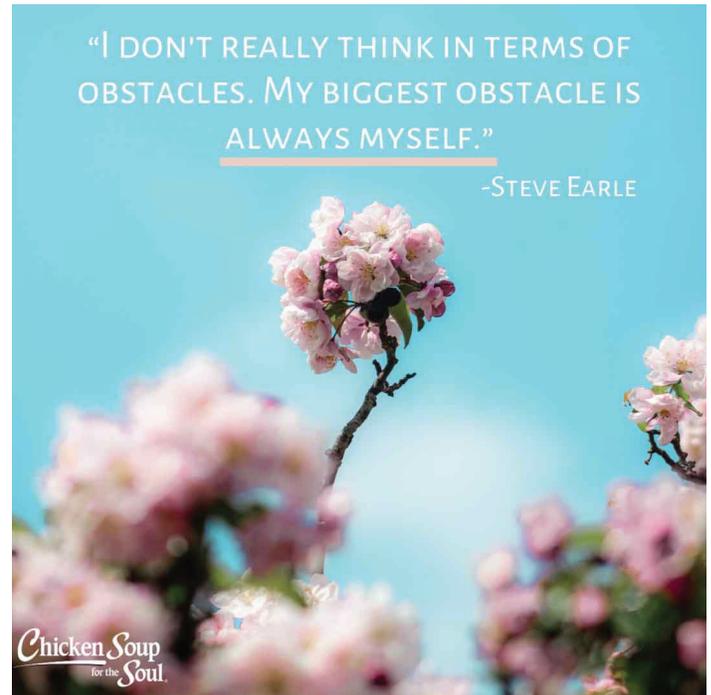


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The annual fundraiser for the Groton Firemen was cancelled due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Earlier, the Groton Dairy Queen had donated the gift cards to the firemen for the fundraiser. Since the fundraiser was not held, the gift cards were returned. Dale and Joyce Grenz, owners of the Dairy Queen, decided to auction off the cards and give the proceeds back to the firemen. \$422 was raised. Dale Grenz is pictured (left) handing a check for \$422 to fireman Weston Dinger. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located at 10 East Railroad Ave. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Things are not quite so rosy today; we're seeing some increases.

We're at 1,045,033 cases in the US. The increase, both in raw number and percentage ticked upward again today largely driven by an unusual surge in NY, at least according to my source, a surge that isn't necessarily showing up in other aggregation sites. I'll give this a day or two to settle down before I get too excited about that; I have found from time to time throughout this episode that the various aggregators diverge for a while and then come back together. I'll keep an eye on this for now. NY leads with 305,024 cases with that surge I'm watching. NJ, with 116,264 cases, shows a decline in its rate of growth. Remaining top-10 states are as follows: MA – 60,265, IL – 50,355, CA – 48,874, PA – 46,191, MI – 40,360, FL – 33,185, TX – 27,795, and LA – 27,660. These ten states still account for 72% of US cases. 3 more states have over 20,000 cases, 6 more have over 10,000, 9 more over 5000, 17 more + DC, PR, and GU over 1000, 5 more over 100, and VI + MP under 100.

As for states showing movement in new case reports, I should have mentioned last night that these are based on 7-day averages compared with a week ago today. Those states with substantial numbers of cases which are not showing much change include NY, MI, NJ, TX, CA, CT, PA, and WA. States where new case reports are increasing include MA, VA, IL, CO, MD, TN, IN, and NC. I will note that the CA increase we discussed last night has washed out in the new 7-day average as looked likely even last night, moving CA from this list to the next one. States where new case reports are decreasing include FL, SD, LA, ID, GA, WV, OH, and VT.

Before we move on to the fatality figures, I want to let you know that the methodology for aggregating these figures by the aggregator I am using has changed, effective today: They are now including deaths listed as probable Covid-19 deaths where those figures are available, whereas they had not in the past. This resolves a question we discussed in comments a few days ago about discrepancies between these and figures available from other aggregators in that it brings them into congruence with these other sources. A side effect of this adjustment in methodology and the resulting totals is that day-to-day growth in numbers reported is going to be meaningless for today and so will not be reported here. I will resume this computation with tomorrow's update. So don't be shocked at the huge increase in deaths for today; it's a direct effect of this adjustment in methodology for counting, not a reflection of some apocalyptic increase in actual number of deaths.

There have been 60,931 deaths in the US. NY has 23,317 NJ has 6770, MI has 3670, MA has 3405, PA has 2392, IL has 2221, CT has 2168, CA has 1960, and LA has 1802. There are 4 more states over 1000 deaths, 5 more over 500, 18 more + DC over 100, 5 more + PR over 50, and 9 more + GU, VI, and MP under 50. We can get back to day-to-day comparisons tomorrow when this adjustment has worked its way through.

We talked last week about upcoming preliminary results on a piece of the remdesivir study, and they're here. This is not the same group of patients in Chicago about whom results leaked, but an official release of preliminary data for almost 400 patients classified as severe, and it looks pretty good. In fact, the ever-sober and cautious Dr. Anthony Fauci sounded more optimistic that I've seen from him, calling this "quite good news" and "highly significant," which lends weight to these results in my book. Over half of these patients were discharged from the hospital within 14 days. One goal of this study was to compare a 5-day course of treatment with a 10-day one, and it appears there is little or not difference between the groups; this is always good news when less of a drug is effective—less chance of side effects and lower cost too. The remdesivir studies have very large numbers of patients enrolled, so I expect more data will become available as time goes on. Meanwhile, it seems likely the FDA will soon issue an emergency use authorization for its use. This will make it available to patients outside the studies without the need to seek individual emergency investigational new drug (dIND) authorization for each patient.

Also on the treatment front, physicians are taking the reports of blood clotting issues in Covid-19 patients very seriously, and suggested treatments with anticoagulants (drugs that inhibit blood clotting) are being outlined. Recommendations are emerging that every patient with the disease should be treated with fairly

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high doses of anticoagulants as a preventive, even before they show evidence of blood clots. It will be interesting to see data accumulate on this approach.

And one more treatment being tested is showing promising results. I mentioned the antimicrobial drug, ivermectin, early this month, saying if there was some sort of evidence of in vivo (in the patient) efficacy, it should probably get a clinical trial. Well, we now have that evidence in preprint form. Some patients have been receiving treatment with ivermectin, and a group of researchers gathered data from 704 of those patients, matched them for age, sex, race/ethnicity, comorbidities, and illness severity score with 704 patients who had not received this drug, then compared the results, which were striking: Of those requiring mechanical ventilation, fewer patients died in the ivermectin group (7.3% vs. 21.3%), and the overall death rate in all patients was also lower with ivermectin (1.4% vs. 8.5%). This is a strong research design, although not the randomized controlled trials we'd need to confirm these findings. I'm going to guess someone will get on that forthwith.

There is a report in preprint (not yet subjected to peer review for publication) of testing for a Chinese vaccine in a small group of Rhesus macaques who were given the vaccine, then challenged by direct administration of virus right into the lungs. Two different doses of vaccine were tested, and both were protective: None of the monkeys developed disease, whereas control animals did. Further, there were no adverse effects noted, including vaccine enhancement, that weird thing where a vaccine can actually make you more likely to get seriously ill instead of preventing it. If this holds in humans, that would be excellent news. This is not one of the fancy engineered vaccines being tested elsewhere, but a very traditional heat-inactivated vaccine made by CanSino, a company with a lot of vaccine experience; the cost is likely to be relatively low since it is a pretty low-tech product. This vaccine went into human trials a couple of weeks ago. We should approach these results with caution on two fronts: (1) No one knows yet which animal models are best for studying this virus, and macaques may not be it, and (2) the number of animals was very small. We'll know more as human trials proceed, but this is promising.

There is also an accelerated vaccine testing program underway in the UK at the Jenner Institute. They are building on work they were already doing using a weakened version of a familiar virus which is modified by the addition of genes from the pathogen, in this case, SARS-CoV-2; it is the proteins coded for by those new coronavirus genes that they want antibodies to target. This group put a vaccine against MERS, caused by a different coronavirus, into testing in the Middle East in December, so if their technique works, they have a head-start on this particular pandemic. They have also had good results in a small study of Rhesus macaques and started phase one clinical trials in 1100 subjects last week. They expect to start a combined phase two and phase three clinical trial with 5000 subjects next month and are testing efficacy right along with safety (something no other projects are doing right now), so they're moving along quickly.

One of the problems they may face, as will be true for any other vaccine project, would be if the world starts getting transmission of Covid-19 under some sort of control because, if that happens, then it will be difficult to prove the vaccine prevents infections. The way vaccines are tested is that you administer the vaccine to several thousand people and administer a placebo (an injection of something inactive like sterile saline solution) to several thousand others, a control group; then you wait to see who gets the disease. If the vaccinated people show significantly lower rates of infection than the control group, you know your vaccine is working. But what if the infection's transmission has been controlled so well that not very many in your control group get infected? You can see the problem. All of the vaccine researchers are aware they may have to chase the pandemic around the world, finding hot spots to test their vaccines, just another added cost and difficulty in what is already an expensive and difficult process. This provides just one more reason to move with haste.

(And before you get all excited thinking we don't really need a vaccine if transmission slows down, you will want to remember the goal here with a disease that kills people is to get to zero. Or two. Something like that anyhow. Any infections mean some dead people, which is not what we're after.)

The UK group has, additionally, begun to make arrangements with European and Asian pharmaceutical manufacturers to quickly produce billions of doses of vaccine should the trials be successful. They

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are having trouble lining up any North American manufacturer because those companies tend to want exclusive worldwide rights to manufacture, and this group has decided there will be no exclusivity. One of them explained, "I personally don't believe that in a time of pandemic there should be exclusive licenses, so we are asking a lot of them. Nobody is going to make a lot of money off this." We can hope someone steps up here because, the more companies are prepared to do this for whatever vaccine is successful, the faster we can stop this once and for all. Might be time for some corporate good citizenship here.

It should also be noted that there will probably not be a single vaccine for everyone; some may work more effectively in different age groups or at different dosages, and having more than one vaccine in production will also help avoid bottlenecks in supply. Even if this particular vaccine fails, as the first trial to reach such a large scale, it will result in more detailed knowledge about the virus and the immune response to it, and that will have value.

And all this talk of vaccines leads me to one final note on the subject: There appears to be growing support, including, crucially, volunteers, for something called human-challenge trials for vaccines. Let's go back to the description of how vaccines are typically tested: vaccinating thousands of folks and then waiting to see what happens if and when they get infected. You need a lot of people because not everyone's going to be exposed to the pathogen, and you have to wait a long time, especially with social distancing and all the precautions people are taking, to have a sufficient number of participants exposed. The human-challenge trial involves doing something like what was done in the macaque trials also described above: vaccinating folks and then deliberately infecting them to see what happens. You can get by with a whole lot fewer subjects and take far less time because you know they're all going to be exposed and when; after all, you're intentionally exposing them as part of the trial. This has obvious ethical implications, but a team of bioethicists recently published a paper explaining how this could be done ethically. Human-challenge trials are done in other circumstances, but typically with less deadly diseases. There is an effort now to sign up relatively young (ages 20-45), healthy, low-risk volunteers, and some 1500 folks have already signed up. It will be interesting to see how this one goes; it's something to watch.

I am reading analysis of some of these population studies for Covid-19 antibodies which show some percentage of a population shows evidence of infection. The percentages ran fairly low in populations, mostly just a few percent; but these are being used to provisionally revise the mortality rates downward: If a whole lot more people were actually infected than we knew, that would mean the percentage of infected people who dies is really lower than we thought. For example, if in a population of 100 infected people, 3 of them die, the mortality rate is 3% ($3/100 \times 100$). But if it turns out there were really 300 infected people (the 100 with symptoms we diagnosed and another 200 we didn't know about), then the mortality rate is $3/300 \times 100 = 1\%$. Big difference.

As we've discussed before, not all antibody tests are created equal, and questions are being raised about the specificity of the ones used in these large population studies. The problem is this: When the actual percentage of the population who's infected is very small, even a small error rate can mislead. If the rate of false positives was 1.5% and you show 3% of the sample tested positive, then a good share of your result can be explained by testing error. That doesn't mean it was from testing error, but it does mean you don't know—and that's a problem. I know this is becoming a theme here, but we really do need better tests.

There have been other criticisms of these studies as well having to do with some abstruse statistical procedures and to do with sampling—how you get folks to be in your study. Often, the way people are recruited for these population studies is you set up somewhere to collect blood samples and put out a call to the public that free testing is available. It should come as no surprise that people who believe they've had Covid-19 (perhaps had symptoms, but couldn't qualify for a diagnostic test) will line up in larger numbers than people who've had no symptoms at all. This is what we call a biased sample, one that is more likely to have a certain kind of result simply because of the way it was gathered.

The takeaway here is that we shouldn't get too excited about the results of these antibody studies yet. It's not that this is bad work, but it would be easy to place too much reliance on what are really preliminary studies. We need time to sort some of these things out when there are better tests, more time to

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do proper sampling, and peer review before publication to vet the statistical work.

Also to do with testing, the first at-home specimen collection kit for diagnosis has received emergency authorization from the FDA. It is presently being to health care professionals and first responders, but the plan is to make it more generally available to the public if supplies are adequate. The cost is \$119, and it involves collecting a nasal swab at home, then mailing it to a lab. Turnaround time, including mailing, should be a couple of days. The FDA says it is as safe and accurate as tests currently conducted at clinics and labs. The advantage here, in addition to a fairly reasonable cost, is that since health care professionals do not have to do the specimen collection, it would reduce considerably the need for PPE now being used for that purpose. Also, more availability is good, so the more companies making reliable tests, the better.

Well, you've just read a whole lot of words from me, and tonight, I'm going to give you a break and close with words from someone else. Dr. John Anderson is a man I feel fortunate to know. He is a friend, a former colleague, and a pastor; he's smarter than the average bear and has evidently been thinking about many of the same things I've been thinking about. So I'll let John finish this thing out for me tonight with my thanks for his gracious permission to share the following:

"Finding myself unsettled by the 'back to normal' branding in response to the pandemic. Politics aside, while I recognize many are craving a need for normalcy and return to some semblance of routine and familiar (and this is a perfectly normal, understandable yearning), this is not a moment after or during which we can simply go 'back to normal.' This experience--perhaps the only experience truly shared by nearly all humanity--has unmasked the brokenness of the systems on which we depend, of the inequalities of wealth and health of what is considered truly 'essential'; it has laid bare the illusion of our self-sufficiency while also highlighting what makes us fully human--relationships, love, care for the most vulnerable. That's what apocalypses do. If we go 'back to normal' we will have failed this moment. We will have missed the opportunity to discern what has been uncovered around us...the pain, loneliness, brokenness of the world, the vulnerable crushed by economic or health disparities, etc. Let's not go back to normal; let's strive with all we can to go forward into new horizons, new ways of being in the world, new futures that respect the dignity of all persons. If we are truly all 'in this together,' truly, let's nurture that so that after, when we can physically be together again, we are STILL all in this together."

Stay well, and we'll talk again.

BACK TO CHURCH

Best Practices for Places of Worship

Stand 6 ft. Apart

Depending on your occupancy, additional services may be necessary to allow for proper social distancing.

Stay at Home

If you are a high-risk individual, continue services from your home.

Sanitize!

Have hand sanitizer available at entrances and in common areas.

Cover Your Face

If you are able to wear a mask, please do so.

Contact Free

Don't pass items hand-to-hand such as communion, print materials or other items. No handshakes or hugs.

Clean & Disinfect

Wipe down door handles, seating, hymnals, railings, etc. before and after services.

Dental Insurance

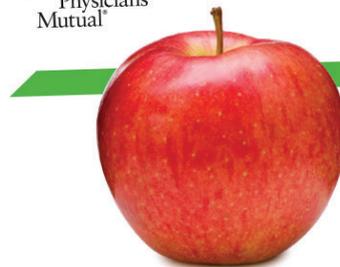
Get the dental care you deserve with dental insurance from Physicians Mutual Insurance Company. It can help cover the services you're most likely to use –



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- ◆ Helps cover over 350 services
- ◆ Go to any dentist you want - but save more with one in our network
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Area COVID-19 Cases

	Apr. 18	Apr. 19	Apr. 20	Apr. 21	Apr. 22	Apr. 23	Apr. 24	Apr. 25	Apr. 26	Apr. 27
Minnesota	2,213	2,356	2,470	2,567	2,721	2,942	3,185	3,446	3,602	3,816
Nebraska	1,287	1,474	1,648	1,722	1813	2,124	2,421	2,732	3,028	3,358
Montana	426	433	433	437	439	442	444	445	448	449
Colorado	9,433	9,730	10,106	10,447	10,878	11,262	12,256	12,968	13,441	13,879
Wyoming	309	313	317	322	326	332	349	362	370	389
North Dakota	528	585	627	644	679	709	748	803	867	942
South Dakota	1542	1635	1685	1755	1858	1,956	2,040	2,147	2,212	2,245
United States	735,287	758,720	786,638	824,438	842,624	867,459	905,364	938,154	965,435	988,189
US Deaths	39,090	40,666	42,295	45,039	46,785	49,804	51,956	53,755	54,856	56,255
Minnesota	+142	+143	+114	+97	+154	+221	+243	+261	+156	+214
Nebraska	+149	+187	+174	+74	+91	+311	+297	+311	+296	+330
Montana	+4	+7	0	+4	+2	+3	+2	+1	+3	+1
Colorado	+379	+297	+376	+341	+431	+384	+994	+712	+473	+438
Wyoming	+7	+4	+4	+5	+4	+6	+7	+13	+8	+19
North Dakota	+89	+57	+42	+17	+35	+30	+39	+55	+64	+75
South Dakota	+131	+93	+50	+70	+103	+98	+84	+107	+65	+33
United States	+28,508	+23,433	+27,918	+37,800	+18,186	+24,835	+37,905	+32,790	+27,281	+22,754
US Deaths	+2,011	+1,576	+1,629	+2,744	+1,746	+3,019	+2,152	+1,799	+1,101	+1,399
	Apr. 28	Apr. 29								
Minnesota	4,181	4,644								
Nebraska	3,374	3,784								
Montana	451	451								
Colorado	14,316	14,758								
Wyoming	396	404								
North Dakota	991	1,033								
South Dakota	2,313	2,373								
United States	1,012,583	1,040,488								
US Deaths	58,355	60,999								
Minnesota	+365	+463								
Nebraska	+16	+410								
Montana	+2	0								
Colorado	+437	+442								
Wyoming	+7	+8								
North Dakota	+49	+42								
South Dakota	+68	+60								
United States	+24,394	+27,905								
US Deaths	+2,100	+2,644								

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April 29th COVID-19 UPDATE

Groton Daily Independent
from Dept. of Health Lab records

Beadle and Lawrence counties have been stepped down from Substantial cases of community-acquired COVID-19 to Minimal to Moderate cases. A county can achieve a None category when they are case free for 28 days.

Brown County recorded two more positive cases, both from the DemKota facility. Day County recorded its first positive case. Charles Mix and Lyman counties were removed from the "fully recovered" category while Davison, Miner, McPherson and Hughes counties were added to that category.

Two more deaths from Minnehaha County were recorded, bringing the death count in that county to 8. There are a total of 13 in the state including two deaths in Beadle County and one each in Jerauld, McCook and Pennington.

South Dakota:

Positive: +61 (2373 total)

Negative: +161 (14,460 total)

Hospitalized: +7 (165 total) - 69 currently hospitalized (no change)

Deaths: +2 (13 total) (Both from Minnehaha)

Recovered: +100 (1492 total)

Active Cases: 868 (42 less than yesterday)

Counties with no positive cases report the following negative tests (Lost Day County): Bennett -2 (11), Brule +2 (55), Butte -4 (50), Campbell 7, Custer -6 (41), Dewey +2 (28), Edmunds +2 (22), Grant +2 (40), Gregory 32, Haakon -1 (15), Hanson 28, Harding 1, Jackson -1 (9), Jones 4, Kingsburg 66, Mellette 11, Perkins 5, Potter +1 (32), Tripp 54, Ziebach 3, unassigned +62 (811).

{Yes, you do see some negative numbers - as investigations are on-going, cases are moved from one county to another}

Brown: +2 positive (Both from DemKota Facility - there are 13 DemKota employees affected with COVID-19) (32 total) - 21 of 32 recovered

Charles Mix: +1 positive (5 total)

Clay: +1 positive, +1 recovered (6 of 6 recovered)

Davison: +1 recovered (5 of 5 recovered)

Day: First positive case

Hughes: +1 recovered (7 of 7 recovered)

Lincoln: +4 positive, +8 recovered (85 of 138 recovered)

Lyman: +1 positive (3 total)

McPherson: +1 recovered (1 of 1 recovered)

Miner: +1 recovered (1 of 1 recovered)

Minnehaha: +47 positive, +85 recovered (1218 of 1984 recovered) {854 of those are Smithfield Employees and 245 are with close contact with employees}

Moody: +1 positive (5 total)

Turner: +2 recovered (7 of 15 recovered)

Union: +2 positive, +1 recovered (8 of 14 recovered)

Yankton: -1 positive, -1 recovered (21 of 26 recovered)

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Fully recovered from positive cases (Lost Charles Mix and Lyman counties, added Davison, Miner, McPherson and Hughes): Aurora, Bon Homme, Clay, Clark, Corson, Davison, Deuel, Fall River, Faulk, Hamlin, Hughes, Hutchinson, Hyde, Lawrence, Marshall, McPherson, Meade, Miner, Oglala Lakota, Roberts, Sanborn, Spink, Sully, Todd, Walworth.

The N.D. DoH & private labs report 1,813 total completed tests today for COVID-19, with 42 new positive cases, bringing the statewide total to 1,033.

State & private labs have conducted 25,536 total tests with 24,503 negative results.

437 ND patients are considered recovered.

COVID-19 IN SOUTH DAKOTA

Active Cases	868
Currently Hospitalized	69
Recovered	1492
Total Positive Cases*	2373
Total Negative Cases*	14460
Ever Hospitalized**	165
Deaths***	13

AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range	# of Cases	# of Deaths
0-19 years	149	0
20-29 years	444	0
30-39 years	550	0
40-49 years	472	0
50-59 years	427	4
60-69 years	220	3
70-79 years	53	1
80+ years	58	5

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Cases
▲			
Aurora	1	1	40
Beadle	21	19	177
Bennett	0	0	11
Bon Homme	4	4	102
Brookings	12	9	349
Brown	32	21	587
Brule	0	0	55
Buffalo	1	0	11
Butte	0	0	50
Campbell	0	0	7
Charles Mix	5	4	84
Clark	1	1	54
Clay	6	6	129
Codington	14	13	454
Corson	1	1	17
Custer	0	0	41
Davison	5	5	296
Day	1	0	58
Deuel	1	1	75
Dewey	0	0	28
Douglas	1	0	26
Edmunds	0	0	22
Fall River	1	1	47
Faulk	1	1	17
Grant	0	0	40
Gregory	0	0	32
Haakon	0	0	15
Hamlin	2	2	61
Hand	1	0	21
Hanson	0	0	28
Harding	0	0	1
Hughes	7	7	231
Hutchinson	3	2	92

Hyde	1	1	13
Jackson	0	0	9
Jerauld	6	4	37
Jones	0	0	4
Kingsbury	0	0	66
Lake	4	3	130
Lawrence	9	9	154
Lincoln	138	85	1375
Lyman	3	2	28
Marshall	1	1	38
McCook	4	3	89
McPherson	1	1	16
Meade	1	1	136
Mellette	0	0	11
Miner	1	1	20
Minnehaha	1984	1218	6170
Moody	5	1	90
Oglala Lakota	1	1	44
Pennington	12	10	772
Perkins	0	0	5
Potter	0	0	32
Roberts	4	4	96
Sanborn	3	3	37
Spink	3	3	94
Stanley	6	0	35
Sully	1	1	13
Todd	1	1	48
Tripp	0	0	54
Turner	15	7	144
Union	17	8	159
Walworth	5	5	44
Yankton	26	21	425
Ziebach	0	0	3
Unassigned****	0	0	811

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths
▲		
Female	1123	2
Male	1250	11

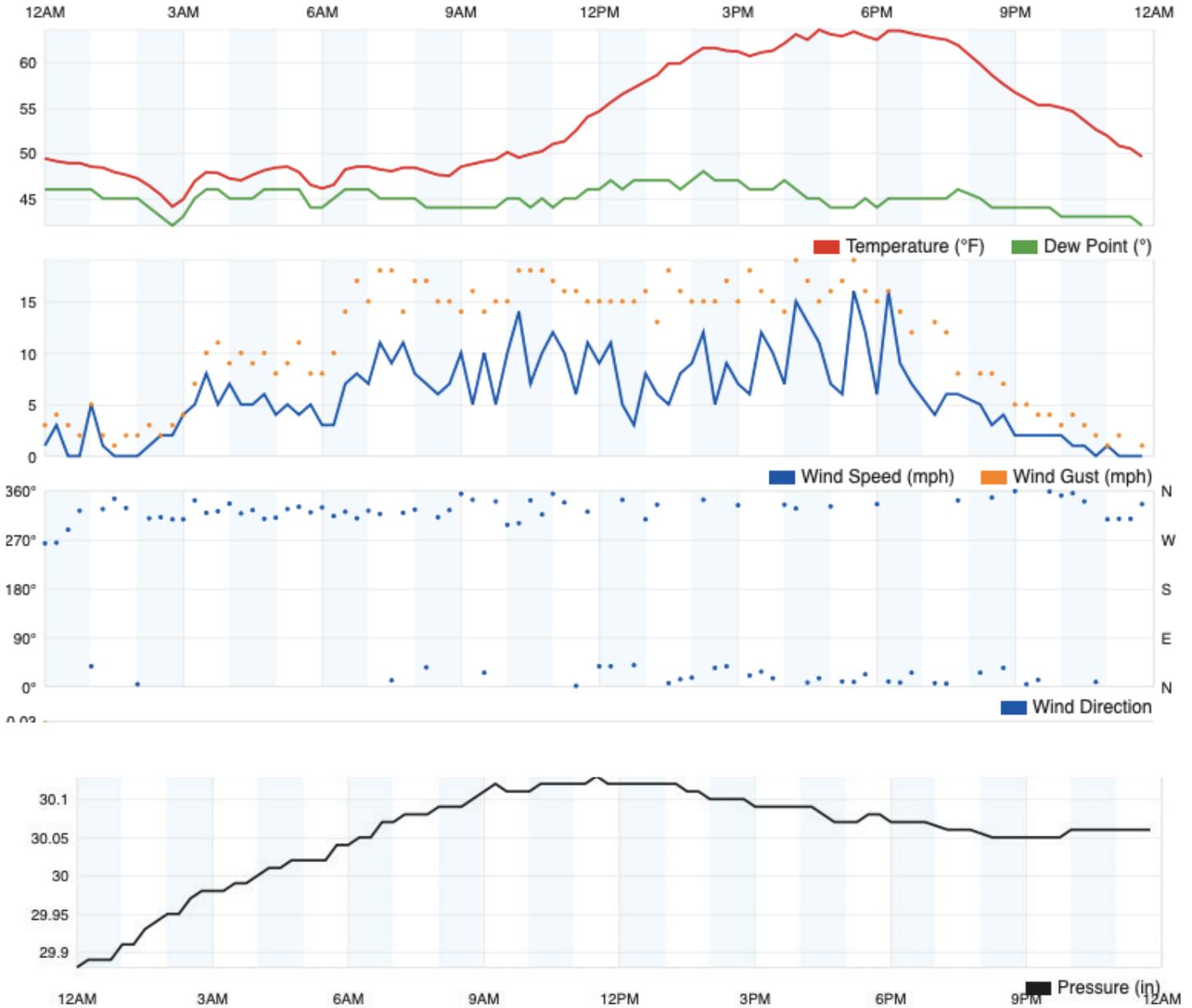
COVID-19 DEATHS IN SOUTH DAKOTA BY COUNTY

County of Residence	# of Deaths
▲	
Beadle	2
Jerauld	1
McCook	1
Minnehaha	8
Pennington	1

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Sunny

High: 73 °F

Tonight



Increasing
Clouds

Low: 53 °F

Friday



Becoming
Sunny

High: 80 °F

Friday
Night



Partly Cloudy

Low: 49 °F

Saturday



Mostly Sunny

High: 73 °F

Warm!

Above Average Temperatures to continue through Sunday

Today

70 to 82°

Warmest near and west of the Missouri River, where winds will become breezy.



Tonight

low 50s

A few showers or thunderstorms over south central SD overnight



Friday

75 to 81°

Becoming Sunny. A few showers or thunderstorms over far eastern SD and western MN.



Warm through Sunday! Highs in the 70s to low 80s today and Friday will be 10 to 15 degrees above average. Expect breezy south to southeasterly winds today around and west of the Missouri River. An area of low pressure crossing South Dakota overnight into Friday could bring a few showers or thunderstorms to south central South Dakota overnight, and then across far northeastern South Dakota and western Minnesota Friday morning into the early afternoon hours.

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Today in Weather History

April 30, 1942: A tornado hit three farms near the northeastern edge of Castlewood. One barn was blown apart, and debris was swept into the house, killing one person. Damage from the estimated F2 tornado was \$20,000.

April 30, 2011: An unyielding low-pressure system moving across North Dakota brought high winds to much of central into parts of northeast South Dakota. Northwest winds of 35 to 50 mph with gusts to over 60 mph occurred from the morning to the late evening of the 30th. The high winds did cause some property damage across the region. A semi was tipped over on Highway 50 in Buffalo County; a large sign was brought down in Highmore, with some damage to security lights and twisted traffic signals in Pierre. Some of the highest wind gusts included 59 mph at Eagle Butte, 61 mph at Oacoma, 66 mph in Corson County, and 69 mph at Hayes in Stanley County.

1852 - A tornado, following the same track as the famous "Tri-state Tornado" of 1925, struck the town of New Harmony IND. Just sixteen persons were killed by the twister, due to the sparse settlement. The "Tri-state Tornado" killed 695 persons. (David Ludlum)

1888: 246 people died in the world's deadliest hailstorm in India. Hailstones were reportedly the size of baseballs. 1600 domesticated animals at Moradabad perished.

1924: A significant tornado outbreak occurred from Alabama to Virginia on the 29 through the 30th. 26 tornadoes were of F2 intensity or greater. A total of 111 people were killed, and over 1,100 injured. An estimated F4 tornado tore through Steedman and Horrell Hill, SC. This tornado killed 55 people.

1953 - A tornado 300 yards in width leveled homes on the north side of Warner-Robins GA, and barracks on the south side of the Warner-Robins Air Force Base. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms developing along a cold front produced severe weather in Idaho, Utah, Wyoming and Montana. Thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 100 mph in Lincoln, Mineral and Sanders counties. Twenty-three cities in the central and southeastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Memphis TN was the hot spot in the nation with a record high of 94 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A cold front produced high winds in the southwestern U.S. Winds gusting to 90 mph in southwestern Utah downed power lines, and damaged trees and outbuildings. The high winds also downed power lines in Nevada, completely knocking out power in the town of Henderson. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in central and eastern Texas. Hail three inches in diameter was reported at Cool, and thunderstorm winds gusted to 80 mph at Hillsboro. For the first time of record Oklahoma City went through the entire month of April without a single thunderstorm. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data) (The Weather Channel)

1990 - Late afternoon and evening thunderstorms produced severe weather in southern Virginia and the Carolinas, with tennis ball size hail reported southeast of Chesnee SC. Thunderstorms moving over the Chesapeake Bay flooded U.S. Highway 50 on Kent Island MD with several inches of water resulting in a seventeen-mile long traffic jam. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

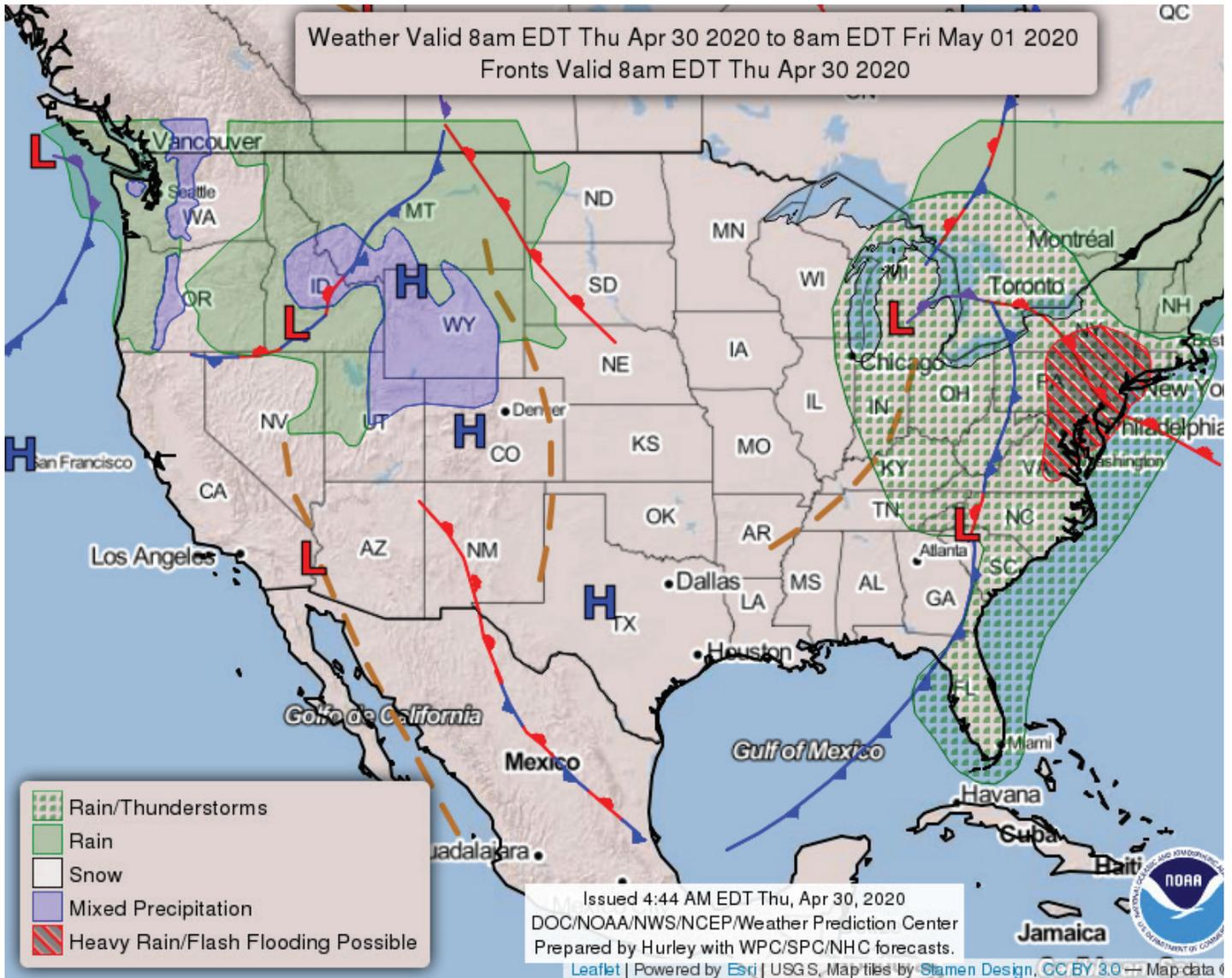
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 64 °F at 5:25 PM
Low Temp: 44 °F at 2:41 AM
Wind: 19 mph at 6:46 AM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 99° in 1992
Record Low: 5° in 1966
Average High: 64°F
Average Low: 38°F
Average Precip in April.: 1.76
Precip to date in April.: 1.55
Average Precip to date: 3.94
Precip Year to Date: 1.90
Sunset Tonight: 8:40 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:21 a.m.



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TRYING TO FIND ME

A telephone salesman called a home and a small child answered the phone just above a whisper. "Hello," he said.

"Is your mother in?" asked the salesman.

"Yes," he said in a hushed voice. "But she's busy."

"Well," the salesman continued, "is your father home?"

"Yes," came the quiet reply. "But he's busy too."

Wondering what was going on the salesman asked, "Well, what are they doing?"

"Looking for me," whispered the child. "I broke my mom's favorite vase and I'm hiding."

Hiding is the natural thing to do when we've done something we think is wrong. It has a long heritage going back to the Garden of Eden when Adam said to God, "I heard you, so I hid." Facing the Lord is not pleasant even though we know that He loves us and will willingly forgive us if we ask.

Often, when we are guilty of being disobedient or knowingly commit a sin, we fear to approach Him. But that is the time we need Him the most. We need to remember that He does not want to hurt us but to heal us. He is anxious to forgive us, restore our relationship with Him, and grant us His pardon and peace. "If we confess, He is faithful and just to forgive." But, we must ask!

Prayer: We know, Heavenly Father, that we do what is unacceptable to You when we sin. May we be swift to confess and repent and forsake what we know is wrong. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: 1 John 1:9 But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.

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2020 Groton SD Community Events

- **CANCELLED** Groton Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt - City Park (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
 - **CANCELLED** Dueling Piano's Baseball Fundraiser at the American Legion
 - **CANCELLED** Fireman's Fun Night (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
 - **POSTPONED** Front Porch 605 Rural Route Road Trip
 - **CANCELLED** Father/Daughter dance.
 - **CANCELLED** Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales, (1st Saturday in May)
 - **CANCELLED** Girls High School Golf Meet at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 05/25/2020 Groton American Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services
 - 06/05/2020 Athletic Fundraiser at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 06/8-10/2020 St. John's VBS
 - 06/19/2020 SDSU Golf at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 06/20/2020 Shriner's Golf Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 06/22/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Ladies Invitational
 - 06/26/2020 Groton Businesses Golf Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 07/04/2020 Firecracker Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 07/12/2020 Summer Fest/Car Show
 - 07/16/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Pro Am Golf Tourney
 - 07/31-08/04/2020 State American Legion Baseball Tournament in Groton
 - 08/07/2020 Wine on Nine Event at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 09/12/2020 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Sat. after Labor Day)
 - 09/13/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Couples Sunflower Classic
 - 10/09/2020 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
 - 10/10/2020 Pumpkin Fest (Saturday before Columbus Day)
 - 10/31/2020 Downtown Trick or Treat
 - 10/31/2020 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat
 - 11/14/2020 Groton Legion Annual Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
 - 11/26/2020 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center
 - 12/05/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Tour of Homes & Holiday Party
 - 12/05/2020 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services
 - 01/--/2021 83rd Annual Carnival of Silver Skates
-
- Bingo every Wednesday 6:30pm at the American Legion Post #39
 - Groton Lions Club Wheel of Meat, American Legion Post #39 7pm (Saturday nights November 30th thru April 11th)
 - Groton Lions Club Wheel of Pizza, Jungle Lanes 8pm (Saturday nights November 30th thru April 11th)
-
- All dates are subject to change, check for updates here

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News from the Associated Press

Bond set at \$500,000 for man accused of killing mother

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Bond has been set at \$500,000 cash for a man accused of fatally shooting his mother in Sioux Falls.

Anthony Pritchard appeared in Lincoln County court Wednesday afternoon.

The body of 63-year-old Teresa Cate was found Monday afternoon after police were called to check on a foul odor. Police Lt. Terrance Matia said at a briefing Wednesday that Cate had died sometime in the past 10 days.

“Due to decomposition of the remains, we had to wait for an autopsy to be done to give us some more information, Matia said. “That led us to believe that this was a homicide.”

Officers arrested the 36-year-old Pritchard Tuesday evening on probable first-degree murder. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for May 14.

Matia said Cate was killed in the apartment, but declined to be specific about where on her body she was shot.

Pritchard’s charges of taking pictures and distributing them without consent and misusing an electronic communication device are unrelated to the homicide.

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) _ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Wednesday:

Dakota Cash

03-11-16-20-28

(three, eleven, sixteen, twenty, twenty-eight)

Estimated jackpot: \$46,000

Lotto America

11-18-28-43-45, Star Ball: 6, ASB: 3

(eleven, eighteen, twenty-eight, forty-three, forty-five; Star Ball: six; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$2.35 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$200 million

Powerball

02-20-49-61-67, Powerball: 20, Power Play: 2

(two, twenty, forty-nine, sixty-one, sixty-seven; Powerball: twenty; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$43 million

Meatpackers welcome Trump order; others question virus risks

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Big meatpacking companies that have struggled to keep plants running during the coronavirus crisis said Wednesday that they welcomed President Donald Trump’s executive order requiring them to stay open, but unions, some employees and Democrats questioned whether workers could be kept safe.

Trump used the Defense Production Act to classify meat processors as critical infrastructure to prevent supermarket shelves from running out of chicken, pork and other meat. Meatpacking plants across the country have closed as COVID-19 infections spread rapidly between workers, who often stand shoulder to shoulder on production lines.

Trump, who consulted with industry leaders before issuing the order, said it would relieve “bottlenecks”

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that the largest companies faced after workers fell ill and some died.

"They are so thrilled," Trump said Wednesday after getting off a call with meatpacking executives. "They're so happy. They're all gung-ho, and we solved their problems."

The executive order was widely seen as giving processors protection from liability for workers who become sick on the job. It came soon after a lawsuit accused Smithfield Foods of not doing enough to protect employees at its plant in Milan, Missouri. A federal judge in that case ordered Smithfield to follow federal recommendations.

The United Food and Commercial Workers union said it would appeal to governors for help, asking them to enforce rules that workers be kept 6 feet apart and that employees be provided with N95 masks and access to virus testing.

"Does it make sense to have meat in the markets if it takes the blood of the people who are dying to make it every day?" asked Menbere Tsegay, a worker at the Smithfield Foods plant in South Dakota, where more than 800 workers have confirmed cases of COVID-19. Two people have died, and the plant has been shut down since mid-April.

The threat of the virus has caused workers like Tsegay, a 35-year-old single mother of four children, to weigh whether to risk their health by working. Tsegay said she's not willing to do that.

"I'd rather starve and wait this out than go back to work," she said.

Companies have already sought changes to reduce risks by providing personal protective equipment, installing plexiglass shields between workers and reducing congestion by staggering shift start times, among other reforms.

The union said plexiglass barriers should not be used as a substitute for putting workers at a safe distance from one another. Union officials also want to slow down meat processing, including getting rid of waivers that allow plants to operate at faster speeds.

Smithfield Foods, which is working on a plan to reopen the Sioux Falls plant, said in a statement welcoming Trump's order that it should make for easier access to protective equipment and testing for employees.

Faced with thinning workforces as workers become infected or stay home in fear, meatpacking companies have also put millions of dollars towards boosting pay and giving workers bonuses to encourage healthy workers to stay on the job.

But Jim Roth, director of the Center for Food Security and Public Health at Iowa State University, said meatpacking plants will likely continue to have problems finding enough workers operate at full capacity.

"There's a shortage of workers to begin with, and then with the illnesses and the need to self-quarantine for 14 days after exposure, I'm not clear where the workers come from to keep the plants open," Roth said.

Trump's order called on the Department of Agriculture to ensure that plants stay open. The USDA said in a statement Wednesday that a team including the Department of Labor and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention would review companies' mitigation plans "and work in consultation with the state and local authorities to resume and/or ensure continuity of operations at these critical facilities."

Twenty meatpacking workers have died nationwide, and another 5,000 have been infected by the virus or shown symptoms of COVID-19, according to the union, which represents roughly 80% of beef and pork workers and 33% of poultry workers nationwide.

Trump promised Wednesday that a report on protecting workers would be coming soon.

Federal agencies have already issued recommendations for operating plants that largely track with steps many companies say they have already taken.

Wendell Young, president of the Philadelphia chapter of the union, described Trump's order as an attempt to appeal to voters rather than to ensure protections.

Marshall Tanick, an employment lawyer in Minneapolis, said the order "does not necessarily immunize" meatpackers from lawsuits.

Legislation to give employers immunity in these situations has been proposed, but it's "very unlikely that anything like that will be enacted soon at the federal level," Tanick said. He said such measures might be easier to achieve at the state level, because it's less burdensome. Without specific legislation immunizing employers, they act at their own risk.

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In Worthington, Minnesota, where a JBS pork plant closed last week because of the virus, U.S. House Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson and Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz said Wednesday that they hope the plant can reopen soon — but only if workers are protected.

“No executive order is going to get those hogs processed if the people who know how to do it are sick, or do not feel like they can be there,” Walz said.

Marisol Avelar, who works at the Worthington plant, said she dreads the call from management telling her to come back. But she said her three children depend on her, and she has no other job prospects in town.

“At the moment they tell me I’m going to work, I’m going to need the money,” she said.

Associated Press writers Amy Forliti and Steve Karnowski in Minneapolis; David Pitt in Des Moines, Iowa; Josh Funk in Omaha, Nebraska; and Darlene Superville and Mary Clare Jalonick in Washington also contributed to this report.

Excerpts from recent South Dakota editorials

By The Associated Press undefined

Madison Daily Leader, April 27

We’re a bit skeptical of chloroquine trial

South Dakota officials said Friday they will continue to make a malaria drug available to treat COVID-19, even as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration warned against its use outside of hospital and research settings.

So many things about the coronavirus pandemic seems like we’re sailing into uncharted waters, and this is another one. We’re not aware of South Dakota or any other state previously getting involved in clinical trials for drugs.

Clinical trials for either new drugs, or for existing drugs used for new purposes, are highly regulated. There is a lengthy process involving documented past research, current objectives of the trial, and assurances of safety.

Some people believe that the emergency nature of COVID-19 is reason for suspending or skipping some of the protocols for a clinical trial. We’re very skeptical about making that connection.

In this case, hydroxychloroquine is an established drug with approved uses for malaria and lupus. President Trump has suggested the drug could be used in the fight against COVID-19, and that we don’t have time to put it through the regular channels. Regrettably, some Americans have purchased the drug and started self-administering it based on the suggestion.

The FDA flagged reports of serious side effects and death among patients taking hydroxychloroquine and the related drug chloroquine.

The state of South Dakota is partially funding a hydroxychloroquine trial in partnership with Sanford Health. The state received 1.2 million doses of the drug from the Strategic National Stockpile.

Officials say participation in the trial is voluntary, perhaps as a bit of a waiver in case things go wrong. Susan Hoover, an infectious disease physician at Sanford Health, said its physicians are aware of the potential of both hydroxychloroquine and azithromycin, an antibiotic sometimes administered with the malaria medication, to disrupt heart rhythms. They are closely monitoring patients who receive the drugs.

We understand how eager everyone is to find both a vaccine and a cure for COVID-19, but we also don’t believe we should compromise the integrity of trials by skipping important protocols.

Aberdeen American News, April 25

Remember our seniors — and our seniors

You’ve probably seen a lot of senior pictures popping up in feeds if you are a Facebook user.

There’s a move to show support for the high school class of 2020 because those students are almost certainly not going to have any type of traditional graduation ceremony. The gatherings might be online

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or combine some type of drive-in/outdoor/radio broadcast combination, but there won't be mid-May ceremonies in a crowded school gym unless social distancing guidelines are lifted.

Right now, some districts are planning traditional ceremonies later this summer. Others will have parades through town to recognize students. Plans continue to evolve for other districts.

It's a tough loss for these young folks, some of whom are missing out on their final high school athletic seasons or fine arts events.

These are the strange times of the COVID-19 pandemic. Someday, it might make for a good story. But mostly it falls somewhere between a massive inconvenience and a painful life experience we need to work through the best we can.

So any way we can show a little support for the graduates-to-be is nice. And if they chuckle at fashions and hairstyles of the past, all the better.

Go ahead. Dig out that senior picture of yours and publish it on social media. We could all use the smiles these days.

And send cards or hop online (or plan a party for when it's safe) to let the students know you're proud of them. They deserve that much.

But there is another group of seniors we might not have in mind with all of our planning and social distancing and working from home. They are senior citizens.

Our family members, friends and neighbors older than 65 are most at risk of having serious symptoms from COVID-19. And they should be the first to take the CDC's safety recommendations to heart.

But let's not forget them. Or even let them think we're forgetting them, even if we aren't.

One community member mentioned it might be nice to organize an event in which people, properly spaced, walk around retirement communities and assisted-living centers and nursing homes so they can wave to the folks inside just to say hello. It's certainly a nice thought even if it might be hard to organize.

Surely, that's how some of us have visited our parents or grandparents. It might even be the only way some senior citizens have met new grandchildren.

Loneliness is hard to deal with.

Feeling forgotten or left out is even worse.

Let's not let it happen.

While you're at the store picking up cards and gifts for the graduation season, maybe grab some extra for those members of our community who can't freely get out to visit.

COVID-19 has brought out both the best and, in some cases, the worst in people. Let's try and keep our focus on the best.

People are hurting. People are feeling isolated. And high school seniors are missing out on a lot of the fun most of us got to experience when we were wrapping up our 12th-grade year.

There's a lot to learn from and celebrate about both groups. Let's make sure we let them know how valuable they are.

To the high school seniors — best of luck. And to the other seniors, thank you for all you have given. We sure do miss you.

Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan, April 28

For openers: A calculated risk

The Yankton City Commission's decision Monday night to begin a modest loosening of the COVID-19 ordinance approved nearly a month ago represents a small step forward on a journey toward something resembling normal life and normal business in this community.

However, the timing of the decision also makes it a calculated risk.

The commissioners took the advice of the city's health board to keep the restrictions and the business closures in place until May 15. Without that approval, the emergency measures would have expired at the end of this week.

However, the commission also voted to allow some wiggle room, giving hair stylists and tanning salons,

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for instance, the option to open as soon as May 2.

And as these businesses choose to open — and whenever other businesses are able to unlock their doors — it's clear that distancing measures must remain a priority to limit the spread of the coronavirus and make this transition work.

Still, this is a gamble.

This community, this state and this country in general don't appear to be on the backside of this pandemic. Cases in both South Dakota and Nebraska are on the rise — for the latter, they are surging — and the peak looms somewhere before us, not behind us. An estimate that's guiding Gov. Kristi Noem indicates that South Dakota's peak now figures to be in the second week of June. Locally, officials at Avera Sacred Heart Hospital announced Monday that efforts to "bend the curve" here have pushed the peak back to around July 4; while that puts things further away, it does also lessen the potential demand on hospital beds, ventilators and other medical equipment.

So, there remains a long road ahead of us on battling this pandemic. As Noem said Tuesday during a media briefing, "We are not out of the woods yet. As I've said many times, this is a marathon, not a sprint."

That's why modifying our course of action now figures to be a risk. City officials are making such a move with the knowledge that a wave of new cases and increased medical demand may be coming.

Of course, as was pointed out in Monday's meeting, people have generally adapted well to the current situation and have embraced social distancing and isolation as essential measures. As one city commissioner noted, we've learned a lot in the past month, and that may give us a little more confidence in what might happen when the restrictions are loosened.

Also, it was noted that not all businesses that are currently closed are necessarily going to open immediately. The business owners are concerned about the health and safety not only of their customers but also their own employees.

Conversely, opening a store doesn't necessarily mean customers are going to come rushing back. They've spent the last several weeks looking at the world through a lens of vigorous caution, and they will likely be very careful when venturing out because they've learned not only what to do but also what to avoid.

As we begin this transition, using what we've learned and taking the precautions we've been practicing the last several weeks is going to be of the utmost importance. More challenges will lie ahead, and it's up to everyone — from our leaders and lawmakers right down to each of us — to remain vigilant. As Noem said Tuesday, "Ultimately, it is the people themselves who are primarily responsible for their (own) safety."

There is a lot of economic and social rebuilding to do, and the commission's decision Monday steers us down that path. But great care is needed because the worst may yet be in front of us.

Son arrested, suspected of killing mother in Sioux Falls

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Police say the adult son of a woman found fatally shot in their Sioux Falls apartment has been arrested.

The body of 63-year-old Teresa Cate was found Monday afternoon after police were called to check on a foul odor. Police Lt. Terrance Matia said at a briefing Wednesday that Cate had died sometime in the past 10 days.

"Due to decomposition of the remains, we had to wait for an autopsy to be done to give us some more information, Matia said. "That led us to believe that this was a homicide."

Officers arrested 36-year-old Anthony Pritchard Tuesday evening on probable first-degree murder. He was expected to make an appearance in Lincoln County court later Wednesday.

Matia said Cate was killed in the apartment, but declined to be specific about where on her body she was shot.

Pritchard's charges of taking pictures and distributing them without consent and misusing an electronic communication device are unrelated to the homicide.

Grim count: US virus toll passes Trump's 60,000 marker

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump likes to talk about the most, the best, the thing that nobody has ever seen.

Now he is trying to make a virtue of a lower number, arguing that the efforts of his administration have warded off a far greater death toll than otherwise would have been seen.

But the reported U.S. death toll on Wednesday crept past 60,000, a figure that Trump in recent weeks had suggested might be the total death count. He had cited the estimate as a sign of relative success after the White House previously warned the U.S. could suffer 100,000 to 240,000 deaths.

Trump also has repeatedly used the outer band of any estimate — the potential that 2.2 million Americans could have died had there been no interventions — to try to make his case most powerfully.

The U.S. death toll from COVID-19 is certain to keep growing from here.

And, like the unemployment rate, the numbers also will be revised — and likely upward, due to under-reporting. The focus on death tallies also overlooks other important markers such as immunity levels and infection rates.

"All these pieces of data are like a giant jigsaw puzzle that you're putting together," said Dr. Howard Markel, director of the University of Michigan's Center for the History of Medicine. "The death toll is just one of them."

Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, said it's simplistic for Trump or other public officials to focus on the death toll since it's incomplete. Cases not initially classified as COVID-19 could be added at a later date.

"The problem is you look at the number on your television screen and the number looks real," she said. "What you don't have is that that number should have an asterisk next to it."

Dr. Deborah Birx, coordinator of the White House coronavirus task force, on March 29 revealed models projecting the deaths of 100,00-240,000 Americans, assuming social distancing efforts were ongoing. At the same time, she said epidemiology models initially had predicted a worst-case scenario of 1.5 million to 2.2 million U.S. deaths without mitigation efforts such as social distancing, hand washing and staying home as much as possible.

Soon after, Trump began speculating that the 100,000 figure was an outer limit,. Later, he leaned more toward a 60,000 projection.

"The minimum number was 100,000 lives, and I think we'll be substantially under that number," he said April 10. "Hard to believe that if you had 60,000 — you could never be happy, but that's a lot fewer than we were originally told and thinking."

Trump tempers his comments by saying even one death is too many, but he's also appeared relieved at the notion of a toll of 60,000. That's more in a matter of months than the 58,220 U.S. military deaths during the Vietnam War but far below the 675,000 deaths from the 1918 flu pandemic that Trump often cites.

Trump has used the 2.2. million death estimate to suggest he saved millions of lives through leadership that he and other administration officials say was "decisive." His actions have been challenged by state, local and public health officials who have complained about shortages of testing supplies and safety gear for doctors and nurses.

Trump often cites restricting travel from China, where the virus originated, and from Europe, where it took hold before exploding in the U.S., as among his most important first steps.

"We did the right thing, because if we didn't do it, you would have had a million people, a million and a half people, maybe 2 million people dead," the president said on April 20.

"Now, we're going toward 50-, I'm hearing, or 60,000 people," he continued. "One is too many. I always say it. One is too many. But we're going toward 50- or 60,000 people."

Trump offered a revised estimate Monday when asked if he deserved a second term with a death toll akin to the American lives lost in Vietnam.

"Yeah, we've lost a lot of people," he said in the Rose Garden. "But if you look at what original projec-

tions were — 2.2 million — we're probably heading to 60,000, 70,000. It's far too many. One person is too many for this."

Calvin Jillson, a presidential scholar at Southern Methodist University, contrasted Trump's public talk of death counts to the reluctance of administration and military officials to discuss Vietnam War body counts.

Jillson said Trump doesn't realize the numbers are always "going to turn negative at some point" and that the way he talks about the death count suggests a lack of empathy.

"It highlights how infrequently he will actually talk about these numbers as people, as loved ones, as fellow Americans, as people no longer with us," Jillson said. "That is natural to a politician whose stock in trade is to feel the audience and to empathize with them."

The White House had resisted any public announcement about a potential death toll until Birx and other experts unveiled their own model of the anticipated cost to the nation — both with and without social distancing measures.

Earlier this month, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention began posting projections on the number of anticipated U.S. deaths from the coronavirus from seven different research teams.

The teams use different types of data and make different assumptions, including about the effects of social distancing, use of face coverings and other measures. The most recent summary showed modelers predicted a cumulative U.S. death toll of 50,000 to 100,000 by mid-May.

CDC Director Dr. Robert Redfield declined to predict the death toll during an Associated Press interview Tuesday.

"I use models to try to predict the impact of different interventions. That's really the important thing," Redfield said.

AP Medical Writer Mike Stobbe in New York and Associated Press writer Zeke Miller in Washington contributed to this report.

Follow Darlene Superville on Twitter: @dsupervilleap

Before the virus: Looking back on some last 'normal' moments

By **LEANNE ITALIE** Associated Press

The coronavirus scare has done something to time.

The days, weeks, and now the months, have blurred and stretched as talk of reopening the world has taken over for millions waiting and wondering at home.

There are few of life's usual rhythms. And like so many cataclysms before this one, memories are settling in of the old times, for better or worse.

What was normal then and isn't now? Here's what a few around the world had to say about their last "normal" moment before the pandemic took hold:

NEW YORK: A 'CHEERS' MOMENT

Rafael Familia began work last July as a bar-back in Manhattan at The Crocodile Lounge, where drinks come with free mini pizzas and Skee-Ball is also on tap.

The 30-year-old native New Yorker, now living in his aunt's spare room in the Bronx, had been working in bars for five years after leaving college when he ran out of money. He was trying to pay down his student debt and earn enough to head back to school.

"On March 16, we were mandated to close down suddenly," he said. "We all lost our jobs at that moment. It was one of the most bizarre things ever. There was no point in being angry. It was everybody."

Familia, his co-workers and their regulars gathered at the bar that night, before last call at 8 p.m.

"We kinda just held a going-away party," he said. "We had a 'Cheers' moment. We basically just drank whatever was on the shelf. It was like, we may never see this place open ever again. We just had fun and danced. People kept showing up that I hadn't seen in years."

"We knew we were going to see hard times after that night."

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PARIS: A FONDLY REMEMBERED FUNERAL

Ask Paris undertaker Franck Vasseur to recall the last funeral he “enjoyed” and you get back a sad, somewhat confused stare from the tired eyes under his disheveled mop of hair.

Dealing with a flood of bodies since March has turned his world into a head-spinning procession of death. Unable to comfort families who can’t accompany bodies for cremation or gather in large numbers for funerals, Vasseur feels robbed of his purpose.

“We have been in a centrifuge,” he said.

Eventually, casting his mind back to February, he digs up a comforting memory.

It was a funeral he organized for an architect who died suddenly on a trip out of Paris. Vasseur swelled with nostalgia and pride in recalling a job well done. The flowers. The speeches. The marker pens handed out to family members who scribbled last words of love and remembrance on the plain wooden coffin.

The ceremony was at Père Lachaise, the Paris cemetery that’s the final resting place for a dizzying array of celebrities: Edith Piaf, Oscar Wilde, Jim Morrison.

“There were tears, there was joy, there was music. Some people spoke, others could not bring themselves to speak. There was sharing. There was warmth,” Vasseur recalled. “The things I miss, all the things we don’t have now.”

Now, “we have nothing,” he said. “Just bodies being evacuated.”

— John Leicester, France

TAUPO, NEW ZEALAND: AN OLYMPIC DREAM DELAYED

Nicole van der Kaay was 8 when she watched a couple of triathletes from New Zealand pull away from the field to win gold and silver at the 2004 Olympics in Athens.

Since then, she’s dreamed of competing in the Games herself.

Her training hit a snag last season when she developed a tibial stress fracture. But this year she was ready to compete again in a World Cup triathlon at Australia’s Mooloolaba Beach. It was supposed to be a big step toward qualifying for the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo.

In the March 14 race, she was excited to be mixing it up again with some top athletes, and she raced strongly enough, finishing 12th. But events around her were cascading. A trip to the next race was canceled. She needed to get back to New Zealand immediately or face being quarantined.

The Olympics were postponed soon after. She felt confused, adrift.

“I was lost almost. I’d been training so long,” she said. “All of sudden my year’s goal, my all-time goal, had to be put away.”

She quickly gained perspective.

“The picture in my mind was that everyone was in the same position, that there were horrible things going on in the world, and it was a time to come together,” she said.

She returned to her family farm near Taupo, New Zealand, and began a monthlong lockdown. Swimming pools were closed, the nearby lake off limits. So her dad built her a makeshift pool in the deer shed using some planks, bales of hay and waterproof tarpaulin. They filled it with a hose.

Strapped in with a belt and bungee cord, she has been able to swim in place. But it’s cold. She wears woolen thermals under her wetsuit and jumps straight into a hot bath after training.

Whether the Olympics is held next year as planned or gets delayed again, she wants to be ready.

— Nick Perry, New Zealand

NEW ORLEANS: BITTERSWEET MARDI GRAS

Devin De Wulf, a New Orleans transplant and stay-at-home dad, took to Mardi Gras culture with the gusto of a native when he moved there after Hurricane Katrina.

“Post-Katrina New Orleans was a place where a lot of people who were idealistic, who wanted to help out, they came,” he said.

The former middle school teacher from Charleston, South Carolina, founded the Mardi Gras Krewe of Red Beans in 2008. Its 350 members adorn their parade costumes with, yes, red beans as they walk to honor their families, their neighborhood and the traditional Monday meal of beans and rice.

This year, as the coronavirus took hold elsewhere, Mardi Gras went on as usual, drawing thousands from

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around the world. It ended Feb. 25, before the lockdowns in the U.S. began.

On Fat Monday, called Lundi Gras by locals, De Wulf's krewe danced in the streets in their bean suits, children in tow, as a crowd of 15,000 cheered them on. It was a good day for the Krewe of Red Beans. The feeling didn't last.

Coronavirus cases soon overwhelmed the city's hospitals.

"We had a lovely time. Everything was normal, until it wasn't," he said. "With the gift of hindsight, we know that our parade this year spread COVID. I wish that we had been alerted that COVID was here."

De Wulf knows the pandemic struggle up close. He's married to an ER doctor and has found a new project to help ease the stress for ER and ICU staff throughout his city. He began fundraising to feed frontline workers and raised about \$500,000 in barely three weeks.

"A lot of people donate from all over the place and I think it's because they're rooting for the city," De Wulf said. "People have rooted for New Orleans time and time again. We're an underdog story."

RENTON, WASHINGTON: AN OTTER BIRTHDAY

Andrew Fouche, who pastors a small Baptist church just outside Seattle, is the father of five in one of the first areas hit by COVID-19.

"Our last gathering as a church was March 8," he said. "Just a couple days after that, the orders came out to limit gatherings of our size."

But his 100 congregants at Sunset Community Church in Renton have dodged the virus and reorganized online for worship, prayer and fun, including Bible Jeopardy.

Three of Fouche's kids have had birthdays in the last six weeks, two in isolation and one, Sophia, on March 1. Before things got bad in Seattle, the 40-year-old Fouche and his wife pulled out a 10th-birthday celebration for Sophia.

"We went to the Seattle Aquarium, with lots of other people, and enjoyed that. That's something that she loves to do. We went out to dinner at one of our favorite Chinese restaurants and shared communally, family style," Fouche said.

"All of those things take on a different feel now," he said. "It feels like a different life."

Sophia's favorite part of her special birthday, that last normal moment?

"I really like seeing the otters at the aquarium," she said. "Yeah, it was really good."

MADABA, JORDAN: A JOB WELL DONE

Mariana Makramalla is usually hunched over a table, snipping small pieces of colored stone with pliers in her family's mosaics workshop in the western Jordan town of Madaba.

Typically, Madaba attracts tourists who also visit nearby Mount Nebo, where the Bible says Moses was granted a view of the Promised Land. But Jordan closed its borders in mid-March, just before peak tourist season, as it tried to halt the the virus.

During the closure, Makramalla, 24, and her 27-year-old brother Majed, visit the two-room workshop from time to time to tidy up. The walls are covered with colorful mosaics for sale, whether an icon of the Virgin Mary or a variation on the tree of life.

Makramalla, a Coptic Christian, said she's a bit aimless these days, staying up until dawn and puttering. She misses the structure of her time spent in the workshop.

"When I first start doing the picture, if it has a difficult thing, at the beginning I say, no I can't finish this one. It's very hard," she said. "But when I start cutting the stone, even if it's the wrong one the first time, I keep cutting it, cutting it to put the best one. When I have finished it, or almost finished it, I see it's very nice, so I feel very happy."

Makramalla graduated from college last year with a degree in English translation. Like so many young Jordanians, she has been unable to find work in her field. She got into mosaics three years ago, while still in college, after training under a Syrian craftsman.

She loves the sense of accomplishment, the compliments she receives for good work and the lively exchanges with Arab and foreign tourists. She recalls how good it felt after her first sale, a mosaic of Mary and Jesus.

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"There were many things to do before the corona," Makramalla said, "but now, nothing."

— Karin Laub, Jordan

Follow Leanne Italie on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/litalie>

Outsiders consider possibility of chaos in North Korea

By FOSTER KLUG Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — North Korea's collapse has been predicted — wrongly— for decades.

Some said it would happen after fighting ended in the Korean War in 1953. Others thought it would be during a 1990s famine or when national founder Kim Il Sung died in 1994. And when the death of his son, Kim Jong Il, thrust a little-known 20-something into power in 2011 some felt the end was near.

It's no surprise then that recent rumors that leader Kim Jong Un is seriously ill have led to similar hand-wringing.

South Korea believes that Kim is alive and in control, and most analysts agree that even if he weren't, Kim's powerful sister, Kim Yo Jong, would likely take control, possibly with the help of select officials.

Many experts say North Korea would weather the transition just as it has every other upheaval.

But what if it didn't? Here's a look at how other nations might deal with a catastrophe in North Korea.

THE UNITED STATES

If the government in Pyongyang should collapse, a U.S.-South Korean contingency plan called OPLAN 5029 would reportedly come into play.

The plan is meant to secure the border and North Korea's nuclear weapons if the government can't function or if control of those weapons becomes uncertain.

"The million-dollar question is: When do you invoke the OPLAN and what indicators do you rely on to do so? Because one country's 'securing the country' operation can look to the other nation like an 'invasion plan.' And then all hell can break loose," said Vipin Narang, a North Korea nuclear specialist at MIT.

The biggest U.S. worry is North Korea's nuclear stockpile being used, stolen or sold.

"If the U.S. does not have plans to go in and secure and retrieve North Korean nukes — to the extent we know where they are — then we are not doing our job," said Ralph Cossa, president emeritus of the Pacific Forum think tank in Hawaii. "Beyond that, it makes little sense for the U.S and/or South Korea to get involved in internal North Korean power struggles."

The danger of a U.S. misstep during a collapse would be huge. Among the potential problems would be coordinating with South Korea's military at a time when Chinese troops would also likely be operating in the North and funding immense military and humanitarian efforts.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said recently, when asked about Kim's health, that Washington will continue to pursue complete denuclearization, "regardless of what transpires inside of North Korea with respect to their leadership."

CHINA

China is the North's main source of aid and diplomatic backing and considers political stability in its impoverished neighbor crucial to its own security.

Although China has agreed to United Nations sanctions over the North's weapons programs, it's wary of anything that would collapse the economy or unseat the ruling party and potentially unleash conflict on its border and a flood of refugees crossing over.

China in recent years has reinforced its border defenses with the North. But many people living on the Chinese side of the border are ethnically Korean, increasing fears of instability or even territorial loss if the border was opened.

China's biggest concern, however, is thought to be the prospect of American and South Korean troops operating along its border, a worry that prompted China to enter the Korean War 70 years ago.

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A change in leadership in North Korea, however, would be unlikely to bring about major changes to the relationship, said Lu Chao, a professor at the Liaoning Academy of Social Sciences in China.

SOUTH KOREA

Aside from joint plans with the U.S. military, internal South Korean preparations for a North Korean collapse reportedly deal with how to shelter an influx of refugees and how to set up an emergency administrative headquarters in the North.

According to leaked U.S. diplomatic cables, then senior South Korean presidential adviser Kim Sung-hwan told a top U.S. diplomat in 2009 that South Korea's constitution states that North Korea is part of South Korean territory and that "some scholars believe that if the North collapses, some type of 'interim entity' will have to be created to provide local governing and control travel of North Korean citizens."

When asked recently about contingency plans, South Korea's Unification Ministry said it "prepares for all possibilities."

One big problem is that unlike China, South Korea cannot mobilize the large number of soldiers needed to stabilize North Korea.

"If the North Korean regime is on the brink of collapse, China will most likely send troops to its ally and establish a pro-Beijing regime in the country," South Korea's JoongAng Ilbo newspaper said in a recent editorial. "Seoul must do its best to minimize China's intervention in the North based on the solid alliance with" Washington.

AP correspondent Hyung-jin Kim in Seoul contributed to this report.

Foster Klug, AP's news director for the Koreas, Japan and the South Pacific, has reported on North Korea and Asia since 2005.

Immigrants deliver food, 'hope' to workers hit by pandemic

By CLAUDIA TORRENS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Every afternoon, Sandra Pérez and Francisco Ramírez go over their list of fellow New Yorkers who need help because of the coronavirus pandemic. Some are sick. Others lost jobs, but have children to feed. Others are elderly or disabled. All are immigrants, like them.

Then, the friends, both originally from Mexico, stock up on rice, beans, vegetables, cereal, soups and fruit at an East Harlem supermarket, and make deliveries by car to as many as 15 families a day.

"I feel that if we are well, physically, emotionally, then we can help others," said Ramírez, a 52-year-old day laborer who used to do construction jobs, but now finds work scarce because of the crisis.

Pérez and Ramírez are among a growing number of people who have taken it upon themselves to help an immigrant community that has been hard hit by the pandemic, but often lives in the shadows of government and not-for-profit aide systems because of barriers such as language and immigration status.

These aide networks can be informal and operate on word-of-mouth and social media fundraising campaigns.

In Stamford, Connecticut, Erika Zamora has been distributing food from the restaurant she co-owns even after it was forced to close.

"Many people here live check by check. If you miss a check you are in trouble," said Zamora, herself a Mexican immigrant. She plans to start calling people for donations.

In Delaware, Spanish-language radio station La ZMX manager Vladimir Rosales has been receiving calls from Guatemalan, Mexican, Salvadoran, Honduran and other immigrants asking for food. He responded by soliciting donations from stores in Wilmington and Seaford and having families pick up the bags of groceries from the station.

"It is very sad. People call me in tears," he said.

The Migration Policy Institute found that 20% of the U.S. workers in vulnerable industries facing layoffs

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are immigrants, even though they only make up 17% of the civilian workforce.

According to a Pew Research Center study conducted in March, 49% of Hispanics surveyed say they or someone in their household has taken a pay cut or lost a job – or both – because of the COVID-19 outbreak, compared with 29% of white and 36% of black people.

The death toll from the coronavirus has also been disproportionately high in Black and Hispanic communities in New York City. Blacks have suffered roughly double the fatality rate of whites during the epidemic, according to city health data. The fatality rate for Hispanics has been only slightly better.

Perez said she felt compelled to begin offering volunteer help after seeing messages needy members of the Mexican community were posting on Facebook. Ramirez started his own Facebook page where people could share information. Perez bought food with her own money at first, but she and Ramirez now pay for the groceries with donated money.

People they deliver to tell them about others going hungry. Phone numbers get passed along and chain develops: Pérez says she gets about 10 to 15 phone calls or texts per day from people seeking help.

“We want to focus on the most vulnerable ones,” said Pérez, a 40-year-old single mother who works part-time for the city.

Peréz and Ramirez spend a daily average of between \$100 and \$150 at the supermarket. There are days that Peruvian and Mexican restaurants donate food and the friends just distribute those boxes. They raise the money through the Facebook page and a growing list of friends.

Sometimes the requests are more grim. People ask which funeral home they should call for relatives who have died or for the name of groups that can help cover the costs of a funeral or the repatriation of ashes to Mexico.

Raquel Barrera, a Mexican single mother who is sick in the Bronx, got a food delivery from Pérez and Ramírez last week.

Barrera, who is getting over a fever, body pain and strong coughing, lives with her mother, daughter, two nieces, a sister and a grandchild in a two-bedroom apartment.

“The food they brought was a blessing because we were able to feed the kids for several days,” said Barrera, who lost her job cleaning horse stables at a Chester, New York, ranch, about an hour from her home.

Most green-card holders can benefit from unemployment insurance or from the economic stimulus package recently approved by Congress. Some immigrants on a temporary work permit, like those applying for asylum, can also get unemployment insurance and the new relief checks.

Immigrants without social security numbers, however, are unable to access any of these options. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio recently announced a partnership with Open Society Foundations to provide emergency relief to immigrant families, regardless of immigration status.

In California, Gov. Gavin Newsom announced that his state will give cash to immigrants living in the country illegally who are hurt by the coronavirus, offering \$500 apiece to 150,000 adults.

Filling in the gaps are volunteers like Myrna Lazcano, who lost her job cleaning homes and offices thanks to the shutdown.

The 43-year-old Mexican immigrant, her husband and two daughters live off their savings, but still Lazcano delivers food to others in her East Harlem neighborhood bought with money that local churches, activists and acquaintances.

“By helping the community like this I feel that we are lifting the weight of this crisis,” she said. “People smile when they see the bags with food. I call them canisters of hope.”

Europe's employment aid keeps jobs from vanishing -- for now

By MASHA MACPHERSON and DAVID McHUGH Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Christian Etchebest's Parisian bistro is a shadow of its usual bustling self. Five lunch specials sit in neat paper bags on the bar awaiting takeout customers — a tiny fraction of his normal midday business before the coronavirus.

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A skeleton staff rotates in daily at La Cantine du Troquet near the banks of the Seine River, just blocks from the Eiffel Tower. One day they packaged a streamlined version of his Basque menu: sausages with a celery and beetroot remoulade, mashed potatoes and a dessert of strawberries with lemon sauce.

Yet Etchebest isn't facing bankruptcy — not yet anyway — thanks to a French government program that lets him put staff on reduced hours and makes up most of their lost salary, on the condition they are not fired. That is giving him a chance to keep his team together, awaiting the day when restrictions are lifted and sit-down meals are again allowed at this restaurant and his six others across Paris.

Similar programs are keeping hard-hit businesses across Europe afloat, preventing millions of workers from losing their jobs and income for now, and thousands of bosses from seeing their trained staff scatter. Some 11.3 million workers in France are getting up to 84% of net salary. The government estimates the cost at 24 billion euros (\$26 billion), with half of all private sector employees expected to take part.

In Germany, some 3 million workers are being supported, with the government paying up to 60% of their net salary if they are temporarily put on shorter or zero hours. Those with children get 67%, and many companies such as Volkswagen add more.

The impact of the pandemic and the cushioning provided by such short-work programs were underlined in reports released Thursday that showed the unemployment rate in the 19-country eurozone edged up only by a tenth of a point to 7.4% in March despite a record economic contraction. GDP tanked 3.8% quarter-on-quarter in the first three months of the year and is forecast to slide even more in the second quarter.

The work support programs are different from jobless benefits. They are only for temporary shutdowns that are no fault of the business itself. And they are no panacea. Such programs can't save jobs that disappear due to long-term slowdowns in customer demand or to technological changes. But it gives workers and bosses breathing space and hope, preventing the unnecessary destruction of viable businesses.

"I will roll up my sleeves up and I will fight for all my restaurants," Etchebest said. "For the majority of my staff to remain with me and so on. What else can I say? I can't contemplate the contrary ... I will fight for it until the end."

His chef, Thierry Lararralde, was weathering the crisis financially thanks to the support. "I can't say I'm struggling; my net salary is around 3,000 euros (\$3,222 a month), I am making 700 euros (\$750) less." He is making ends meet by spending less on gas and cooking at home: "It's cheaper, we adapt."

The takeout crew pushed aside their masks to eat together, Etchebest slicing a rare roast beef on a wooden board for them.

Etchebest realizes the road ahead could be tough after they re-open with fewer tables due to social distancing requirements.

"I am fully aware we will have 40%, 50% less of business," he said, adding that some employees with health risks may not return. "I think everyone needs to adapt their business model — financially and operationally."

Economist Holger Schaefer at the German Economic Institute in Cologne said short-work support gives employers more options than the stark choice of keeping people or firing them.

"I can say, 'You come 70% of the hours, or 50% or 30%.' One doesn't have to say either all or nothing," he said. "When the crisis is past and the demand for labor rises, then the business owner has exactly the right staff available right away and doesn't have to find new people."

The support also bolsters the entire economy. "When someone is afraid that their job will be lost in the near future, that person limits their consumption, they don't buy a new car and spend less money, and that has in turn an effect on the macro-economy," Schaefer said.

Short-work schemes proved their value during the Great Recession in Germany, where 1.4 million workers took part. The unemployment rate only edged up, from 7.3% in January 2009 to 7.5% in December that year, even as the economy shrank a painful 5%. Growth then quickly rebounded.

It's the flip side of a European labor market, where worker protections are often blamed for deterring hiring in good times and where income taxes are higher to pay for the safety nets. It took seven years for

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unemployment to drop from a peak of over 12% in 2013 in euro-currency countries to 7.3% in February.

Femke Zimmermann, manager of Brasserie Berlage in The Hague in the Netherlands, has her eye on re-opening even as she spends most days at home looking after her 1-year-old and 5-year-old sons while the restaurant's owners pay her with government help.

For now, she is not overly worried about losing her job. She stays in contact with her team and asked them to come in to give the restaurant a two-day spring clean.

"They hate sitting at home. They want to do something for the business," she said.

Athens waiter George Sakkas, 26, is getting by on a Greek government program that lets businesses suspend workers' contracts and replaces their pay with a flat stipend of 800 euros (\$870). Businesses that take the help cannot fire staff.

"The stipend definitely helped," he said, noting the amount was roughly what he would make anyway.

"In the beginning we didn't know about the stipend, so (the closing) hit us very badly," he said. "When the stipend arrived it gave us some breathing space."

McHugh reported from Frankfurt, Germany. Associated Press writers Mike Corder in The Hague, Netherlands; Angela Charlton in Paris and Theodora Tongas in Athens contributed to this report.

Follow AP pandemic coverage at <http://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

5 things to know today - that aren't about the virus

By The Associated Press

Your daily look at nonvirus stories in the news:

1. NEW LIGHT SHED ON SEALS' MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN In efforts to free Mark R. Frerichs, a 57-year-old military contractor from Illinois, Navy commandos raided a village and detained suspected Taliban-linked militants, the AP has learned.

2. WHO MIGHT PLAY SPOILER IN NOVEMBER Running as a Libertarian, Michigan Rep. Justin Amash faces almost impossibly steep odds, but his candidacy can produce unpredictable twists.

3. BIDEN PICKS VETTING TEAM IN RUNNING MATE SEARCH Former Connecticut Sen. Chris Dodd, Delaware Rep. Lisa Blunt Rochester, Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti and Apple executive Cynthia Hogan will serve as co-chairs on the committee.

4. NETFLIX FILM WINS BIG AT TRIBECA Alice Wu's "The Half of It," a teenage spin on Cyrano de Bergerac, is the winner of the top award from the Tribeca Film Festival.

5. NCAA MOVES TOWARD ATHLETE COMPENSATION By this time next year, college athletes may be permitted to earn money for their names, images and likenesses without compromising their eligibility.

Another glut of US unemployment applications is expected

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. government is expected Thursday to issue another bleak report on the layoffs that have cut through America's workforce since the coronavirus forced businesses across the country to shut down starting last month.

The Labor Department will likely report that several million more people filed for unemployment benefits last week, after more than 26 million applied for aid in the previous five weeks. All told, the layoffs add up to the largest streak of U.S. job losses on record.

Across nearly every industry, nonessential businesses have closed, and workers have been sent home with no clear idea of when or whether they might be recalled. An economic recovery may be months or years off, though governors in a few states have begun allowing some businesses to reopen under certain restrictions.

For April, economists say the unemployment rate could go as high as 20%. That would be the highest

rate since the Great Depression, when it reached 25%.

SEALs tried to locate US citizen taken by Afghan militants

By **JAMES LAPORTA** and **ERIC TUCKER** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In the days following the capture of an American contractor in Afghanistan earlier this year, Navy commandos raided a village and detained suspected members of the Taliban-linked Haqqani network while the U.S. intelligence community tried to track the cellphones of the man and his captors, The Associated Press has learned.

While the circumstances surrounding the abduction remain unclear, the previously unreported operation described by multiple American officials over the past month shed new light on early efforts to locate Mark R. Frerichs, a contractor from Illinois whose disappearance has been shrouded in mystery and whose case has been the subject of minimal public discussion by the U.S. government.

The new details emerge as violence and political infighting in Kabul threaten to scuttle a Taliban peace deal with the U.S. Last month, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo voiced frustrations after a failed attempt to mediate a power struggle between Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and political rival Dr. Abdullah Abdullah. The Trump administration said it would cut \$1 billion in aid to Afghanistan.

Washington has urged Kabul to release Taliban prisoners, which is part of the peace agreement, arguing the detainees were at risk of spreading the coronavirus.

But there are no public indications that Frerichs, a Navy veteran, has been part of negotiations between the U.S. and Taliban leadership or that his release is part of any peace deal.

"The Taliban kidnapped my brother in January. In February, the U.S. signed a peace deal with the Taliban. My brother wasn't part of the deal. Now we are arranging for the Taliban and Afghan government to exchange thousands of prisoners," Charlene Cakora, one of Frerichs' sisters, said in a statement provided to the AP. "Why can't we make an American hostage be one of them?"

Frerichs' father, Art, said in a statement that though he has faith in President Donald Trump and Pompeo, "I just need them to tell their people negotiating with the Taliban that America won't lift a finger until my son comes home. He's a veteran. This is America. We don't leave people behind."

The Pentagon and U.S. Special Operations Command declined to comment on the SEALs' raid. The rescue effort is being coordinated through the FBI-led, multiagency Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell, which said in a statement that it was working with its partners to ensure "that Mark Frerichs and all Americans held hostage abroad are returned home." It encouraged anyone with information about the case to come forward.

The State Department said it was aware of an American who'd been abducted in Afghanistan.

"The welfare, safety and security of Americans is the Trump Administration's highest priority," the department said. "The United States will continue to push for the safe return of this and all other U.S. citizens through all relevant channels."

A former U.S. national security official who is advising the Frerichs family called on Washington peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad to resolve the situation, saying "he needs to understand from the top that getting an American hostage home is also part of his job. He is aware of Mark's presence, but it does not appear yet that he understands that he needs to get him home." The former official insisted on anonymity to speak candidly since the official sometimes works with the Trump administration.

U.S. officials believe Frerichs, 57, of Lombard, Illinois, was held for at least some time in Khost, an eastern province along the border with Pakistan and its so-called tribal regions, a mountainous area that has historically been a haven for Taliban and al-Qaeda militants.

The former national security official said that Frerichs has been in Afghanistan for about a decade working on commercial projects and was not a U.S. government contractor.

"The first 96 hours is crucial," a senior U.S. government official briefed on the case told the AP on the condition of anonymity because the official was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly. "If they're not recovered in the first few days, it becomes harder every minute after."

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Though no formal demands are known to have been made, U.S. intelligence officials believe Frerichs was captured by members of the Haqqani network, a militant group aligned with the Taliban in Afghanistan. The Haqqanis have strong links to North Waziristan, a tribal region in Pakistan, south of Afghanistan's Khost province.

The Obama administration designated the Haqqani network as a foreign terrorist organization in 2012 for its ties with the Taliban and the group's attacks on U.S. military and civilian personnel. Though the Haqqanis are known to carry out assassinations and kidnappings for ransom, Taliban leadership has not acknowledged Frerichs' capture.

"I have not received any information about him," said a Taliban source who asked not to be named. "There has been no clue despite my contacts with every side to get information."

In November, the Afghan government released three prominent members of the Haqqani network in exchange for an American citizen and an Australian professor abducted in 2016. Pompeo characterized the prisoner swap as a "goodwill gesture."

Rep. Michael Waltz, a Florida Republican and Army veteran who led the teams that searched for Bowe Bergdahl after the Army soldier abandoned his post in 2009 and wound up captured by the Taliban, said the Taliban frequently hides American hostages until they can move them over the border into Pakistan.

He said peace deal negotiations should have stopped as soon as the U.S. government learned that Frerichs was missing.

"I have real concerns about suggestions that the Taliban are serious about peace, that the Taliban are upholding their end of the deal when — as we speak today — they are holding a former Navy veteran and American citizen hostage that they took, again, during the peace negotiations," Waltz said in an interview.

The search area for Frerichs began in Khost and extended south to the province of Kandahar, according to the senior U.S. government official and a second official at the Defense Department.

Members of the elite Naval Special Warfare Development Group, more familiarly known as SEAL Team Six, who were involved in the Frerichs effort had spent late January working to recover the bodies of two American service members who died when their aircraft crash-landed in Ghazni in central Afghanistan, according to the two U.S. officials.

The bitter winter weather that limited overhead surveillance of the airplane wreckage by U.S. military drones also worked against officials during the later SEAL operation on the night of Feb. 3. Periods of poor-to-nonexistent visibility ultimately delayed a planned intelligence-gathering operation on a known Taliban location, said the senior U.S. government official, who has direct knowledge of the raid.

Once the weather cleared, the SEALs loaded onto helicopters and flew to the undisclosed location. The senior official declined to disclose the exact location of the province for operational security reasons.

The senior U.S. government official and the Defense Department source with knowledge of the raid, who also requested anonymity, said the SEAL platoon was not met with any Taliban resistance and that once at the compound, they detained several alleged Haqqani militants and uncovered a weapons cache. It's not known if the weapons cache was destroyed at the scene or given to Afghan security forces.

The suspected Haqqani members were questioned about Frerichs' whereabouts and ultimately turned over to the Afghan government, according to the senior U.S. government official.

On Feb. 4, American intelligence officials received a report that Frerichs had possibly been moved to Quetta, Pakistan, a historical haven for the Taliban, the two officials said. But the information was deemed not credible enough to warrant a special operations mission, according to the senior U.S. government official.

The report also conflicted with signals intelligence U.S. officials had at the time. Signals intelligence is information gathered from the electronic signals that are broadcast from devices like portable radios and cellphones. The information can be used to track the movements of individuals or eavesdrop on conversations, known in the spy business as low-level voice intercepts.

U.S. intelligence officials continued to receive location pings from the suspected cellphones of Frerichs and his captors, but the trail went cold on Feb. 5, according to the senior U.S. government and Defense Department officials.

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While the senior U.S. government official would not say where exactly the last location ping for Frerichs came from, the official said it was near where he was captured. The AP was not able to determine how the U.S. intelligence community knew to target these specific cellphones to monitor.

“Operationally, the reason why time is critical in a kidnapping is because you can close the distance quicker, ideally immediately or by utilizing sources,” said the senior U.S. government official. “This is not the case right now. He could be two houses down from where he was taken and we would not know.”

LaPorta reported from Delray Beach, Florida. Associated Press writers Matthew Lee in Washington, Kathy Gannon in Islamabad and Allen G. Breed in Raleigh, North Carolina, contributed to this report.

Contact AP’s global investigative team at Investigative@ap.org.

AP-NORC poll: Seeking virus data, people struggle with trust

By AAMER MADHANI and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When John Manley tested positive for COVID-19, his sister urged him to get on the malaria drug that she’d heard Fox News hosts plugging and that President Donald Trump was heralding as a potential “game changer” for fighting the coronavirus.

But Manley, 58, a civilian U.S. Army public affairs officer, was skeptical of using a drug not approved by the Food and Drug Administration for treating the virus and decided it was a gamble not worth taking.

“It caused a huge rift in the family because the science wasn’t behind it,” said Manley, who lives in Stuttgart, Germany, and whose wife, Heidi Mathis, also tested positive for the virus after a visit to New York. Both have since recovered, and the FDA has advised people not to take the drug outside a hospital or clinical trial.

The Manley family squabble highlights an essential question that many Americans are grappling with as they seek out the information they need to stay safe during the country’s worst public health crisis in a century: Whom do you trust?

Or, as Manley frames it: “What is being jammed down our throats in our news? Who is talking about these things? Where do you go to actually get something you can believe?”

Sixty-eight percent of Americans say they highly trust the information that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is providing about the virus, 66% trust their doctor or health care provider, and 52% said the same about their state or local government, according to a recent Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll.

But Americans are more skeptical of the coronavirus information they’re getting from the media and from family and friends, with 32% saying they have a lot of trust in information provided by each. Only 23% of Americans said they have a great deal or quite a bit of trust in the information that Trump provides on the coronavirus, according to the poll.

In interviews, Americans said the process of consuming, digesting and discerning the credibility of the fire hose of virus information coming from politicians, public health experts and the media — not to mention what their family, friends and colleagues are sharing on social media — has become a time-consuming and frequently unsettling process.

Gary Thomas, 71, a retiree from Pueblo, Colorado, and longtime news junkie, has become even more regimented in his consumption. He begins each day at the breakfast table, where he’ll spend a couple of solitary hours with his phone and coffee reading the latest virus news. He’ll later put in several more hours watching the latest developments on cable with his wife, while continuing to monitor newspaper apps and social media feeds.

Contrast that with Michele Cody, 45, a technology manager from Riverton, New Jersey. She’s become so worn down by the crush of information that she’s put herself on a news diet — giving up her early morning newscast and relying more on a roundup of coronavirus news pushed to her inbox.

Retiree Jana Foley decided the best way to get the information she needs out of Trump’s briefings, and

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keep her blood from boiling, is through selective use of the mute button on her TV remote.

"When Trump is talking, we usually turn it down because we just get really upset and aggravated," said Foley, 71, of Johnston, Iowa. "We turn it up when the experts are speaking."

Vance Davis, 53, of Atlanta, finds himself frustrated with media coverage that he thinks is tinged with anti-Trump bias. In recent weeks, he said he's stopped watching CNN and is now flipping between Fox News, the conservative One America News Network and Al Jazeera, the Qatar-headquartered network's English newscast.

Davis said that much of the media has unfairly piled on Trump, overplaying things like the president's musings that injecting disinfectant could be a cure for the virus. He said Trump could have handled the situation better by saying he misspoke instead of claiming he was being sarcastic.

Still, Davis said, he trusts the president "quite a bit."

"Sometimes, he may grandstand too much, but you have to understand who he is and just suck it up," he said.

Zach Stafford, 24, an AmeriCorps educator from Belleville, Illinois, watched the crisis unfold overseas and began to worry about the personal ramifications if it made it to the U.S.: His mother, Debra Mize, 61, has multiple sclerosis, an autoimmune disease that makes her more vulnerable if she catches the virus. He immediately realized that trustworthy information on the virus was crucial for preserving his mother's well-being.

The two have since been glued to the news, watching Trump's briefings and New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's morning updates, as well as Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker's news conferences.

Mize said on most mornings she'll wake up around 4 a.m., make her way to her recliner and begin scrolling through social media, news sites and Boston College historian Heather Cox Richardson's daily newsletter. By day's end — typically with liberal commentator Rachel Maddow's MSNBC broadcast — Mize calculates she's consumed about six hours of news.

She's found herself flustered arguing with friends on social media who are convinced that the virus — and the need for social distancing — is a hoax. One was insistent that 5G towers, the ones that create speedy internet connections, were to blame for the pandemic. There is no evidence of this.

"When she started using it to justify the fact that she wasn't going to listen to the stay-at-home orders ... I just unfriended her," Mize said.

In rural Clay County, Nebraska, Tim Lewis, an emergency manager for the county, said winning trust and persuading people to follow the state's social distancing guidelines is a battle that sometimes needs to be waged one person at a time.

On a recent afternoon, Lewis was preparing to reach out to one of the county's 6,200 residents who unnerved neighbors by telling them he had close contact with coronavirus-infected patients elsewhere in the state but saw no need to self-quarantine.

"This isn't New York," said Lewis, whose county has had nine people test positive for the virus. "But we're trying to get people's trust and help them understand this is a world thing."

Both state and local government officials are getting high marks from Americans, with 63% of respondents approving of their handling of the crisis, according to the latest AP-NORC poll. In comparison, only 40% said they approved of the federal government's handling of the crisis, and 28% approved of congressional leaders' performance.

Fully 60% of respondents said Trump was not listening to health experts enough, while 35% said he was listening to them just the right amount.

Brian Haferkamp, a web developer from Maywood, Illinois, said he hasn't put much trust in Trump's rhetoric from the bully pulpit. Instead, Haferkamp, 42, said he's been paying attention to guidance from state and local officials in Cook County, which has had more than 1,400 coronavirus-related deaths.

"In the end, I think our local government is where it's going to come down and have the most practical meaning," Haferkamp said.

Back in Germany, Manley is still spending much of his days reading and watching U.S. media coverage and tuning into White House and state officials' briefings.

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At the top of his mind is his wife, in the midst of her illness, telling him what she wanted him to do with her remains if she didn't make it. A few weeks later, after he was diagnosed, he lay awake in the middle of the night, scared to fall asleep.

That visceral sensation of fear is something he wishes could be properly conveyed to Americans.

He says nothing — briefings, newscasts or friends — can prepare people for that moment “when it drives you to end-of-life conversations, and it drives you to not wanting to go to sleep because you don't know if you'll wake up.”

European Central Bank steps up aid as economy slides

By DAVID McHUGH Associated Press

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — The European Central Bank is ramping up its measures to cushion the region against a record economic downturn caused by the lockdowns on business amid the virus outbreak.

The monetary authority for the 19 countries that use the euro currency on Thursday lowered the interest rate on cheap loans it provides to banks. It also offered new credit lines to banks to cushion the economy, which suffered its biggest contraction in the first quarter since records began in 1995.

The new ECB measures announced Thursday come on top of already announced stimulus efforts that include an ongoing 750 billion euros in bond purchases. Those purchases help drive down market borrowing rates for companies and governments. In particular, they have kept a lid on financing costs for heavily indebted Italy, one of the countries hardest hit by the outbreak.

The bank has also eased requirements for bank capital cushions, relief that means banks are not pressed to restrict lending in order to shore up their own finances. The ECB also made it easier for banks to tap cheap credit directly from the central bank by loosening collateral requirements.

Markets will now be looking for cues on the bank's stance from ECB President Christine Lagarde at her post-decision news conference. Lagarde initially bobbled the bank's response at its March 12 meeting by saying the bank was not involved in capping borrowing costs for indebted governments, a gaffe that was quickly withdrawn and followed by the pandemic emergency bond purchases that have helped keep borrowing markets relatively calm.

The ECB took the steps after official figures showed the eurozone economy contracted by a record 3.8% in the first three months of the year, the biggest drop since statistics started being kept in the mid 1990s and worse than the drop in 2009 during the Great Recession that followed the bankruptcy of US investment bank Lehman Brothers. The bank had already lowered its key interest rate benchmarks to record lows before the virus outbreak during a period of sub-par growth in Europe.

The drop compares to a 4.8% contraction in the U.S. during the first quarter as the shock from the outbreak hits economies around the world.

Unemployment rose only slightly, however, even amid the massive shutdowns that idled everything from florists to factories. The jobless figure rose to 7.4% in March from 7.3% in February, statistics agency Eurostat said Thursday. Millions of workers are being supported by temporary short-hours programs under which governments pay most of their salaries in return for companies agreeing not to lay people off.

U.S. unemployment rose to 4.4% in March from 3.5% in February, though the eventual picture is likely far worse. First-time claims for unemployment benefits have skyrocketed in the U.S. as 26 million people applied through the first three weeks of April.

The statistics in Europe likely understate the depth of the fall since shutdown measures were mostly put in place only in March, the last of the three months in the quarter.

Figures from France and Italy showed both countries fell into recession, defined as two quarters of economic contraction. The French economy shrank 5.8%, the most since the country's statistics agency began keeping the figures in 1949. The drop was particularly pronounced in services that involve face to face interaction, such as hotels and restaurants, retail stores, transportation and construction.

As economies stagger, pressures grow to ease virus lockdowns

By JOHN LEICESTER and DAVID McHUGH Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — The world's economic pain was on full display Thursday with new bleak evidence from Europe and the United States of the mounting devastation wrought on jobs and economies by coronavirus lockdown measures.

In Europe, where over 132,000 people with the virus have died so far, fears about new infection spikes were tempering hopes that economies now on government-funded life support will regain their vigor as workers return to factories, shops and offices.

New unemployment figures Thursday covering the 19 European countries that use the shared euro currency underscored how massive job-protection programs are temporarily keeping millions of Europeans on payrolls, sparing them the record-setting flood of layoffs that is battering tens of millions of Americans.

The European economy shrank a record 3.8% in the first quarter as lockdowns turned cities into ghost towns and plunged nations into recession. The drop was the biggest since eurozone statistics began in 1995 and compares to a 4.8% contraction in the United States.

France's economy shrank an eye-popping 5.8%, the biggest quarterly drop since 1949. In Spain, the contraction was 5.2% in the same period. In Croatia, the prime minister warned the economy could shrink 9% this year as the pandemic keeps tourists away from its Mediterranean beaches and historic sites and he wants European borders reopened. Germany is projecting that its economy, the eurozone's biggest, will shrink 6.3% this year.

No continent is being spared. The Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported a 37% surge in coronavirus cases in the past week — to more than 36,000 confirmed infections and over 1,500 deaths.

In Latin America, Brazil's virtually uncontrolled surge of coronavirus cases is igniting fears that construction workers, truck drivers and tourists will spread COVID-19 to neighboring countries that are doing a far better job of controlling the virus.

The Paris-based International Energy Agency projected an unprecedented plunge in the global demand for energy this year, equivalent to losing the entire demand of India, the world's third-largest energy consumer.

The pain of coronavirus lockdowns has piled pressure on governments to ease them. The World Health Organization said nearly half of the 44 countries in Europe that restricted people's movements have started easing them and 11 more will do so soon.

But WHO's Dr. Hans Kluge noted that Europe still accounts for 46% of virus cases and 63% of deaths globally and "remains very much in the grip of this pandemic."

"This virus is unforgiving. We must remain vigilant, persevere and be patient, ready to ramp up measures as and when needed," he said. "COVID-19 is not going away anytime soon."

As economies splutter back to life and workers adapt to the strangeness of new barriers designed to keep them apart, governments are watching infection rates and public behavior like hawks, wary of a second wave of deaths. German Health Minister Jens Spahn said his government wants to take "small steps, rather than risk a big step back."

California's governor planned to close all beaches and state parks starting Friday after people thronged the seashore during a sweltering weekend, ignoring social distancing. Nevada's governor asked people to stay at home until May 15 but eased restrictions on some outdoor activities and businesses.

In Sweden, authorities spread stinky chicken manure on a city park in Lund to discourage celebrations on Thursday, a traditionally festive day.

The promise of an effective treatment against the coronavirus — an experimental drug that can speed the recovery of COVID-19 patients — raised hopes Thursday for faster progress in battling the pandemic and restoring wrecked economies and livelihoods.

The U.S. government and others are working to make the medication available to patients as quickly as possible. News of the medical advance lifted world markets, outshining gloomy economic data showing the

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U.S. economy contracted nearly 5% in January-March in the worst downturn since the Great Recession. California-based biotech company Gilead Sciences and the U.S. government reported in a major study run by the U.S. National Institutes of Health that the drug remdesivir shortened the time it takes for COVID-19 patients to recover by four days on average — from 15 days to 11.

The study, involving 1,063 coronavirus patients, also showed a trend toward fewer deaths among those on the drug, said Dr. Anthony Fauci, the U.S. government's top infectious diseases expert.

"What it has proven is that a drug can block this virus," he said. "This will be the standard of care."

Even though a vaccine is perhaps a year or more away, experts say an effective treatment could have a profound effect on the outbreak. Hopes for the treatment buoyed Asian stocks Thursday but Europe's grim economic numbers weighed on its markets.

The virus has killed nearly 228,000 people worldwide, including 61,000 in the U.S., according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University. Confirmed infections globally topped 3.2 million, including 1 million in the U.S., but the true toll of the pandemic is likely much higher because of limited testing, differences in counting the dead and concealment by some governments.

The latest figures on Americans applying for unemployment benefits come out Thursday, with economists estimating that 1 in 6 workers, or nearly 30 million people, have lost their jobs over the past six weeks.

Mario Franco, who worked at a McDonald's highway rest stop in Connecticut for 26 years, rising to night manager, was laid off in late March. The 50-year-old said he has little savings and now relies on a food bank and union donations.

"They didn't give us any notice," he said. "Just suddenly the night shift ended and that was it."

The U.S. unemployment rate for April is due late next week, and economists say it could range as high as 20% — a level last seen during the Depression.

Worldwide, the International Labor Organization says the pandemic has left 1.6 billion people who depend on day labor or other informal work in immediate danger of losing their livelihoods. That's nearly half the global workforce of 3.3 billion. It expects 305 million full-time jobs to be wiped out in April-June.

Pushing to reopen the country, President Donald Trump was allowing federal social distancing guidelines to expire Thursday and was even planning to travel to Arizona next week.

But many economists are skeptical that the U.S. economy will bounce back quickly, noting that the virus could flare up again or consumers might be too worried to return to business as usual.

"The virus has done a lot of damage to the economy and there is just so much uncertainty now," said Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics.

Harrison Ford piloting plane that wrongly crosses runway

HAWTHORNE, Calif. (AP) — Harrison Ford was piloting a plane that wrongly crossed a runway where another plane was landing, and federal authorities are investigating, officials and a representative for the actor said Wednesday.

Ford was at the controls of a small plane Friday at Hawthorne Airport in the Los Angeles area when, according to a statement released by Ford's publicist, he crossed the runway after mishearing an instruction from air traffic control.

"He immediately acknowledged the mistake and apologized to ATC for the error," according to the statement from publicist Ina Treciokas. "No one was injured and there was never any danger of a collision."

It was the latest of several similar incidents over the years for the 77-year-old actor, who collects and frequently flies planes and helicopters.

Most recently, he flew low over an airliner with 116 people aboard moments before mistakenly landing on a taxiway at another Southern California airport in 2017.

Without naming Ford, the Federal Aviation Administration said Wednesday that a two-seat Aviat Husky plane crossed the runway while another aircraft was performing a touch-and-go landing just over a half-mile away.

Ford's statement says the purpose of his flight was "to maintain currency and proficiency in the aircraft."

In 2015, Ford was injured when he crashed his World War II-era plane on a Los Angeles golf course after engine failure. Federal investigators found that Ford was not at fault for the crash, which was entirely mechanical.

What you need to know today about the virus outbreak

By The Associated Press

On a day of economic gloom, scientists offered a ray of hope: the first effective treatment against the coronavirus.

The U.S. government said it is working to make the antiviral medication remdesivir available to patients as quickly as possible after a major study found it shortened the time it takes for COVID-19 patients to recover by four days on average — from 15 days to 11. The news came as the U.S. government reported that American output is shriveling at an alarming rate in the biggest and fastest collapse since the Depression.

Here are some of AP's top stories Wednesday on the world's coronavirus pandemic. Follow APNews.com/VirusOutbreak for updates through the day and APNews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak for stories explaining some of its complexities.

WHAT'S HAPPENING TODAY:

— The U.S. economy shrank at a 4.8% annual rate last quarter as the coronavirus pandemic shut down much of the country and began triggering a recession that will end the longest expansion on record. Amid the economic fallout, the Federal Reserve signaled Wednesday that it will keep its key short-term interest rate near zero for the foreseeable future.

— President Donald Trump said Wednesday the federal government will not be extending its coronavirus social distancing guidelines once they expire Thursday. He also said he plans to resume official travel with a trip to Arizona next week and hopes to resume mass campaign rallies in the coming months.

— New figures show that out of 2,700 coronavirus tests across the federal Bureau of Prisons, nearly 2,000 have come back positive, strongly suggesting there are far more COVID-19 cases left undiscovered.

— As governments across the United States gradually allow businesses to reopen, leaders are grappling with how much legal protection to give companies in case their workers get sick from the coronavirus.

— It started with a funeral that got out of hand. It ended Wednesday with some of New York City's Jews at odds with the mayor over his criticisms of the Orthodox community as it struggles to deal with the coronavirus.

— Puerto Rico's government has failed to tap into millions of federal dollars set aside for the island as a growing number of unemployed parents struggle to feed their children in a U.S. territory where nearly 70% of public school students are poor.

— The discovery of about 50 bodies on ice in rented trucks outside a funeral home is the latest example of New York City's morticians struggling to cope with the number of dead amid the coronavirus outbreak.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death. The vast majority of people recover.

Here are the symptoms of the virus compared with the common flu.

One of the best ways to prevent spread of the virus is washing your hands with soap and water. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends first washing with warm or cold water and then lathering soap for 20 seconds to get it on the backs of hands, between fingers and under fingernails before rinsing off.

You should wash your phone, too. Here's how.

TRACKING THE VIRUS: Drill down and zoom in at the individual county level, and you can access numbers that will show you the situation where you are, and where loved ones or people you're worried about live.

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ONE NUMBER:

— 1,000: The number of coronavirus-related deaths in India, which has shelved a plan to give the anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine to thousands of people in Mumbai's crowded slums to prevent coronavirus infections.

IN OTHER NEWS:

— POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE: LeBron James is putting together an all-star event to honor and celebrate the high school class of 2020, which has had its graduation season upended by the coronavirus pandemic.

— HURDLE INSPIRATION: Clint Hurdle began sending his daily notes of inspiration more than 10 years ago, during his days managing the Colorado Rockies. What used to be group text messages have turned into much more — every morning, his Daily Encouragement emails go out to some 5,000 eager recipients.

Drug proves effective against virus as economic damage rises

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER, MARILYNN MARCHIONE and PAT EATON-ROBB Associated Press

Scientists on Wednesday announced the first effective treatment against the coronavirus — an experimental drug that can speed the recovery of COVID-19 patients — in a major medical advance that came as the economic gloom caused by the scourge deepened in the U.S. and Europe.

The U.S. government said it is working to make the antiviral medication remdesivir available to patients as quickly as possible.

"What it has proven is that a drug can block this virus," said Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious-disease expert. "This will be the standard of care."

Stocks surged around the world on the news, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average gaining more than 530 points on the day, or over 2%.

Still, word of the new drug came as the U.S. government reported that American economic output is shriveling in the biggest and fastest collapse since the Depression. The virus has killed over 220,000 people worldwide, including more than 60,000 confirmed deaths in the U.S., and led to lockdowns and other restrictions that have closed factories and other businesses around the globe.

The U.S. said its gross domestic product, or output of goods and services, shrank at an annual rate of 4.8% in the January-March period, the sharpest quarterly drop since the global financial meltdown of more than a decade ago.

And the worst is yet to come: The Congressional Budget Office has estimated that the GDP of the world's biggest economy will plunge at a 40% annual rate during the three-month period that ends in June.

The latest figures on people applying for unemployment benefits in the U.S. come out Thursday, with economists estimating perhaps 1 in 6 American workers, or nearly 30 million people, have lost their jobs over the past six weeks.

The U.S. unemployment rate for April will be released at the end of next week, and economists have said it could range as high as 20% — a level last seen during the Depression.

Mario Franco, who worked at a McDonald's at a rest stop along Interstate 95 in Darien, Connecticut, for 26 years, rising to night manager in charge of the kitchen staff, was laid off in late March. The 50-year-old said he has little savings and now relies on a food bank and union donations.

"They didn't give us any notice," he said through an interpreter. "They didn't tell us about it. Just suddenly the night shift ended and that was it. There was no more work."

Amid the economic carnage, President Donald Trump was pushing to reopen the country, allowing federal social distancing guidelines to expire Thursday and even saying he plans to travel to Arizona next week.

Trump who in recent weeks had predicted the total U.S. virus death toll would come in at around the 60,000 milestone passed Wednesday, laid out plans for returning to pre-virus normalcy despite doctors' warnings that the country will need to embrace extended social distancing and mask-wearing.

Confirmed infections globally reached about 3.2 million, including 1 million in the U.S., according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University. The true numbers of deaths and infections are believed to be much higher because of limited testing, differences in counting the dead and concealment by some governments.

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California-based biotech company Gilead Sciences and the U.S. government reported that in a major study, remdesivir shortened the time it takes for COVID-19 patients to recover by four days on average — from 15 days to 11. Also, a trend toward fewer deaths was seen among those on the drug, Fauci said.

The study was run by the U.S. National Institutes of Health and involved 1,063 hospitalized coronavirus patients around the world.

An effective treatment could have a profound effect on the outbreak, since a vaccine is probably a year or more away.

Economic damage, meanwhile, is piling up around the world.

The United Nations' main labor body predicted the world will lose the equivalent of about 305 million full-time jobs in the second quarter.

It also projected that 1.6 billion workers in the "informal economy," including those working beyond the reach of the government, "stand in immediate danger of having their livelihoods destroyed." That is nearly half the global workforce of 3.3 billion people.

In Europe, almost every measure of the economy is in free fall. Figures due to be released Thursday are expected to show a drop of about 4% in the first three months of the year in the eurozone, and an even steeper hit is projected this quarter. Unemployment is expected to rise to about 8%.

The figure would be worse if not for massive amounts of government aid to keep millions of workers on payrolls. Government debt is exploding to cover the costs of such relief.

"The lockdowns to contain the COVID-19 pandemic are taking an unprecedented toll on the European economy," said Florian Hense, an economist at Berenberg Bank.

In Paris, aircraft maker Airbus reported a first-quarter loss of 481 million euros (\$515 million), laid off thousands of workers and sought billions in loans to pull through the crisis. U.S.-based rival Boeing said it is cutting 10% of its workforce and reducing the production rate of commercial jets.

Italy's credit rating was lowered in the first downgrade of a major economy as a result of the crisis. Its rating stands just one level above junk bond status. Italy expects its economy to shrink 8% this year.

Germany's economy minister said the government is projecting a contraction of about 11% in GDP by the end of the quarter. But he also predicted a sharp recovery in 2021.

Many economists are skeptical the U.S. economy will bounce back quickly later in the year, noting that the virus could flare up again or consumers and employees might be too worried to return to business as usual.

"The virus has done a lot of damage to the economy, and there is just so much uncertainty now," said Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics.

With the crisis easing in places like Italy, France and Spain, European governments are making adjustments in their transportation networks to try to get their economies running again without setting off a second wave of infections.

In Italy, Milan is putting red stickers on the floor to tell bus passengers how far apart to stand. The Dutch are putting on longer, roomier trains. Berlin and many other cities are opening up more lanes to bicyclists. And in Britain, bus passengers are using the middle or rear doors to reduce the risk to the driver.

Many Japanese defy appeals to stay home to curb virus

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Under Japan's coronavirus state of emergency, people have been asked to stay home. Many are not. Some still have to commute to their jobs despite risks of infection, while others continue to dine out, picnic in parks and crowd into grocery stores with scant regard for social distancing.

On Wednesday, the first day of the "Golden Week" holidays that run through May 5, Tokyo's leafy Shiba Park was packed with families with small children, day camping in tents.

The lure of heading out for Golden Week holidays is testing the public's will to unite against a common enemy as health workers warn rising coronavirus cases are overwhelming the medical system in some places. Experts say a sense of urgency is missing, thanks to mixed messaging from the government and

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a lack of incentives to stay home.

In distant, tropical Okinawa, locals have resorted to posting social media appeals to tourists not to visit, "to protect our grannies and grandpas."

"Please cancel your trip to Okinawa and wait until we can welcome you," Okinawa's governor Denny Tamaki tweeted. "Unfortunately Okinawa can provide no hospitality and our medical systems, including on remote islands, are in a state of emergency."

In this country driven by conformity and consensus, the pandemic is pitting those willing to follow the rules against a sizable minority who are resisting the calls to stay home.

To get better compliance, the government needs stronger messaging, said Naoya Sekiya, a University of Tokyo professor and expert of social psychology and risk communications.

A tougher lockdown would also help.

While the halfhearted adherence to the calls to stay home has dismayed Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike, none of those spurning the advice are breaking the law. Legally, the state of emergency can only involve requests for compliance. Violators face no penalties. There are few incentives to close shops.

The main message has been economy first, safety second: Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has insisted Japan will not adopt European-style hard lockdowns that would paralyze the economy. His economy minister heads the government's coronavirus task force meetings.

"The message coming from the government is rather mild, apparently trying to convey the need to stay home while prioritizing the economy," Sekiya said. Since people lack a shared sense of crisis, instead of staying home they're hoping for the best and assuming they won't get infected, he said.

Three-quarters of people responding to a recent survey by the Asahi newspaper said they are going out less than usual. But just over half felt they could comply with Abe's call to reduce their social interactions by 80%.

People of all ages are shrugging off the stay-at-home request. The popular "scramble" intersection in downtown Tokyo's Shibuya looked uncrowded, but eateries and pubs on backstreets were still busy. In the western suburb of Kichijoji, narrow shopping streets were jammed during the weekend with families strolling and heading to lunch. Pachinko pinball parlors have drawn ire for staying open despite name-and-shame announcements and other pressure to close. Bars and restaurants are ignoring a requested 8 p.m. closing time.

"It's ridiculous," said an 80-year-old man drinking Wednesday at a downtown bar. "What am I supposed to do at home? I'd only be watching TV."

Officials are trying to fight back. In Kichijoji, they patrolled shopping arcades carrying banners saying "Please, do not go out." Local mayors appealed to the government to close the crowded Shonan beach, popular with surfers and families, south of Tokyo. Some prefectures have set up border checkpoints to spot non-local license plates.

"It seems not everyone shares the sense of crisis," said Kazunobu Nishikawa, a disaster prevention official in Musashino city, which oversees Kichijoji. "Many people understand the risks of this infectious disease," he said, but "others seem to think COVID-19 is nothing more than a common cold and don't care as long as they don't catch it."

Abe declared the state of emergency on April 7, as virus cases surged. It initially covered only Tokyo and six other areas but later expanded to include the whole country.

Abe did not ask non-essential businesses to close. But Koike, the Tokyo governor, fought and prevailed in requesting that schools, movie theaters, athletic clubs, hostess bars and other such businesses in the city be asked to close. Most restaurants and pubs still can operate from 5 a.m. to 8 p.m., and grocery and convenience stores and public transport remain open as usual.

The government has rolled out an unprecedentedly huge economic package of 108 trillion yen (\$1 trillion) that included loans for small businesses and other coronavirus measures. Responding to criticism he was neglecting individuals and families in dire need of cash to survive, Abe belatedly announced cash payouts of 100,000 yen each to all residents of Japan.

Survey data show the 80% social distancing target has roughly been met during weekends, with the

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numbers of nightlife goers and commuters noticeably lower. But parks and popular outdoor spots in Japan's densely crowded cities are still bustling with people, said Hiroshi Nishiura, a Hokkaido University professor and expert of epidemiological analysis.

Tokyo reported 47 newly confirmed cases on Wednesday, with the total across the nation just over 14,000, though limited testing means the number of infections is likely much higher.

Call center employee Mayumi Shibata is among the many Japanese who cannot fully work from home, partly because much paperwork in this modern nation is still not computerized and most documents must be stamped in person using ink seals.

"I will commute as long as I can keep my job," Shibata said while standing outside the busy downtown Shinagawa train station one recent morning.

With the trains slightly less crowded, conditions for commuting are better, and she tries to take her lunch break outside, if it's not raining, to get some fresh air. "I'm trying not to get infected," she said.

As virus cases surge, Brazil starts to worry its neighbors

By **ALMUDENA CALATRAVA** and **MICHAEL WEISSENSTEIN** Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — Brazil's virtually uncontrolled surge of COVID-19 cases is spawning fear that construction workers, truck drivers and tourists from Latin America's biggest nation will spread the disease to neighboring countries that are doing a better job of controlling the coronavirus.

Brazil, a continent-sized country that shares borders with nearly every other nation in South America, has reported more than 70,000 cases and more than 5,000 deaths, according to government figures and a tally by Johns Hopkins University — far more than any of its neighbors. The true number of deaths and infections is believed to be much higher because of limited testing.

The country's borders remain open, there are virtually no quarantines or curfews and President Jair Bolsonaro continues to scoff at the seriousness of the disease.

The country of 211 million people surpassed China — where the virus began — in the official number of COVID-19 deaths this week, prompting Bolsonaro to say: "So what?"

"I am sorry," the far-right president told journalists. "What do you want me to do?"

In Paraguay, soldiers enforcing anti-virus measures have dug a shallow trench alongside the first 800 feet (244 meters) of the main road entering the city of Pedro Juan Caballero from the neighboring Brazilian city of Punta Porá, to prevent people from walking along the road from Brazil and disappearing into the surrounding city.

Paraguay has fewer than 250 confirmed coronavirus cases and its borders have been closed since March 24, with enforcement particularly focused on the largely open frontier with Brazil.

Argentine officials say they are particularly worried about truck traffic from Brazil, their top trading partner. In provinces bordering Brazil, Argentina is working to set up secure corridors where Brazilian drivers can access bathrooms, get food and unload products without ever coming into contact with Argentines.

"Brazil worries me a lot," Argentine President Alberto Fernández told local news outlets Saturday. "A lot of traffic is coming from Sao Paulo, where the infection rate is extremely high, and it doesn't appear to me that the Brazilian government is taking it with the seriousness that it requires. That worries me a lot, for the Brazilian people and also because it can be carried to Argentina."

One of eight known cases in the Argentine state of Misiones is that of a 61-year-old truck driver who apparently caught the disease in Sao Paulo and then returned to Argentina, where he died after infecting his wife. Argentina has about 4,000 cases and more than 200 dead, according to the Johns Hopkins tally.

Even officials in the United States, which has registered more than 1 million cases and more than 60,000 deaths, have expressed concern about Brazil.

Florida, which has a large population of people of Brazilian heritage, could face a threat of air travelers from Brazil carrying the coronavirus to the state, Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis told President Donald Trump in Washington on Tuesday.

"We could be away on the other side doing well in Florida, and then you could just have people kind of

come in," DeSantis said.

The governor said Trump's ban of flights from China helped control the virus in the western U.S. Trump asked him if that meant "cutting off Brazil."

DeSantis replied that one possibility was "not to necessarily cut them off" but to require airlines to test passengers before they board planes bound for Florida.

Authorities in Colombia are also worried, said Julián Fernández Niño, an epidemiologist at National University in Bogotá.

"In a globalized world, the response to a pandemic can't be closed frontiers," he said. "Brazil has great scientific and economic capacity, but clearly its leadership has an unscientific stance on fighting coronavirus."

In Uruguay, President Luis Lacalle Pou said the spread of the virus in Brazil was setting off "warning lights" in his administration and authorities are tightening border controls in several frontier cities.

Thirty workers recently crossed from Brazil to the Uruguayan border city of Rio Branco to help build a cement plant. Four tested positive for the virus, prompting Uruguay to place the whole crew in quarantine.

Officials in some Uruguayan border towns have discussed setting up "humanitarian corridors" through which Brazilians could safely leave the country.

Even socialist Venezuela, where the health system has been in a yearslong state of collapse, has said it's worried about neighboring Brazil.

"I've ordered the reinforcement of the frontier with Brazil to guarantee an epidemiological and military barrier," President Nicolás Maduro said on state television last week.

Bolivia's government, a right-wing ally of Bolsonaro's, declined to comment on its neighbor's anti-virus measures, but Defense Minister Fernando López promised this month to strongly enforce the closure of the border.

"If we keep being flexible on the border, our national quarantine will be useless," he said.

Trump erupts at campaign team as his poll numbers slide

By **ZEKE MILLER** and **JONATHAN LEMIRE** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump erupted at his top political advisers last week when they presented him with worrisome polling data that showed his support eroding in a series of battleground states as his response to the coronavirus comes under criticism.

As the virus takes its deadly toll and much of the nation's economy remains shuttered, new surveys by the Republican National Committee and Trump's campaign pointed to a harrowing picture for the president as he faces reelection.

While Trump saw some of the best approval ratings of his presidency during the early weeks of the crisis, aides highlighted the growing political cost of the crisis and the unforced errors by Trump in his freewheeling press briefings.

Trump reacted with defiance, incredulous that he could be losing to someone he viewed as a weak candidate.

"I am not f---ing losing to Joe Biden," he repeated in a series of heated conference calls with his top campaign officials, according to five people with knowledge of the conversations. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about private discussions.

The message to the president was sobering: Trump was trailing the former Democratic vice president in many key battleground states, he was told, and would have lost the Electoral College if the election had been held earlier this month.

On the line from the White House, Trump snapped at the state of his polling during a series of calls with campaign manager Brad Parscale, who called in from Florida; RNC chair Ronna McDaniel, on the line from her home in Michigan; senior adviser Jared Kushner; and other aides.

Echoing a number of White House aides and outside advisers, the political team urged Trump to curtail his daily coronavirus briefings, arguing that the combative sessions were costing him in the polls, particularly among seniors. Trump initially pushed back, pointing to high television ratings. But, at least temporarily, he

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agreed to scale back the briefings after drawing sharp criticism for raising the idea that Americans might get virus protection by injecting disinfectants.

Trump aides encouraged the president to stay out of medical issues and direct his focus toward more familiar and politically important ground: the economy.

Even as Trump preaches optimism, the president has expressed frustration and even powerlessness as the dire economic statistics pile up. It's been a whiplash-inducing moment for the president, who just two months ago planned to run for reelection on the strength of an economy that was experiencing unprecedented employment levels. Now, as the records mount in the opposite direction, Trump is feeling the pressure.

"We built the greatest economy in the world," Trump has said publicly. "I'll do it a second time."

Trump's political team warned that the president's path to reelection depends on how quickly he can bring about a recovery.

"I think you'll see by June a lot of the country should be back to normal, and the hope is that by July the country's really rocking again," Kushner told "Fox & Friends" on Wednesday morning. But other aides, business leaders and economists predict a far longer road toward recovery.

Representatives for the RNC and the Trump campaign did not comment on the polling or last week's phone calls. In a tweet just after midnight Wednesday, Trump denied that he had recently shouted at his campaign manager and said that "he is doing a great job."

According to people familiar with the incident, Trump vented much of his frustration at Parscale, who served as the bearer of bad news.

Trump has long distrusted negative poll numbers — telling aides for years that his gut was right about the 2016 race, when he insisted that he was ahead in the Midwest and Florida. At the same time, Parscale and other Trump aides are talking up the sophistication of their data and voter outreach capabilities this time.

The president and some aides have had simmering frustrations with Parscale for a while, believing the campaign manager — a close Kushner ally — has enriched himself from his association with Trump and sought personal publicity. Trump had previously been angered when Parscale was the subject of magazine profiles. This latest episode flared before the campaign manager was featured in a New York Times Magazine profile this week.

Aides have grown particularly worried about Michigan — which some advisers have all but written off -- as well as Florida, Wisconsin and Arizona.

Trump announced Wednesday that he will visit Arizona next week — his first trip outside Washington in a month — as he looks to declare that much of the nation is ready to begin reopening after the virus.

The president has mocked Biden, his presumptive general election rival, for being "stuck in his basement" in his Delaware home during the pandemic.

Trump said Wednesday that he hopes to soon visit Ohio, a battleground state that Trump carried handily in 2016 but that aides see as growing slightly competitive in recent weeks.

Aides acknowledged that the president's signature rallies would not be returning anytime soon. Some have privately offered doubts that he would be able to hold any in his familiar format of jam-packed arenas before Election Day, Nov. 3.

Biden assault allegation prompts GOP attacks, Dem worries

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A sexual assault allegation is raising Joe Biden's first big challenge as the Democrats' presidential nominee, fueling Republican attacks and leaving many in his own party in an uncomfortable bind.

Biden's campaign has denied the allegation from his former Senate staffer Tara Reade, who has said Biden assaulted her in the basement of a Capitol Hill office building in the 1990s. But the story garnered fresh attention this week after two of Reade's associates said she previously told them about elements of her allegations.

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Republicans who are worried about President Donald Trump's increasingly precarious political standing are seizing on the allegation to portray Democrats as hypocrites who only defend women who allege wrongdoing against conservatives. They are digging in despite the fact that it could renew attention on the multiple sexual assault allegations lodged against Trump.

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

The tension is heightened because Biden himself is saying nothing about the allegation.

Like many Americans, he has spent the past several weeks at home to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Biden has participated in a handful of local and national interviews, during which he wasn't asked about the allegation. But he hasn't held a press briefing for the broader press corps that covers him since April 2, before multiple news organizations reported Reade's story. The public appearances he has made, such as fundraisers or events alongside prominent Democrats, have been controlled.

Some Democrats say that approach isn't working and are urging a more forceful response.

"The campaign has issued statements, but he hasn't issued any statements in his own voice," said former Democratic National Committee Chairwoman Donna Brazile. "It's not helping, it's just damaging — not only to the person who has come forward, but it's also damaging the candidate."

Lis Smith, who worked as a top strategist on Pete Buttigieg's presidential campaign, also called on the Biden campaign to speak up.

"These accusations have not been found to be credible, so it's in the Biden campaign's interest to nip this in the bud directly and do it quickly," she said.

The November contest between Biden and Trump will be the first presidential race of the #MeToo era, which has led numerous women to come forward with allegations of sexual assault. Trump himself has been accused of assault and unwanted touching by numerous women, allegations he denies. He was forced to apologize during the 2016 campaign after he was heard on a recording bragging about using his fame to assault women.

Women are a core constituency for Democrats, and Biden has a mixed history. While he wrote the Violence Against Women Act as a senator, he also came under heavy criticism for his handling of Anita Hill's Senate testimony in the 1990s. Just before he launched his 2020 campaign, several women accused him of unwanted touching, behavior for which he apologized.

Biden has pledged to pick a woman as a running mate, and the allegation has left those thought to be in contention in a tough spot.

Stacey Abrams, the former Georgia Democratic governor candidate, said, "Women deserve to be heard, and I believe they need to be listened to, but I also believe that those allegations have to be investigated by credible sources."

"The New York Times did a deep investigation and they found that the accusation was not credible," she added. "I believe Joe Biden."

That echoed talking points issued by the Biden campaign to surrogates last week that were obtained by The Associated Press. They pointed to investigations by The New York Times, The Washington Post and the AP that found no other allegation of sexual assault and no pattern of sexual misconduct.

Some Democratic donors and fundraisers say the issue has not come up in calls with party financiers. Others worry that it could be used against Biden, much as Hillary Clinton's private email server and the activities of the Clinton Foundation were wielded against her by Trump.

Some, most notably women, say they are paying close attention to the allegations, which gave them pause.

Alex Sink, a donor and former Democratic nominee for governor of Florida, said she was "not happy" to read about the allegations against Biden. While she still plans to vote for him, she worried his campaign was too quick to categorically deny Reade's story.

"They put themselves immediately out on a limb by saying, 'It didn't happen, we categorically deny it,

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it's not true," Sink said. "That's a dangerous position to be in because they aren't leaving any room for themselves."

Some female Democratic operatives expressed concerns the allegation is particularly damaging because it's an indictment of Biden's central campaign rationale: that he provides a moral counter to Trump and that the election is a "battle for the soul of America."

"I think the stakes could not be higher for defeating Donald Trump — but at the same time, I think we have to apply a consistent standard for how we treat allegations of sexual assault, and also be clear-eyed about how Donald Trump will use these allegations in the general election campaign," said Claire Sandberg, who worked as Bernie Sanders' organizing director this cycle.

The silence from the Biden campaign has given Republicans an opening on an issue that was, in 2016, far more fraught for the GOP, when Trump was asked to answer for the more than two dozen women who alleged varying levels of sexual assault and harassment from him. The GOP argues Democrats aren't being consistent, pointing to the aggressive questioning and coverage of Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh when he faced an allegation of sexual assault.

"The left, and their media allies, has one standard for Republicans and another standard for Democrats like Joe Biden," said Steve Guest, a spokesman for the Republican National Committee. "The double standard is appalling."

Trump himself has yet to address the issue, but Donald Trump Jr. has spent weeks highlighting the allegation on Twitter, as has Trump's campaign manager Brad Parscale.

Even some Trump antagonists within the GOP say the opportunity for the president and his allies is obvious.

Rick Tyler, a former spokesman for Texas Republican Sen. Ted Cruz and a prominent Trump critic, noted that the coronavirus outbreak and subsequent economic crash have "ruled out any prospect that Republicans could run on great economic times."

"And so what's left? What's left is scorched earth, and that means digging up anything they can about Biden," he said. "They're trying to make Joe Biden into something that's worse than Donald Trump."

Memo says California governor will order all beaches closed

By ADAM BEAM and STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Gov. Gavin Newsom will order all beaches and state parks closed Friday after tens of thousands of people flocked to the seashore last weekend during a heat wave despite his stay-at-home order, according to a memo sent Wednesday evening to police chiefs around the state.

Eric Nuñez, president of the California Police Chiefs Association, said it was sent to give chiefs time to plan ahead of Newsom's expected announcement Thursday.

A message to the governor's office seeking comment wasn't immediately returned.

Newsom this week targeted beachgoers in Orange and Ventura counties, calling them an example of "what not to do" if the state wants to continue its progress fighting the coronavirus. While many beaches and trails throughout the state have been closed for weeks, others have remained open with warnings for visitors to practice social distancing and more have reopened.

In Newport Beach, some 80,000 visitors hit the beach over the weekend, although lifeguards said most people exercised social distancing. With criticism swirling, the Newport Beach City Council met Tuesday and rejected a proposal to close the beaches for the next three weekends.

Nearby Laguna Beach approved a limited reopening. Beaches across San Diego County reopened Monday, with a few exceptions.

The governor's order is sure to draw fire as pressure is building to ease restrictions and slowly reopen the state.

Six San Francisco Bay Area counties that imposed the first broad stay-at-home orders in California because of the coronavirus loosened them — slightly — for the first time Wednesday, joining a growing list of local governments that are cracking the door to a less-restrictive life.

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The announcement was part of a dizzying list of modified orders making it difficult to keep up with what is allowed and what is not. Tennis will be OK in Sacramento starting Friday, but not in San Francisco, where public health officials say it's still not safe for people to share a ball.

Compounding the confusion: Some elements of the revised orders won't take effect because they conflict with the statewide stay-at-home order, which is still in place.

"I want to remind everyone that we must all abide by all the local health orders and the state health orders. That means whichever is stricter, in some cases that is the state order," Santa Clara County legal counsel James Williams said. "It is important that we adhere to the stricter of both."

The Bay Area order allows for landscaping, construction and other outdoor businesses, such as flea markets and nurseries, so long as social distancing is maintained. And in what could be a critical addition for many parents, it specifies that summer camps are allowed, but only for children of people allowed to work under the state order. The children must remain in groups of 12 or fewer and with the same supervisor and may not mingle with kids outside their group.

It's not clear if that element complies with the state order. When asked about it Wednesday, Newsom said it was "a point of clarification" his administration will be discussing with local officials.

The changes in local orders reflect the growing unrest among some residents and government officials over Newsom's order and his plan for a slow and methodical reopening of the nation's most populous state even as other states such as Florida move much more quickly.

With much of the economy closed, more than 3.7 million Californians have filed for unemployment benefits since March 12. In Auburn, northeast of Sacramento, salon owner Tisha Fernhoff said she has started taking an occasional client to help pay her rent and meet other expenses. She's among a smattering of owners across the state who have dodged public health orders that closed their businesses because they are considered nonessential.

Newsom reiterated Wednesday it would be weeks before he makes the first significant modification to the state order, urging people to remain at home to prevent unintended outbreaks among the state's most high-risk populations, including nursing homes.

"It won't be on the basis of pressure, it won't be on the basis of what we want, but what we need to do," Newsom said. "And what we need to do from my humble perspective is listen to the public health experts."

But each of the state's 58 counties have their own public health experts, and many are starting to ask Newsom to open up the state. On Monday, six rural Northern California counties sent a letter to the governor asking him to let them reopen, noting they only had 69 confirmed virus cases among a combined population of 500,000 people.

Santa Clara County Health Director Dr. Sara Cody said local officials have come up with their own metrics to measure infection rates, hospitalizations and testing to ensure that infections don't start rising again. If that happens, she said, stricter rules will be back.

But she acknowledged there may be other health effects from forcing people to stay home, as well as the burgeoning unemployment the pandemic restrictions have caused.

"I wish I could give you a set timeline for when this was going to end. My family asks me, my friends ask me — we don't have a date," she said, noting that there still is no vaccine, so "we are going to need to have protections in place for a very, very long time."

Surf's down in California: Governor will close beaches

By ADAM BEAM and STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Gov. Gavin Newsom will order all beaches and state parks closed starting Friday after people thronged the seashore during a sweltering weekend despite his social distancing order that aims to slow the spread of the coronavirus, according to a memo sent to police chiefs around the state.

Eric Nuñez, president of the California Police Chiefs Association, said it was sent to the group's members Wednesday evening so they have time to plan ahead of Newsom's expected announcement Thursday.

A message to the governor's office seeking comment wasn't immediately returned.

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While most state parks and many local beaches, trails and parks have been closed for weeks, Newsom's order is sure to ignite pushback from communities who argue that they can safely provide some relief to residents who are starved of fresh air.

Pressure is building to ease state and local restrictions that have throttled the economy, closing most businesses and adding nearly 4 million people to the unemployment rolls.

On Wednesday, six San Francisco Bay Area counties that imposed the first broad stay-at-home orders in California because of the coronavirus loosened them slightly to allow for landscaping, construction and other outdoor businesses, such as flea markets and nurseries, so long as social distancing is maintained.

And in what could be a critical addition for many parents, it specifies that summer camps are allowed, but only if kids stay in small groups and their parents are considered to hold essential jobs under the state order, such as health care workers.

Some recreational bans also were eased, but not all in exactly the same way. For instance, tennis will be OK in Sacramento starting Friday, but not in San Francisco.

Compounding the confusion: Some elements of the revised orders won't take effect because they conflict with the statewide stay-at-home order, which is still in place.

In Riverside County, authorities said its local order will end Thursday and be replaced by less-restrictive measures. Trails and parks will be open for hiking, biking and horseback riding as long as visitors wear masks.

Health officials, however, warn that more mingling also brings the potential for more infection and the government should tread gingerly when easing restrictions so as not to ignite another surge in coronavirus cases.

Newsom's beach order follows a weekend in which some 80,000 people flocked to Newport Beach in Orange County, south of Los Angeles, with additional thousands gathering at open beaches in Ventura County, north of LA.

An Orange County supervisor, Donald P. Wagner, issued a statement saying he believes Newsom has the power to close local beaches but "it is not wise to do so."

"Orange County citizens have been cooperative with state and county restrictions thus far. I fear that this overreaction from the state will undermine that cooperative attitude and our collective efforts to fight the disease," he said.

Beaches in Los Angeles County remain closed.

Lifeguards said most people appeared to be heeding social distance safety rules such as limiting groups and not lingering on the sand. But the crowds irked Newsom, who has said California's 40 million residents should try to stay home as much as possible.

"This virus doesn't take the weekends off, this virus doesn't go home because it's a beautiful sunny day around our coasts," he said Monday.

The same day, beaches across San Diego County reopened. A day later, Newport Beach officials rejected a plan to close the city beaches for three consecutive weekends.

California is approaching 50,000 confirmed coronavirus cases and nearly 2,000 deaths, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University, although the number of infections is thought to be far higher because many people have not been tested.

However, virus hospitalizations have been virtually flat for several weeks in California and the state has dodged the dreaded massive surge of patients experienced by New York and several other states.

Newsom has praised Californians for helping "flatten the curve" of the outbreak through social distancing but he also is reluctant to follow the examples of Georgia, Florida and several other states that are moving more rapidly to restart their economies.

Newsom reiterated Wednesday it would be weeks before he makes the first significant modification to the state order, urging people to remain at home to prevent unintended outbreaks among the state's most high-risk populations, including nursing homes.

"It won't be on the basis of pressure, it won't be on the basis of what we want, but what we need to do,"

Newsom said. "And what we need to do from my humble perspective is listen to the public health experts."

But each of the state's 58 counties have their own public health experts, and many are starting to ask Newsom to open up the state. This week, seven rural Northern California counties with low numbers of COVID-19 cases have asked Newsom to let them reopen.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, Santa Clara County Health Director Dr. Sara Cody said local officials have come up with their own metrics to measure infection rates, hospitalizations and testing to ensure that infections don't start rising again. If that happens, she said, stricter rules will be back.

"I wish I could give you a set timeline for when this was going to end. My family asks me, my friends ask me — we don't have a date," she said, noting that there still is no vaccine, so "we are going to need to have protections in place for a very, very long time."

Police called after NYC funeral home puts bodies in trucks

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and DEEPTI HAJELA Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Police were called to a Brooklyn neighborhood Wednesday after a funeral home overwhelmed by the coronavirus resorted to storing dozens of bodies on ice in rented trucks, and a passerby complained about the smell, officials said.

Investigators who responded to a 911 call found that the home had rented four trucks to hold about 50 corpses, according to a law enforcement official. No criminal charges were brought and the official, who was not authorized to speak publicly about the investigation, spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

The Andrew T. Cleckley Funeral Home was cited for failing to control the odors. The home was able to obtain a larger, refrigerated truck later in the day, the official said.

Workers suited up in protective gear could be seen in the afternoon transferring bodies into the refrigerated truck.

A person who answered the phone at the funeral home hung up without speaking. Subsequent calls went to voicemail, which was full.

New York City funeral homes have struggled in the city since late March.

The city set up temporary morgues. Hospitals used refrigerated tractor trailers to cart away multiple bodies at a time, sometimes loading them in public view on the sidewalk. Crematoriums have been backed up. Funeral directors across the city have pleaded for help as they have run out of space.

The NYPD notified the state Department of Health, which oversees funeral homes, about the situation at the Andrew T. Cleckley Funeral Home. It did not respond to an email seeking comment.

Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams went to the scene on Wednesday evening. He told the Daily News, "While this situation is under investigation, we should not have what we have right now, with trucks lining the streets filled with bodies."

He said "it was people who walked by who saw some leakage and detected an odor coming from a truck."

Chalk marks, discipline aid mass protest in virus-era Israel

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Social distancing doesn't come naturally in Israel. But the country, known for its informal, in-your-face mentality, seems to be setting a new standard for public protests in the age of coronavirus.

During the past two weekends, thousands of people have gathered in perfect geometric patterns in Tel Aviv's central square to comply with social distancing rules as they express their anger over the continued rule of a prime minister charged with serious crimes.

The demonstrations, resembling a vast glowing human matrix in stunning aerial photos, have become a symbol of Israel's dueling political and health challenges. They also contrast with some other hot spots of civic unrest at a time when gatherings are restricted or banned around the world.

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"If we want to succeed, we need to do it the right way," said protest organizer Shikma Schwarzmann. "We obey the law."

Civic protests are common in Israel. When the government imposed movement restrictions last month, it made exceptions for protests as long as participants stayed two meters, or six feet, apart.

Schwarzmann, a particle physicist at Israel's renowned Weizmann Institute of Science, said she never intended to become a political activist but was galvanized by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's behavior. Many believe his actions, cloaked in the battle against the coronavirus, are really aimed at avoiding prosecution for corruption charges and remaining in power.

Last month, citing the coronavirus, Netanyahu's hand-picked justice minister all but shuttered the country's court system, postponing the prime minister's trial until May. The middle-of-the-night order came just two days before the trial was to begin.

Days later, a Netanyahu ally suspended parliamentary activity, temporarily preventing opponents from proceeding with legislation that could have barred the Israeli leader from serving as prime minister.

In their first act last month, Schwarzmann, her three brothers and some friends organized what they expected to be a small protest convoy. As word spread on social media, the convoy grew to hundreds of vehicles, many of them stopped by police en route to Jerusalem. Demonstrators honked horns and waved black flags from windows but remained in their cars to comply with public health instructions.

In recent weeks, the grassroots "black flag" movement turned its attention toward the new coalition agreement between Netanyahu and his rival Benny Gantz.

Gantz, who had vowed never to sit in a government with Netanyahu, cited the coronavirus crisis for the about-face. While Israel has largely kept its outbreak in check, over 200 people have died and its economy has been ravaged as unemployment spiked to 25%.

The protesters have held three gatherings in Tel Aviv, with volunteers telling people where to stand by marking the ground with "X's" carefully spaced over six feet apart from one another.

The X's were the idea of one of Schwarzmann's brothers, who brought a large box of chalk with him the first week. Activists have also held smaller demonstrations in Jerusalem.

The Tel Aviv protests have been vocal and visible. Participants wearing face masks hoisted Israeli and black flags, held signs reading "Crime Minister" and beamed their cellphone flashlights into the air for cameras above.

The demonstrators, estimated to be in the thousands, have been orderly. Police say there have been no arrests.

"It's nice to have nice pictures, because it gives us exposure," Schwarzmann said. "But this protest is not about beautiful pictures. The big picture in this country is not that beautiful. That's why we are protesting."

Protests in Israel are not always so mild-mannered.

Jerusalem market vendors barred from opening their vegetable stalls recently scuffled with police. In pre-pandemic times, demonstrations by some groups, including Arab citizens, Ethiopian immigrants and ultra-Orthodox Jewish men, sometimes ended in clashes, with police accused of using a heavy hand. In the occupied West Bank and Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, security forces at times use lethal force against stone throwers.

Demonstrators in some other countries have struggled to adapt to the age of social distancing.

Russia has experienced some online protests, and anti-nuclear activists in Japan are encouraging people to protest on their balconies on May 9.

In other places, including southern Russia, Ukraine, the U.S., Germany, Lebanon and Somalia, protesters have flouted social-distancing rules.

In Hong Kong, which has banned public gatherings of more than four people, a few hundred anti-government protesters recently attempted unsuccessfully to split into small groups and were dispersed by police.

In Lebanon, hundreds of protesters set banks on fire and hurled stones at soldiers in riots triggered by a the country's financial crisis that was exacerbated by a weeks-long virus lockdown. Earlier this week, a man was killed in clashes.

Schwarzmann said she does not expect to demonstrate every week, but that activists will continue to

find creative ways to protest.

A group of business owners, for instance, plans another convoy this week to press for financial help, while a good-government group is organizing another Tel Aviv demonstration on Saturday in support of the Supreme Court, which is to rule on the legality of the new coalition deal next week.

"I don't know if we will succeed. We will try at least to do things that have a chance," she said.

Many field hospitals went largely unused, will be shut down

By MICHAEL R. SISK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Gleaming new tent hospitals sit empty on two suburban New York college campuses, never having treated a single coronavirus patient. Convention centers that were turned into temporary hospitals in other cities went mostly unused. And a Navy hospital ship that offered help in Manhattan is soon to depart.

When virus infections slowed down or fell short of worst-case predictions, the globe was left dotted with dozens of barely used or unused field hospitals. Some public officials say that's a good problem to have — despite spending potentially billions of dollars to erect the care centers — because it's a sign the deadly disease was not nearly as cataclysmic as it might have been.

Many of the facilities will now be kept on standby for a possible second wave of infections. Some could even be repurposed as testing sites or recovery centers.

"It will count as a huge success for the whole country if we never have to use them," said Simon Stevens, the chief executive of the National Health Service in England, where sparsely used field hospitals have been criticized as costly, unnecessary "white elephants."

"But with further waves of coronavirus possible, it is important that we have these extra facilities in place and treating patients," Stevens said.

In Italy and Spain, field hospitals were seen as crucial to relieving strain on emergency rooms as the disease exploded in March. Those countries rank behind only the United States for the largest number of infections and deaths, according to a Johns Hopkins University tally.

Spain built at least 16 field hospitals, ranging from a few beds under tents to one with more than 5,000 beds at Madrid's big convention center. That facility has treated more than 4,000 patients, accounting for 10% of the total infected population in the disease-ravaged capital.

As the crisis eases and permanent hospitals are able to better manage the load, some of Spain's field hospitals are scaling back or shutting down. The Madrid facility halved its capacity and could close in two weeks if infection rates hold.

Spanish Health Minister Salvador Illa said the field hospitals have been important and in some cases "essential."

For all the successes, there have also been missteps.

In Milan, in Italy's hardest-hit region, a field hospital funded with 21 million euro (\$23 million) in private donations came too late and was built too far from the city center to be much help.

The 200-bed hospital, put up in less than two weeks at a conference center on the outskirts of town, opened to great fanfare on March 31, but by then pressure on the region's intensive care units was already starting to fall. It has treated only a few dozen patients.

Italy's national civil protection agency opposed the plan from the start, arguing it could never equip the facility with ventilators or personnel in time. But the regional governor, a member of a rival political party, forged ahead.

"We had to ... prepare a dam in case the epidemic overcame the embankment," Lombardy Governor Attilio Fontana told Italian all-news station Radio 24.

In Berlin, construction and hiring are continuing at a 1,000-bed field hospital dubbed the Corona Center. The project has advanced despite a glut of available hospital beds in the German capital, leading to questions about its usefulness and the 90 million euros (\$97.8 million) it's cost so far.

In New York, the hardest-hit state in the U.S. with nearly 300,000 cases and more than 18,000 deaths,

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Gov. Andrew Cuomo has used the mantra “plan for the worst, hope for the best” to defend his push for field hospitals that have, so far, gone largely unused.

Looking at projections in mid-March that the state would need to double hospital capacity to 110,000 beds by the end of April, Cuomo asked the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to build at least four field hospitals and the Navy to deploy the Navy’s Comfort hospital ship to Manhattan.

At the same time, hospitals were discharging patients to free up beds and adding new ones, and the public was starting to embrace social-distancing measures to stem the spread of infection.

With the number of disease-related hospitalizations cresting far below forecasts, at 18,825 on April 12, just one of the Army Corps-built temporary facilities opened, at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center. It will close Friday after treating little more than 1,000 patients.

The three other field hospitals that Cuomo requested were completed and mothballed for possible future use, including ones on the campuses of Stony Brook University and the State University of New York College at Old Westbury on Long Island. Plans for four other field hospitals were scrapped, and the Comfort is set to leave on Thursday.

The Army Corps of Engineers paid construction firms \$136 million to build the Stony Brook facility and \$116.5 million to build the one on the Old Westbury campus, according to federal contracting data. It gave out at least \$100 million in contracts for since-canceled hospitals at a horse racing track and a city park.

The disparity between Cuomo’s worst-case-scenario planning and what actually happened caught the attention of one critic, President Donald Trump.

“We built you thousands of hospital beds that you didn’t need or use,” he tweeted to his gubernatorial nemesis on April 17.

Similar scenarios have played out across the U.S.

Chicago pared back plans for a 3,000-bed temporary hospital at McCormick Place, the nation’s largest convention center, as infection numbers decreased. Opened April 3 instead with 500 beds, the \$64 million facility treated just 12 people as of last week, with six of them being released.

A 1,000-bed facility at Detroit’s big convention center has treated about three-dozen people, with 16 receiving care there as of Tuesday. Mayor Mike Duggan called the facility’s limited usage a “sign of great success” and said it would soon shut down.

Philadelphia plans to shutter its 200-bed temporary hospital in about two weeks. Open since April 20, it’s never had more than six patients at a time. New Jersey’s four Army Corps-built field hospitals, with a total of 1,000 beds, have treated 346 patients as of Monday.

“Better to build it and they don’t come than to not build it at all,” Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney said.

Meanwhile, in New Orleans, the convention center that provided refuge to survivors of Hurricane Katrina 15 years ago, is seeing about 100 coronavirus patients at any given time as a field hospital.

Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards said he does not have any immediate plans to close the facility, because modeling shows the possibility of an uptick in virus cases in the future. He said the city has no need for the convention space.

“Quite frankly, we’re not going to have conventions coming to New Orleans in the immediate future,” Edwards said.

Skeptics loom as NCAA builds guardrails around compensation

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Sports Writer

For more than 60 years, NCAA leaders have insisted college athletes had to be amateurs and to be amateurs they could not be paid for being athletes — by anybody.

That will no longer be the case. The NCAA announced Wednesday it is moving forward with a plan to allow college athletes to earn money for endorsements and a host of other activities involving personal appearances and social media content.

It’s a big deal — “unprecedented,” Ohio State President and NCAA Board of Governors chairman Michael Drake called it. But there are important details to be sorted out before NCAA membership votes on legisla-

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tion in January and there are plenty skeptical lawmakers and lawyers watching.

"The challenge of evaluating this is we don't know where they have landed yet," said Gabe Feldman, director of the Tulane University sports law program.

While athletes will be able to cash in on their names, images and likenesses as never before, the money won't come from the NCAA, schools or conferences.

The broad plan is to allow athletes to strike deals with third parties, but require them to disclose those agreements with their schools. The NCAA and schools want to regulate for improprieties so payments aren't actually recruiting inducements or pay-for-play schemes.

Guardrails is the word college sports leaders are using to describe those regulations. The next phase is building those guardrails.

There will be no cap on what the athletes can earn, said Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith, who led the group that produced the recommendations approved by the Board of Governors.

That's important because the NCAA is still fighting the appeal of an antitrust case in which the plaintiffs claimed the association and its member schools and conferences have been illegally capping compensation to athletes at the value of a scholarship.

What the NCAA will attempt to do is monitor deals athletes make and require them to disclose details.

Boosters, those who support schools with donations, likely won't be immediately disqualified from working with athletes. But the NCAA fears individuals and companies using business relationships with athletes as cover for paying prospects to attend a particular school.

How to draw that line has yet to be resolved. The NCAA also has to figure out how to assess the fair-market value for an athlete appearing in a television commercial for a local business, signing autographs at a memorabilia shop or promoting a product or event on social media.

"It is still a moving target," Smith said. "But again, we just have to be reasonable. If I do a deal with Panera Bread and I do two likes and they pay me \$50,000 for that, I'm not so sure that is in the realm of what we're talking about."

Big East Commissioner Val Ackerman, co-chair of the working group with Smith, said there has been discussion about creating a third party to make those assessments and manage disclosure.

"This has been referred to alternatively to as a clearinghouse or a registry or an NIL center," Ackerman said. "And I don't know that there would be an approval mechanism, but the notion would be to create the sunshine and the transparency that would allow us to monitor valuations and booster involvement. And if there are some concerning patterns, we would be able to help screen those out or figure out how to address those."

Athletes will not be allowed to use their schools' logos or brands in their personal deals. So if Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence appears in a TV ad, he won't be allowed to wear the school's familiar orange Tiger Paw.

While NCAA leaders celebrated the move as another example of evolving to better serve college athletes, there are plenty of skeptics. The NCAA has been talking with members of Congress about federal legislation that would render moot various state laws and perhaps stave off future legal challenges.

"This proposal is one step forward, one step back," tweeted Sen. Chris Murphy, a Connecticut Democrat who has been pushing for more economic rights for college athletes. "The NCAA wants to limit athlete endorsement deals in a way that could make them totally impractical. And the NCAA wants Congress to give it total power of athletes' compensation. That should be a non-starter."

California lawmakers have already passed a bill that would make it illegal for NCAA schools to prohibit college athletes from making money on endorsements, social media advertising and other activities. The law goes into effect in 2023. Dozens of states have followed California's lead; a Florida bill awaiting the governor's signature would go into effect July 2021.

"Recommendations today by the □□NCAA□ are about protecting their pockets, not student athletes," tweeted Republican Chip LaMarca, a Florida state lawmaker. "Now they are shifting blame for their deliberate inaction to states that have passed meaningful legislation to protect students' right to earn a living."

Jeffrey Kessler, the lead attorney in an antitrust cases against the NCAA that is still in appeals, said the NCAA's move toward NIL compensation for athletes "completely destroys every argument they've made

in the past.”

“Because their defense has been if you allow to permit any type of compensation to the athletes beyond what they call cost of attendance, this will destroy the whole concept of amateurism and destroy fan interest in college sports,” he said.

Kessler said now there is no justification left for any of the NCAA’s restrictions.

NCAA President Mark Emmert had a different take.

“It’s a natural extension,” he said, “of the steps that the NCAA member schools have taken over the past years to constantly improve the college athlete experience as an integral part of higher education.”

Meatpackers welcome Trump order; others question virus risks

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Big meatpacking companies that have struggled to keep plants running during the coronavirus crisis said Wednesday that they welcomed President Donald Trump’s executive order requiring them to stay open, but unions, some employees and Democrats questioned whether workers could be kept safe.

Trump used the Defense Production Act to classify meat processors as critical infrastructure to prevent supermarket shelves from running out of chicken, pork and other meat. Meatpacking plants across the country have closed as COVID-19 infections spread rapidly between workers, who often stand shoulder to shoulder on production lines.

Trump, who consulted with industry leaders before issuing the order, said it would relieve “bottlenecks” that the largest companies faced after workers fell ill and some died.

“They are so thrilled,” Trump said Wednesday after getting off a call with meatpacking executives. “They’re so happy. They’re all gung-ho, and we solved their problems.”

The executive order was widely seen as giving processors protection from liability for workers who become sick on the job. It came soon after a lawsuit accused Smithfield Foods of not doing enough to protect employees at its plant in Milan, Missouri. A federal judge in that case ordered Smithfield to follow federal recommendations.

The United Food and Commercial Workers union said it would appeal to governors for help, asking them to enforce rules that workers be kept 6 feet apart and that employees be provided with N95 masks and access to virus testing.

“Does it make sense to have meat in the markets if it takes the blood of the people who are dying to make it every day?” asked Menbere Tsegay, a worker at the Smithfield Foods plant in South Dakota, where more than 800 workers have confirmed cases of COVID-19. Two people have died, and the plant has been shut down since mid-April.

The threat of the virus has caused workers like Tsegay, a 35-year-old single mother of four children, to weigh whether to risk their health by working. Tsegay said she’s not willing to do that.

“I’d rather starve and wait this out than go back to work,” she said.

Companies have already sought changes to reduce risks by providing personal protective equipment, installing plexiglass shields between workers and reducing congestion by staggering shift start times, among other reforms.

The union said plexiglass barriers should not be used as a substitute for putting workers at a safe distance from one another. Union officials also want to slow down meat processing, including getting rid of waivers that allow plants to operate at faster speeds.

Smithfield Foods, which is working on a plan to reopen the Sioux Falls plant, said in a statement welcoming Trump’s order that it should make for easier access to protective equipment and testing for employees.

Faced with thinning workforces as workers become infected or stay home in fear, meatpacking companies have also put millions of dollars towards boosting pay and giving workers bonuses to encourage healthy workers to stay on the job.

But Jim Roth, director of the Center for Food Security and Public Health at Iowa State University, said

meatpacking plants will likely continue to have problems finding enough workers operate at full capacity.

"There's a shortage of workers to begin with, and then with the illnesses and the need to self-quarantine for 14 days after exposure, I'm not clear where the workers come from to keep the plants open," Roth said.

Trump's order called on the Department of Agriculture to ensure that plants stay open. The USDA said in a statement Wednesday that a team including the Department of Labor and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention would review companies' mitigation plans "and work in consultation with the state and local authorities to resume and/or ensure continuity of operations at these critical facilities."

Twenty meatpacking workers have died nationwide, and another 5,000 have been infected by the virus or shown symptoms of COVID-19, according to the union, which represents roughly 80% of beef and pork workers and 33% of poultry workers nationwide.

Trump promised Wednesday that a report on protecting workers would be coming soon.

Federal agencies have already issued recommendations for operating plants that largely track with steps many companies say they have already taken.

Wendell Young, president of the Philadelphia chapter of the union, described Trump's order as an attempt to appeal to voters rather than to ensure protections.

Marshall Tanick, an employment lawyer in Minneapolis, said the order "does not necessarily immunize" meatpackers from lawsuits.

Legislation to give employers immunity in these situations has been proposed, but it's "very unlikely that anything like that will be enacted soon at the federal level," Tanick said. He said such measures might be easier to achieve at the state level, because it's less burdensome. Without specific legislation immunizing employers, they act at their own risk.

In Worthington, Minnesota, where a JBS pork plant closed last week because of the virus, U.S. House Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson and Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz said Wednesday that they hope the plant can reopen soon — but only if workers are protected.

"No executive order is going to get those hogs processed if the people who know how to do it are sick, or do not feel like they can be there," Walz said.

Marisol Avelar, who works at the Worthington plant, said she dreads the call from management telling her to come back. But she said her three children depend on her, and she has no other job prospects in town.

"At the moment they tell me I'm going to work, I'm going to need the money," she said.

Biden assault allegation prompts GOP attacks, Dem worries

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A sexual assault allegation is raising Joe Biden's first big challenge as the Democrats' presidential nominee, fueling Republican attacks and leaving many in his own party in an uncomfortable bind.

Biden's campaign has denied the allegation from his former Senate staffer Tara Reade, who has said Biden assaulted her in the basement of a Capitol Hill office building in the 1990s. But the story garnered fresh attention this week after two of Reade's associates said she previously told them about elements of her allegations.

Republicans who are worried about President Donald Trump's increasingly precarious political standing are seizing on the allegation to portray Democrats as hypocrites who only defend women who allege wrongdoing against conservatives. They are digging in despite the fact that it could renew attention on the multiple sexual assault allegations lodged against Trump.

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

The tension is heightened because Biden himself is saying nothing about the allegation.

Like many Americans, he has spent the past several weeks at home to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Biden has participated in a handful of local and national interviews, during which he wasn't asked

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about the allegation. But he hasn't held a press briefing for the broader press corps that covers him since April 2, before multiple news organizations reported Reade's story. The public appearances he has made, such as fundraisers or events alongside prominent Democrats, have been controlled.

Some Democrats say that approach isn't working and are urging a more forceful response.

"The campaign has issued statements, but he hasn't issued any statements in his own voice," said former Democratic National Committee Chairwoman Donna Brazile. "It's not helping, it's just damaging — not only to the person who has come forward, but it's also damaging the candidate."

Lis Smith, who worked as a top strategist on Pete Buttigieg's presidential campaign, also called on the Biden campaign to speak up.

"These accusations have not been found to be credible, so it's in the Biden campaign's interest to nip this in the bud directly and do it quickly," she said.

The November contest between Biden and Trump will be the first presidential race of the #MeToo era, which has led numerous women to come forward with allegations of sexual assault. Trump himself has been accused of assault and unwanted touching by numerous women, allegations he denies. He was forced to apologize during the 2016 campaign after he was heard on a recording bragging about using his fame to assault women.

Women are a core constituency for Democrats, and Biden has a mixed history. While he wrote the Violence Against Women Act as a senator, he also came under heavy criticism for his handling of Anita Hill's Senate testimony in the 1990s. Just before he launched his 2020 campaign, several women accused him of unwanted touching, behavior for which he apologized.

Biden has pledged to pick a woman as a running mate, and the allegation has left those thought to be in contention in a tough spot.

Stacey Abrams, the former Georgia Democratic governor candidate, said, "Women deserve to be heard, and I believe they need to be listened to, but I also believe that those allegations have to be investigated by credible sources."

"The New York Times did a deep investigation and they found that the accusation was not credible," she added. "I believe Joe Biden."

That echoed talking points issued by the Biden campaign to surrogates last week that were obtained by The Associated Press. They pointed to investigations by The New York Times, The Washington Post and the AP that found no other allegation of sexual assault and no pattern of sexual misconduct.

Some Democratic donors and fundraisers say the issue has not come up in calls with party financiers. Others worry that it could be used against Biden, much as Hillary Clinton's private email server and the activities of the Clinton Foundation were wielded against her by Trump.

Some, most notably women, say they are paying close attention to the allegations, which gave them pause.

Alex Sink, a donor and former Democratic nominee for governor of Florida, said she was "not happy" to read about the allegations against Biden. While she still plans to vote for him, she worried his campaign was too quick to categorically deny Reade's story.

"They put themselves immediately out on a limb by saying, 'It didn't happen, we categorically deny it, it's not true,'" Sink said. "That's a dangerous position to be in because they aren't leaving any room for themselves."

Some female Democratic operatives expressed concerns the allegation is particularly damaging because it's an indictment of Biden's central campaign rationale: that he provides a moral counter to Trump and that the election is a "battle for the soul of America."

"I think the stakes could not be higher for defeating Donald Trump — but at the same time, I think we have to apply a consistent standard for how we treat allegations of sexual assault, and also be clear-eyed about how Donald Trump will use these allegations in the general election campaign," said Claire Sandberg, who worked as Bernie Sanders' organizing director this cycle.

The silence from the Biden campaign has given Republicans an opening on an issue that was, in 2016, far more fraught for the GOP, when Trump was asked to answer for the more than two dozen women

who alleged varying levels of sexual assault and harassment from him. The GOP argues Democrats aren't being consistent, pointing to the aggressive questioning and coverage of Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh when he faced an allegation of sexual assault.

"The left, and their media allies, has one standard for Republicans and another standard for Democrats like Joe Biden," said Steve Guest, a spokesman for the Republican National Committee. "The double standard is appalling."

Trump himself has yet to address the issue, but Donald Trump Jr. has spent weeks highlighting the allegation on Twitter, as has Trump's campaign manager Brad Parscale.

Even some Trump antagonists within the GOP say the opportunity for the president and his allies is obvious.

Rick Tyler, a former spokesman for Texas Republican Sen. Ted Cruz and a prominent Trump critic, noted that the coronavirus outbreak and subsequent economic crash have "ruled out any prospect that Republicans could run on great economic times."

"And so what's left? What's left is scorched earth, and that means digging up anything they can about Biden," he said. "They're trying to make Joe Biden into something that's worse than Donald Trump."

Russia slams US arguments for low-yield nukes

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — The Russian Foreign Ministry on Wednesday rejected U.S. arguments for fielding low-yield nuclear warheads, warning that an attempt to use such weapons against Russia would trigger an all-out nuclear retaliation.

The U.S. State Department argued in a paper released last week that fitting the low-yield nuclear warheads to submarine-launched ballistic missiles would help counter potential new threats from Russia and China. It charged that Moscow in particular was pondering the use of non-strategic nuclear weapons as a way of coercion in a limited conflict — an assertion that Russia has repeatedly denied.

The State Department noted that the new supplemental warhead "reduces the risk of nuclear war by reinforcing extended deterrence and assurance."

The Russian Foreign Ministry sees it otherwise.

The ministry's spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, commented on the State Department's paper at a briefing on Wednesday, emphasizing that the U.S. shouldn't view its new low-yield warheads as a flexible tool that could help avert an all-out nuclear conflict with Russia.

"Any attack involving a U.S. submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM), regardless of its weapon specifications, would be perceived as a nuclear aggression," Zakharova said. "Those who like to theorize about the flexibility of American nuclear potential must understand that in line with the Russian military doctrine such actions are seen as warranting retaliatory use of nuclear weapons by Russia."

Zakharova cast the U.S. deployment of low-yield warheads as a destabilizing move that would result in "lowering the nuclear threshold."

U.S.-Russian differences on nuclear arms issues come as relations between Moscow and Washington are at post-Cold War lows over the Ukrainian crisis and the accusations of Russian meddling in the U.S. 2016 presidential election.

Last year, both Moscow and Washington withdrew from the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

The only U.S.-Russian nuclear arms control agreement still standing is the New START treaty, which was signed in 2010 by U.S. President Barack Obama and then-Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. The pact limits each country to no more than 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads and 700 deployed missiles and bombers and envisages sweeping on-site inspections to verify the compliance.

Russia has offered to extend the New START that expires in February 2021, while the Trump administration has pushed for a new arms control pact that would also include China. Moscow has described that idea as unfeasible, pointing at Beijing's refusal to negotiate any deal that would reduce its much smaller nuclear arsenal.

In a statement Wednesday marking the 10th anniversary of signing the New START, the Russian Foreign Ministry hailed the treaty as an instrument that helps ensure predictability in the nuclear sphere and reaffirmed Moscow's offer to extend it without any preconditions.

UK now has world's third-highest virus-related death toll

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The U.K. has the third-highest coronavirus death toll in the world after the British government published new figures Wednesday that include deaths outside of hospitals.

After factoring in deaths in all settings such as care homes, the number of people in Britain who have died after testing positive for the virus has now hit 26,097, way ahead of the 21,678 announced on Tuesday. Until now, hospital deaths have been reported daily, while deaths in nursing homes and other settings were reported separately on a weekly basis.

Under the new measurement, the U.K. has leapfrogged Spain and France in Europe, with only Italy ahead. The U.S. has the world's highest death toll.

The upward revision prompted renewed criticism of the government's approach throughout the crisis. The new leader of the main opposition Labour Party, Keir Starmer, said the scale of deaths in the U.K. is "truly dreadful" and has accused the Conservative government of being too slow in putting the country into lockdown, in testing people for the virus and in getting critical protective gear for medical workers.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab sought to ease any worries, saying the additional deaths were a cumulative total going back to March 2.

"They don't represent a sudden surge in the number of deaths," he said at the government's daily press briefing.

In spite of that, it is becoming increasingly clear that the U.K. could end up with the second-highest coronavirus death toll in the world, partly because Italy is considered to be around a couple of weeks ahead in the epidemic.

There is also an acknowledgement that the new figures underestimate the total death toll in care homes as they only include those who have tested positive for the coronavirus. Also, the death certificates of those dying in care homes can take a couple of weeks to be issued.

Professor Yvonne Doyle, medical director at Public Health England, said the new figures, which her organization helped to compile, provide "a comprehensive picture, and this is most important for control."

In spite of the grim death news, the trends in most of the virus-related numbers are heading in the right direction. The number of people being hospitalized with the coronavirus has been falling for the best part of three weeks, particularly in London, which was the epicenter of the outbreak in the country. Also the number of coronavirus-related deaths are falling when measured on a seven-day rolling basis.

Doyle said she could not yet say whether deaths in care homes were falling but that "we should know that soon because the hospital curve has declined."

Raab said it was too soon for the government to make an assessment as to whether its five tests on easing the lockdown restrictions have been met. Among those tests are a "sustained and consistent fall" in daily coronavirus-related daily deaths, and reliable data showing that the rate of inflection has moderated to manageable levels.

"We are coming through the peak but we are not there yet, which is why we are keeping our focus on the social distancing measures," he said.

The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, or SAGE, is due to deliver its latest advice to ministers in the next few days but all the signs are that the government will extend most of the lockdown restrictions from May 7.

Earlier this week on his return to work after recovering from COVID-19, Prime Minister Boris Johnson, said the country was at "the moment of maximum risk." Johnson missed Prime Minister's Questions earlier Wednesday because his partner gave birth to a baby boy.

COVID-19 showing suburbs are just as vulnerable as cities

By DAVID PORTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Haunting images of an empty Times Square and the daily accounting of hundreds of fatalities in New York City have reinforced the idea of the coronavirus as an urban contagion.

That may obscure an equally sobering truth: Many of the city's suburbs have been hit just as hard. In some, there have been more fatalities per capita than in super-dense Manhattan.

The virus's rampage through the New York metro region, from the well-to-do towns along Connecticut's coastline to the bedroom communities of northern New Jersey and Long Island, offers a counterweight to the notion of the suburbs, with their plentiful open spaces, as safe havens.

"You expect to see it spread more rapidly in densely populated areas like cities, but it does that anywhere the virus is introduced and where people are in contact with other people," said Dr. Stephen Morse, professor of epidemiology at Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health in New York. "All it needs is fertile soil because it spreads quite well, unfortunately."

The first sustained outbreak to be detected in the New York metropolitan area occurred in the suburb of New Rochelle, where an attorney who had attended large gatherings at a local synagogue was the first to test positive.

Another cluster sprang up 5 miles west of the city in Teaneck, New Jersey. The first New Jersey resident to die, 69-year-old horse racing veteran John Brennan, lived in northern New Jersey and worked at a racetrack in Yonkers, a New York suburb.

According to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University, Rockland County, New York, has reported roughly 3,500 positive cases per 100,000 residents, nearly triple the rate in Manhattan and more than double the rate in Brooklyn. Westchester County, which includes New Rochelle, has a rate of nearly 2,900 cases per 100,000 residents.

If the five New Jersey counties closest to New York were a country, they would have recorded the 12th most cases in the world, more than 59,000 through Tuesday.

At Hudson Regional Hospital in Secaucus, New Jersey, just west of Manhattan, the volume of patients had quadrupled by early April, forcing the emergency room to divert patients several times, hospital CEO Dr. Nizar Kifaieh said, though the numbers have decreased recently.

Dr. Tanaya Bhowmick, an infectious disease physician and assistant professor at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School in New Jersey, said her patients who have underlying immune issues have been taking precautions. But she recently saw a group of youths playing basketball in her suburban neighborhood.

"There might be the perception that they're a little more safe here, which obviously isn't true," she said.

Tracking the virus's path can yield some surprises. The first several people to test positive for the coronavirus in Connecticut actually had a strain that was linked to the outbreak in Washington state, said Nathan Grubaugh, an assistant professor of epidemiology at the Yale School of Public Health. He is leading a study with other researchers that is using genomic testing to chart the spread of the virus across the U.S. and into Connecticut.

After those first cases, data showed Connecticut residents were testing positive for a virus similar to the strains in New York, which have been linked to those in Europe, Grubaugh said.

It wasn't surprising to Stamford Mayor David Martin that his city of about 130,000 people would be one of the hardest hit in the state.

Downtown Stamford is less than 10 miles from the New York state line and less than an hour from Manhattan by train. Nearly 1,800 Stamford residents have tested positive for the coronavirus, by far the highest total among the state's 169 cities and towns.

"The reality is that ... in normal times we have 30,000 people get on or get off the train at the Stamford train station and a big chunk of those people are traveling to or from New York City," Martin said. "With a wide diversity of socioeconomic status that are basically right here next to the New York epicenter, it has been a struggle for us."

Commuting patterns can partly explain the virus's spread in the New York region. Subway ridership in

the city tops 5 million on an average weekday, and according to a recent study by the city's planning commission, about 1 million people travel into New York each day from the surrounding counties — and a quarter-million go in the opposite direction — many on public transportation that is routinely overcrowded.

The picture is more complicated, though. An Associated Press study of COVID-19 cases by zip code in New York City has found, for example, more cases per capita in Staten Island, the least congested of the five boroughs and the one not served by the city's subway system, than in some of the more densely populated areas of Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens.

Bergen County Executive James Tedesco, whose county has the highest number of cases in New Jersey, said officials were initially able to track the virus's spread along the most heavily used bus and train lines. As other outbreaks followed, he has waged an ongoing campaign, mostly successful, to stress the importance of social distancing to the county's approximately 932,000 residents.

"Some people have a behavior that says, 'I don't care;' that's the small minority still, and I'm happy about that," Tedesco said. "I get it, it's not easy. But I have lost an uncle, my cousin lost her father and her husband in the last three weeks, and a friend of mine lost his wife. This isn't the flu."

NYC mayor takes heat after lashing out at Jewish funeral

By **MARINA VILLENEUVE, MICHAEL HILL and KAREN MATTHEWS** Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio defended his tweets criticizing a large Orthodox Jewish funeral. Gov. Andrew Cuomo said daily deaths are down but still "disgustingly high." Front-line health care workers and first responders will be mass tested for antibodies.

Here are the latest coronavirus-related developments in New York:

FUNERAL DISPERSED

De Blasio oversaw the dispersal of a large, tightly packed Hasidic Jewish funeral Tuesday night and lashed out at the mourners who had gathered in defiance of social distancing rules intended to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

"My message to the Jewish community, and all communities, is this simple: the time for warnings has passed," de Blasio tweeted after police dispersed the funeral in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn.

In another tweet, de Blasio called the large gathering, the latest in a string of ultra-Orthodox funerals to be broken up by police, "absolutely unacceptable."

"What I saw WILL NOT be tolerated so long as we are fighting the Coronavirus," he wrote.

Images posted on social media show hundreds of people on the street for the funeral of a rabbi who had died of COVID-19. Some mourners wore face coverings.

There were no arrests, but Police Commissioner Dermot Shea said Wednesday that a dozen summonses were issued citing social distancing violations and refusal to disperse.

Shea said that mourners who defy the state's ban are not only risking giving the virus to each other, but potentially also exposing officers who have to respond for crowd control.

"You are putting my cops' lives at risk, and it's unacceptable," Shea said.

Critics, however, assailed de Blasio for the language in his tweet chiding "the Jewish community" for the actions of members of one sect.

World Jewish Congress President Ronald S. Lauder said Wednesday he was recommending that the group formally censure de Blasio.

"I agree with the Mayor that social distancing is vitally important — and last night's gathering was not appropriate," Lauder said in a statement. "But to blame the entire Jewish community is the type of stereotyping that is dangerous and unacceptable at any time, and particularly pernicious while the world is gripped in fear and the worst among us are looking for scapegoats."

Anti-Defamation League CEO Jonathan Greenblatt tweeted that generalizing about the whole Jewish population of New York City "is outrageous especially when so many are scapegoating Jews."

Others noted the crowds that gathered earlier Tuesday to watch a flyover by the Navy's Blue Angels and

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the Air Force's Thunderbirds to honor health-care workers.

"Only bigots have a problem when a few 100 Hasidim do what thousands of people in the same city have done the same day (not social distance)," the Orthodox Jewish Public Affairs Council tweeted.

De Blasio said Wednesday that he was sorry if his words hurt anyone's feelings but he didn't regret calling out what he characterized as a dangerous violation of social distancing rules.

"If you saw anger and frustration, you're right. I spoke out of real distress," the mayor said. "It's not like people gathering in the park. This was thousands of people," he said. "What I saw, I have not seen anywhere else."

Adherence to social distancing guidelines has been a challenge in some Orthodox Jewish communities, where trust in secular authorities is low.

Leaders of several U.S. Orthodox organizations issued a statement last month urging people to heed social distancing rules after the Fire Department had to break up a large Orthodox wedding in Brooklyn.

THE NUMBERS

New York reported 330 new COVID-19 deaths, continuing a trend of daily fatalities decreasing slowly over the past three weeks.

"The decline has been slow at best and still disgustingly high," Cuomo said Wednesday.

The virus has claimed just over 18,000 lives statewide since the outbreak began last month, according to state figures. The state total doesn't include more than 5,300 New York City deaths that were attributed to the virus on death certificates but weren't confirmed by a lab test.

Cuomo said virus-related hospitalization rates continue to tick down. But the number of new hospital admissions is holding at around 950 people a day.

The coronavirus causes mild symptoms in many, but it can cause serious illness or death for some, particularly older adults and those with certain health conditions.

ANTIBODY TESTS FOR FRONT-LINE WORKERS

De Blasio announced Wednesday that antibody testing to show whether a person was previously infected with the coronavirus will be offered to 150,000 health care workers and first responders under a partnership with the federal Department of Health and Human Services. The testing will begin next week and will take place at the front-line workers' workplaces, the mayor said.

A positive antibody test does not guarantee immunity to the virus, and the mayor said health care workers and first responders should not let down their guard or shed protective equipment. Still, he said, a positive antibody test should offer some reassurance.

"Anyone who has been infected and came through obviously had the ability to beat this disease," de Blasio said. "Knowing you've been exposed to it is powerful information."

MANY MASKS

A towering collage of hundreds of multi-colored face masks sent to New York to help fight the outbreak was unveiled by Cuomo at his daily briefing.

Five days after highlighting the generosity of a retired Kansas farmer who donated a mask, Cuomo said thousands more have come in from across the country.

The mix of masks included homemade coverings decorated with little hand prints, stripes and tie-dyed patterns. One read "I Love NY." Cuomo called it a "self-portrait of America."

"This is just people's way of saying we care and we want to help," he said. "This is what this country's about. And this is what America's about."

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Many of New York City's suburbs have also been hit hard by the outbreak. In some, there have been more fatalities per capita than in Manhattan.

In cities around the world, public transportation systems are key to getting workers back on the job. Yet

methods of getting around will have to be re-imagined for the coronavirus era.

New York City's arts community — dancers, actors, visual artists and designers, who never made much income to start with — is especially suffering, imperiling New York City as a creative capital.

Goodell reduces salary to \$0, NFL workers taking pay cuts

By BARRY WILNER AP Pro Football Writer

Commissioner Roger Goodell has reduced his salary to \$0 and other NFL employees will be taking pay cuts or furloughs due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Goodell, who makes upward of \$30 million a year from salaries and bonuses, voluntarily had his salary reduced this month, a person familiar with the move tells The Associated Press on Wednesday. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the NFL has not announced the move publicly.

The league also is implementing tiered reductions in base salary, beginning with the pay period ending May 22. The reduction will be 5% for workers up to the manager's level, 7% for directors, 10% for vice presidents, 12% for senior vice presidents, and 15% for executive vice presidents.

In a memo sent to league office staffers, Goodell also said no employee earning a base salary of less than \$100,000 will be affected by these reductions, and no employee's salary will be reduced below \$100,000 by the reductions.

"We hope that business conditions will improve and permit salaries to be returned to their current levels, although we do not know when that will be possible," Goodell said.

While the NFL has gone about business as usual with free agency and the draft — and currently is planning to play a full season beginning in September — it clearly is feeling the same economic pinch as other sports. Even as it extended its streaming deal with Amazon Prime for Thursday night games for another three years on Wednesday, the league was making in-house financial adjustments.

That means furloughs and adjustments to pension plans.

The furlough program "for individuals in our workforce who are unable to substantially perform their duties from home and/or whose current workload has been significantly reduced," Goodell wrote, will become effective May 8.

Those being furloughed will be alerted in the next few days, and they will keep medical, dental and vision benefits, with the league paying the full cost of maintaining those benefits.

"It is important to remember that a furlough is not a termination," Goodell told league staffers. "We do not know how long a furlough will last, but we are hopeful that we will be able to return furloughed employees back to work within a few months."

Pension plan and other contributions will be reduced from 15% to 10% of eligible compensation and is a permanent change which takes effect on July 1.

"The NFL is not immune to the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and it is our obligation to take responsible steps to protect the business and manage through this crisis as effectively as possible," Goodell wrote.

"These decisions were difficult and we know these measures will cause hardship for those impacted. I encourage everyone to continue to identify ways of operating more efficiently and reducing costs. If we do that, I believe that furloughs and compensation reductions can be limited, or in time even reversed.

"I assure you that we will continue to monitor economic conditions, communicate with you promptly and openly — whether the news is good or bad — and have your interests in mind as decisions are made going forward."

The NFL plans to release its regular-season schedule around the second week in May, and currently is allowing virtual workouts coordinated by teams. It has an owners meeting scheduled for the Los Angeles area in late May that likely will become a video conference instead.

Training camps wouldn't open before the end of July. The first major event of the summer would be the Pro Football Hall of Fame game on Aug. 6 and inductions on Aug. 8. All of those, of course, must be considered tentative at this time.

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America First meets global pandemic, testing Trump worldview

By MICHAEL TACKETT and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

When terrorists struck the United States on Sept. 11, Nicholas Burns was the U.S. ambassador to NATO, and one memory still stands out: how swiftly America's allies invoked Article Five of the organization's charter, that an attack on one member was an attack on all.

It was a kinship among nations nurtured over decades and a muscular display of collective defense that has defined much of the post World War II era. It is also a worldview that Burns finds starkly at odds with President Donald Trump's "America First" foreign policy as NATO's members and other countries suffer from the deadly weight of the coronavirus pandemic.

America First has been a ready applause line for Trump, but now it is also a philosophy being put to a life-or-death test, with much of the world still looking to the U.S. for leadership and assistance.

Burns, a Harvard professor and a former top U.S. diplomat who served Republican and Democratic presidents, said it was "entirely reasonable and rational" to focus inward "in the first weeks of the crisis in March. The president's job is to protect the people of the United States. ... Having said that, I think it is abundantly clear that we cannot succeed in fighting the pandemic and confront the global economic collapse if we are not cooperating globally."

"The America First attitude is a very fixed set of beliefs about the world and our role in it," said Burns, who is also an informal adviser to former Vice President Joe Biden, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee. "He thinks that alliances and partnerships weaken us and slow us down. He's not an isolationist. He's a unilateralist. That has not worked well the last three years."

Trump's guiding foreign policy mixed with his "I alone can fix it" ethos has made him an unpredictable partner for America's allies, who continue to struggle with how to manage the president and fortify strategic ties with the United States.

During the pandemic, Trump has been accused by allies like Germany and Canada of disrupting shipments of medical supplies, saying that the U.S. needed them first. But he has also offered to provide ventilators to other nations, both among allies and foes.

"President Trump has done a masterful job in the face of an unprecedented crises – safeguarding the health and well-being of the American people by ensuring our citizens have what they need first – then providing assistance to allies through an historic coordination of international efforts," Hogan Gidley, the deputy White House press secretary, said in a statement.

For much of his presidency, though, Trump has been alliance averse. He has withdrawn from the Iran nuclear deal and Paris climate treaty while threatening to do the same for NATO. And he has rattled some of the United States' longest allies with aggressive rhetoric on trade deals and military alliances alike.

He has favored authoritarian leaders like President Vladimir Putin of Russia, Xi Jinping of China and Kim Jong Un of North Korea over those like German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron.

Now China has also moved to fill a gap in humanitarian aid in the form of supplies. Trump has become more bellicose toward China, saying that the country withheld critical information about the coronavirus outbreak and would pay an unspecified later price for it.

"This pandemic crisis shows the inherent limits to the 'America First' foreign policy," said Richard Haass, another top diplomat in both Bush administrations and president of the Council on Foreign Relations. "Sovereignty is not a guarantee of security. Borders aren't impermeable; oceans aren't moats. We were vulnerable to an infection that began in Wuhan, and it proves that globalization is a reality rather than a choice."

Had Trump truly implemented America First, he said, the nation would have been better prepared. "A true American First national security policy would have had in place more testing, ventilators, PPE. It would have been more self-reliant. This moment shows that America First is more of a slogan than a reality."

But Steve Bannon, a former senior adviser to Trump, said that America First does not mean America alone. "It means prioritizing national interest and that strong allies matters. You don't turn your back on them. America doesn't need to abandon a leadership position. It needs to be a global leader, the global

leader. But you prioritize what you need.”

Bannon said the crisis also underscored the lack of U.S. capacity to manufacture medical equipment and pharmaceuticals, businesses that have located primarily in China and India because of lower production costs. “This pandemic underscores that public health is a national security issue,” he said, adding, “A new nationalism is going to be coming out of this: a stronger America, a more focused America.”

The notion of America First flourished during World War I and was promoted by Republicans and Democrats alike until World War II. After World War II, when the U.S. emerged as a superpower, the country took on an expansionist view of how spreading American ideals and building alliances could ensure peace and the U.S. standing in the world.

The grandest show of influence was the Marshall Plan, when the U.S. spent about \$800 billion in today’s dollars to rebuild Western Europe after World War II, an investment that built alliances that endure today, even though some of them have grown fragile in the Trump era.

“Broadly, the president has failed his Harry Truman moment,” said Benn Steil, the author of the award-winning book “The Marshall Plan: Dawn of the Cold War.” “He had the best opportunity he would ever have to show the world he could rally his nation and its allies around a pandemic response that would highlight the best features of democracy and capitalism – as the Marshall Plan did.”

Instead, Steil said, he is “hearing shock and disappointment” from colleagues abroad. “They have never seen a United States so dysfunctional that it cannot even protect its own citizens, let alone mitigate suffering abroad and rally cooperation among allies.”

Unemployment surge pushing state funds toward insolvency

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — A surge in unemployment stemming from the coronavirus shutdown of large parts of the U.S. economy is starting to push some state jobless funds toward insolvency.

At least a half-dozen states already have notified the federal government that they could need to borrow billions of dollars to pay unemployment benefits because their own trust funds are running out of money.

While the shortfalls won’t prevent unemployed workers from getting government aid, the federal loans could lead to higher taxes for businesses in future years to repay the debt.

U.S. Treasury data shows California, Connecticut and Illinois all expect to borrow soon from the federal government to prop up their unemployment funds. Officials in Massachusetts, New York and Texas confirmed to The Associated Press that they also have notified the federal government of their anticipated need for loans.

All six of those states’ unemployment funds ranked among those at the greatest risk of insolvency because they didn’t have adequate reserves to weather a recession, according to a U.S. Department of Labor report released before the coronavirus outbreak. Many more states also could need federal loans given the widespread economic damage.

“I can’t imagine a state that’s not going to have to borrow by the end of this year,” said Michele Evermore, a senior policy analyst at the National Employment Law Project, a New York-based group that advocates for low-wage workers and the unemployed.

As of mid-April, about 26 million Americans had filed unemployment claims in the first five weeks since governments began ordering people to stay home and some businesses to close as a precaution against spreading the virus that causes the COVID-19 disease. It’s already the worst stretch of job losses in U.S. history. New unemployment data to be released Thursday is expected to push that total even higher.

State unemployment benefits are funded by special taxes on employers and paid through state trust funds. Each state sets its own tax rate and benefit payment amounts. When trust funds run low, states can get federal loans that must be repaid with interest. Loans taken out this year would need to be repaid by November 2022, or else the federal government could raise taxes on businesses to recoup the money.

A law signed by President Donald Trump last month waived the interest on state unemployment loans through the end of this year. But that’s a shorter reprieve than was granted during the Great Recession,

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when interest was waived from February 2009 through December 2010.

The last recession led to the insolvency of unemployment trust funds in 35 states that collectively racked up more than \$40 billion of debt to keep paying unemployed workers. It took years for states to repay that.

"Unfortunately, many of them got caught in this vicious cycle now, where they spent most of the 11 years of economic growth looking backwards, paying off the prior accrued debt rather than being able to save and invest for this current crisis," said Jared Walczak, director of state tax policy at the Tax Foundation, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit.

From the beginning of March through mid-April, state unemployment trust funds have declined by a median of 10%, according to an AP analysis of U.S. Treasury data. But the drop has been far more dramatic in states that were among the first to shut down their economies and among the quickest to pay benefits to the unemployed.

Massachusetts, which provides among the most generous unemployment benefits nationally, saw its trust fund cut in half from early March to mid-April, from \$1.6 billion to less than \$750 million. That marked the largest percentage decline nationally.

In a letter to the U.S. labor secretary, Gov. Charlie Baker estimated the state could need to borrow \$1.2 billion in May and June to pay unemployment benefits.

New York's unemployment trust fund also declined by nearly half during that six-week period, from almost \$2.5 billion to less than \$1.3 billion. The state has applied for up to \$4 billion in federal loans, said New York Department of Labor spokeswoman Deanna Cohen.

How much help New York ultimately needs will depend on how many more people seek unemployment benefits and how long they are without work, Gov. Andrew Cuomo said.

"But it's in the billions of dollars," he said. "There's no doubt about that."

At the start of this year, California's trust fund had barely one-fifth of the recommended amount needed to weather a recession, the worst rating among all states. Its trust fund balance fell from \$3.1 billion in early March to \$1.9 billion in mid-April and has continued to slide.

The state could need to start borrowing from the federal government by the beginning of May, said Barry White, a spokesman for the California Employment Development Department.

Officials in Connecticut and Texas also said they could need to start borrowing in May to pay unemployment claims.

AP Interview: Amash says voters want political 'alternative'

By DAVID EGGERT Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Rep. Justin Amash of Michigan said Wednesday he is seeking the Libertarian nod for president because millions of Americans do not feel well represented by either major political party and their standard-bearers: President Donald Trump and presumptive Democratic nominee Joe Biden.

Amash, a Trump critic who left the Republican Party to become an independent and later supported his impeachment, told The Associated Press that too many people vote Republican or Democrat because they do not feel they have any other choice.

"It's important that we present them with that alternative. ... The first step to moving toward no political parties or all independent candidates is to provide some big challengers to the main two parties right now," he said. "The Libertarian Party can be that challenger."

But third-party presidential campaigns can have unpredictable consequences. In 2000, Ralph Nader's Green Party presidential bid cost Al Gore crucial support and was a contributing factor in George W. Bush's eventual win. Hillary Clinton's 2016 loss, meanwhile, has been blamed in part on the support Green Party candidate Jill Stein picked up in crucial battlegrounds such as Pennsylvania.

Amash was elected in 2010 as part of the tea party wave that toppled Democratic control. If Libertarians select him as their nominee at a national convention currently scheduled for May 21-25 in Texas, he would face nearly impossible odds of winning the presidency.

But Amash argued there is "no clear-cut answer" about whether he would take support from Trump or

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Biden, especially in closely contested places like his home state of Michigan. Trump narrowly won Michigan in 2016, by 10,704 votes, and Democrats are looking to take back the battleground state in 2020.

"There are millions of people who won't vote for either one regardless," Amash said. "I firmly believe that the positions I hold and the principles I espouse are ones that reflect a larger portion of the electorate than the number of people supporting either Donald Trump or Joe Biden."

In Michigan, third-party candidates won 5% of the vote in 2016 — it was mostly Libertarian Gary Johnson — four years after they garnered less than 1%.

If he becomes the Libertarian nominee, Amash will be seeking the presidency at a time when the scope of the federal government is rapidly expanding to respond to the coronavirus. He said he supports a role for Washington to help people affected by the pandemic and the ravaged economy, but said the relief packages have helped the wealthy and well-connected more than the unemployed.

"They were left behind," Amash said. "My campaign is really about representing those people. I really believe most Americans have fairly Libertarian views on things. They want government to work, and if government at any one level is doing too much or doing the wrong things, it's not working very well."

Rather than passing a \$2 trillion rescue bill that backstopped certain industries, Amash said the government should have provided a monthly cash payment to all Americans.

"It still would have been cheaper than what the federal government is doing now, and it would have benefited way more people," Amash said.

Amash, who became an independent last July, said he is running as a Libertarian because it is "very difficult to make headway" without a party apparatus.

Trump on Wednesday tweeted that Amash "would make a wonderful candidate, especially since he is way behind in his district and has no chance of maintaining his Congressional seat. He almost always votes for the Do Nothing Dems anyway. I like him even more than Jill Stein!"

Although Amash said he was confident he could have won reelection to a sixth term in Congress as an independent, he decided it would not have changed the "broken" political system enough.

"My heart is in running for president right now," Amash said.

Brazil leaves its many poor hanging amid coronavirus surge

By MAURICIO SAVARESE and DIARLEI RODRIGUES Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Work had already dried up for Ivanilson Gervásio when the coronavirus first emerged in Brazil in late February. As cases now surge amid a simultaneous implosion of Latin America's largest economy, hope of finding a job is gone, forcing Gervásio to line up for hours outside a state-owned bank for a \$110 monthly government handout.

His goal was to buy beef to feed his 6-year-old daughter, who hasn't had it for a month.

Multitudes of destitute Brazilians like Gervásio face bureaucratic delays in getting assistance, amid fraud and a disjointed emergency response by federal officials. Authorities even launched a cell phone app for the payouts, although many people have only rudimentary mobile devices.

So Gervásio, like many Brazilians, had to leave home amid a lockdown aimed at halting the spread of the virus and go to a Caixa Economica Federal bank.

As crowds swarmed the bank's branches across the country, President Jair Bolsonaro was hit with increasing criticism for a slow response in helping the poorest during the crisis.

He already had been slammed by the left and the right for downplaying the health risk and for delaying a rescue of the economy.

The coronavirus has killed more than 5,400 people in Brazil, the most in Latin America, but even local policymakers admit the toll is much higher. They expect the deaths to peak sometime in May.

Big lines emerged across the country on Monday after the emergency aid announced at the start of April was finally freed up. The aid package will help as many as 24 million citizens working in the informal economy without any benefits, representing more than 10 percent of the population.

Gervásio, wearing an improvised black and yellow mask, was typical of the would-be recipients: He

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doesn't have a bank account and barely understands the aid distribution app. Unemployed for six years and getting by on odd jobs, he had to use a friend's phone to register for the benefit.

"There's no food at home," said Gervásio, tears welling as he described depending on neighbors for food. "We are not afraid of the coronavirus, but starvation is cruel."

In the same line was manicurist Maiara Sales, 31, who left her disabled 5-year-old son at home to go to the bank to report that someone had stolen her identity and her first \$110 payment.

"I can't even remove the email that was registered as mine," she said, adding that many in her neighborhood are hungry. "I see people crying, people who need to eat. The government needs to be more organized. Either they have the money to pay us or they don't."

Bolsonaro argues that workers in Brazil's informal economy are suffering because of the stay-at-home recommendations he opposes that were put in place by governors and mayors. He insists that most Brazilians should be allowed to go back to work, with exceptions for at-risk groups like the elderly or those with underlying health problems.

But the governors counter that Bolsonaro has not released enough federal funds for them to fight the pandemic. Most of the country's states and cities were already strapped for cash before the crisis, they say.

Even the wealthy governor of Sao Paulo state, João Doria, who made a fortune in marketing, backs stronger state intervention.

"By saving lives, we will be able to save the economy," Doria said last month.

Doria, one of Bolsonaro's strongest critics, said his own decision to shut down the state of Sao Paulo — Brazil's most populous — generated intense opposition from his private sector friends, including one who called him "upset, enraged."

"I told him that at the end of this pandemic, I will have helped save his life, his family," Doria said. "And that is because we are taking the right measures."

Sao Paulo received about \$20 billion in emergency federal funds at the start of April but nothing since then, Doria said.

Brazil's Senate is expected to vote next week on a package of nearly \$17 billion for states and cities to compensate for economic losses. Although the lower house of Congress approved it, Economy Minister Paulo Guedes has said handing out the emergency aid would be like doling out a blank check.

Guedes, a free market champion, had rallied much of the business community behind Bolsonaro's victorious 2018 presidential campaign with promises to privatize many state-owned companies, cut government spending and open up largely closed sectors of the economy to more foreign investment.

Despite Guedes' aversion to giving out federal funding, Bolsonaro's administration has acknowledged a need for financial relief.

Caixa slashed interest rates on overdrafts and credit card installment payments, and the government allowed all citizens to withdraw the equivalent of one month's minimum wage — about \$195 — from state-run retirement accounts required for all working Brazilians. The federal government is also sending doctors to some coronavirus hot spots, like the Amazon city Manaus, where coffins have piled up in common graves.

The market-friendly reforms that Bolsonaro and Guedes want to push through is the opposite of what the government should focus on for the foreseeable future, said Monica de Bolle, a Brazilian senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington.

De Bolle said she expects Brazil's economy to contract 9% this year, more than it did in the country's 2015-16 recession, and that unemployment will rise above 20%.

Bolsonaro's economic team was still focusing on economic reforms in March as coronavirus cases rose, instead of getting resources to those who most needed them, she told an online panel Tuesday sponsored by the Washington-based Wilson Center.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime crisis we've never seen before in Brazil," she said.

Bolsonaro also has been consumed this week with a political crisis that erupted after the exit of his justice minister, Sergio Moro.

Asked about the death toll in Brazil this week surpassing that of China, Bolsonaro responded: "So what?"

He added: "I am sorry. What do you want me to do?"

What to gossip about in a quarantine? Virus changes TMZ

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Just like the rest of us, celebrities are largely confined to their homes to wait out the coronavirus pandemic.

Unlike the rest of us, however, many of them still have that need for the spotlight. And for that, Harvey Levin is grateful.

The impresario of an online and television infotainment empire is navigating a stay-at-home world without bold-faced names on red carpets, coming out of airports (a regular source of TMZ ambushes), or getting into fights at nightclubs.

In the first few weeks, it wasn't always easy — one story on the TMZ site was about lounging squirrels that had overtaken a park abandoned by foot traffic.

Yet it turns out the technical challenges that come with quarantine have occupied more of his time than filling space on his programs with things to talk about.

"There's just so much content," he said.

Those who've tuned in to TMZ the past week have seen video of Oprah Winfrey cooking salmon and pasta, sipping red wine and singing along to Harry Belafonte. Lizzo used cell phone video to highlight a favorite body part. Rapper Blueface hosted a social distancing party that was undermined when two drunk women traded punches.

"We miss you guys," Donnie Wahlberg told Levin in a Skype interview. "We miss seeing you in that studio with all your crew and just being part of our everyday life ... You guys are underappreciated."

Levin produces three television shows regularly. "TMZ on TV" is essentially a comic pop culture half hour, available through syndication in virtually all of the nation's TV homes. "TMZ Live" trends a little more serious, an hour-long newscast available in 80 percent of the nation's homes, and "TMZ Sports" is on the Fox Sports 1 network.

It doesn't take much to get the "TMZ on TV" tongues talking. Viral videos, like the newscaster whose at-home report accidentally showed her husband showering in the background, invites snark. Sofia Vergara sent in a picture of herself and a younger niece, both in bikinis facing away from the camera, to prompt a guessing game of who was who.

"TMZ Sports" isn't harmed by the lack of games. More likely, it's enhanced because the players have more spare time, Levin said. Tom Brady's workouts in Tampa Bay have produced their share of stories.

Monday's sports show featured stories about an NFL draftee with a controversial tattoo, and some amateur marriage counseling prompted by the breakup of Jay Cutler and Kristin Cavallari, among other topics.

But TMZ hasn't just focused on celebrity. "TMZ Live" led Monday's show with Levin and co-host Charles Latibeaudiere expressing horror at video of a Chicago house party where dozens stood crowded together in a room, prompting a discussion of whether adherence to social distancing was becoming more lax.

"We've had (California) Gov. (Gavin) Newsom, Mayor (Keisha Lance) Bottoms from Atlanta, we've had Mark Cuban and Dr. Phil — all sorts of people who have come on the show to talk about what's going on with their personal lives and what they're doing to help people," he said. "There's a lot of material out there."

Veteran Hollywood publicist Howard Bragman said he didn't doubt Levin would be able to deal with the changed environment: "He kind of created the genre, so he knows how to deal with it."

Entertainment shows, TMZ's included, seem to be holding their own in the ratings, helped by viewers seeking an alternative to serious coronavirus stories, said Bill Carroll, an expert in the syndication market.

"This has been so eye-opening in terms of the entertainment business," Levin said. "We had to pivot overnight. Five weeks ago when we went home, my technical team figured out overnight how to get our shows running from home."

He admitted to worrying about whether the "TMZ on TV" vibe of staff members in the office trading one-liners about pop culture could be replicated in a Zoom gallery, and has been pleasantly surprised.

"I think everyone is in on the joke right now," he said. "They know it's Skype, they know it's Zoom, they know it's FaceTime. I think that used to be off-putting because you could see the difference with regular video. I don't think it's off-putting anymore."

In the midst of all this, Levin said he was asked by Fox entertainment to produce a special on the Netflix series "Tiger King" and given a six-day deadline.

He said he and his staff had to put together 19 remote interviews in a couple of days, something they could never have done if camera crews had to be used for each one.

He predicted the ability of outlets like TMZ to work remotely will permanently change how business is conducted and how stories are illustrated.

"Is it challenging?" he said. "Yes. But I've learned more in the last five weeks than I learned in 10 years, in terms of television production and digital production."

AP Exclusive: Texas AG helped donor fight virus lockdown

By PAUL J. WEBER and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — When a small county in the Colorado mountains banished everyone but locals to blunt the spread of the coronavirus, an unlikely outsider raised a fuss: Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, who called it an affront to Texans who own property there and pressed health officials to soften the rules.

"The banishment of nonresident Texas homeowners is entirely unconstitutional and unacceptable," Paxton said in a news release April 9, when his office sent a letter asking authorities in Gunnison County to reverse course.

An Associated Press review of county and campaign finance records shows Paxton's actions stood to benefit an exclusive group of Texans, including a Dallas donor and college classmate who helped Paxton launch his run for attorney general and had spent five days trying to get a waiver to remain in his \$4 million lakeside home. Robert McCarter's neighbors in the wealthy Colorado enclave of Crested Butte are also Paxton campaign contributors, including a Texas oilman who has given Paxton and his wife, state Sen. Angela Paxton, more than \$252,000.

Less than three hours after Paxton announced the letter, Gunnison County granted McCarter an exemption to stay, according to documents obtained by AP. The county says the timing was coincidental.

The depth of Paxton's connections in the heart of the Rocky Mountains, which were not previously known publicly, raise questions about Texas' top law enforcement officer using his office to lean on a secluded Colorado county as it scrambled to keep COVID-19 at bay. Paxton has at least nine donors in Texas who own property in Gunnison County, and who collectively have given him and his wife nearly \$2 million in political contributions. He sent the letter even as his own state was requiring people arriving from New Orleans and New York to self-quarantine for 14 days.

Paxton spokesman Marc Rylander said in an email that "it is a normal practice for the attorney general to speak with multiple constituents from around Texas about issues pertinent to Texas residents." Asked whether Paxton had spoken to McCarter or other donors before getting involved in Gunnison County, another spokeswoman, Kayleigh Date, said they could not reveal specific homeowners.

McCarter did not respond to multiple calls and emails seeking comment.

Paxton, a Republican who is in his second term, has raised his national profile as a conservative crusader under President Donald Trump, including leading a lawsuit against the Affordable Care Act that goes before the Supreme Court this fall. He also has spent nearly his entire five years in office under felony indictment for securities fraud. Paxton has pleaded not guilty, and the case has stalled for two years over legal challenges.

Legal experts and watchdogs say Paxton getting involved in Gunnison County could deserve attention from Texas ethics regulators.

"If Attorney General Paxton used his position to deliberately intervene with Colorado officials to benefit a major campaign donor, the Texas Ethics Commission should immediately investigate whether he violated state laws," said Daniel Stevens, executive director of the left-leaning Campaign for Accountability

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in Washington.

Gunnison County, some 200 miles (320 kilometers) southwest of Denver, has reported more than 100 cases of the virus and at least four deaths. The remote community of 17,000 people has only one hospital with 24 beds and no intensive care unit, and health officials cited the scarcity of resources in ordering nonresidents to leave.

Fewer than 2,000 property owners are from Texas, according to the Gunnison County Assessor's Office. The county says the average home value in 2019 was more than \$578,000, and Mountain Living magazine in 2017 described McCarter's neighborhood as a place "where the rustic homes resemble national park lodges."

Prior to Paxton's letter, McCarter asked the county twice about getting a waiver, writing that his family was healthy and had a "freezer full of elk" from a hunting trip that would last for months, according to documents obtained under Colorado open records laws.

Gunnison County Manager Matthew Birnie said Paxton's letter did not influence McCarter getting a waiver, or later changes to the public health order.

"Our public health officials had no knowledge of the connection between the McCarters and AG Paxton and even if they had it would have had no effect on decision-making," Birnie said.

Paxton and McCarter attended Baylor University in the 1980s, and a yearbook shows them together in group photos. McCarter's only political contribution in Texas campaign finance records is a \$5,000 donation to Paxton in 2013, on the day Paxton filed his candidacy for attorney general.

McCarter's neighbors include Texans who made far bigger contributions, though records show none of them asked for waivers during the lockout. They include Midland oilman Kyle Stallings, who has given Paxton and his wife more than \$252,000 in individual donations. He declined comment.

Houston homebuilder Richard Weekley also has property in Gunnison County and has helped steer \$1.6 million in political contributions to the Paxtons. A spokeswoman says he has been staying in Houston and had not discussed the Colorado restrictions with Paxton.

Protective orders issued to 'Duck Dynasty' star's family

WEST MONROE, La. (AP) — Three members of "Duck Dynasty" star Willie Robertson's family have received protective orders against a man charged with shooting at homes on their Louisiana estate.

Daniel King Jr., 38, was booked into jail on a charge of aggravated assault by drive-by shooting after two homes were struck by gunfire on the West Monroe property belonging to Willie Robertson, a star of the reality show about duck hunting that ran from 2012 to 2017.

King has since been ordered to stay at least 1000 feet (305 meters) away from Willie Robertson's son, John Luke Robertson, as well as John Luke's wife and infant child, The News-Star reported. The order was set to run through April 2022.

King was accused of pointing a handgun from the window of a Ford F-250 and firing shots toward the homes, the newspaper reported, citing an arrest warrant from the Ouachita Parish Sheriff's Office.

Nobody was hurt but one bullet went through the bedroom window of the home where John Luke Robertson lives with his family, authorities said. Five people were inside the second home that was hit, the sheriff's office said.

King told deputies he fired the gun while trying to see if the safety was on, and also allegedly admitted to drinking vodka at the time, according to the documents. Deputies said a juvenile was also in the truck.

King remained in custody this week on a \$150,000 bond, The News-Star said. It was unclear whether he had an attorney who could comment on his behalf.

Willie Robertson is the CEO of Duck Commander, the multimillion-dollar duck call and decoy enterprise that inspired the A&E show, which shone a spotlight on the small north Louisiana town. Despite controversy over family patriarch Phil Robertson's comments equating gay people with hell-bound sinners, state officials lauded the show for its importance to tourism.

Making public transit safe a next hurdle in easing lockdowns

By MIKE CORDER and ANGELA CHARLTON Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — In cities around the world, public transportation systems are key to getting workers back on the job and restarting devastated economies. Yet methods of getting around, ranging from trains and buses to ferries and bicycles, will have to be re-imagined for the coronavirus era.

In Europe in particular, mass transit is shaping up as a new focus of governments working to get their countries back on track while responding to the pandemic that now has a death toll of over 120,000 people across the continent.

In the capitals of hard-hit Italy, Spain, France and Britain, standing cheek-to-jowl with fellow commuters was as much a part of the morning routine in pre-coronavirus times as a steaming shot of espresso or a crispy croissant.

That's going to have to change as authorities try to address economic considerations without losing any hard-won gains that social distancing strategies achieved in controlling the spread of the virus.

Solutions include putting red stickers on the floor to tell bus travelers in Milan how far apart to stand. The Dutch are putting on longer, roomier trains and many cities including Berlin are opening up more lanes to cyclists. In Britain, bus passengers are entering through the middle or rear doors to reduce the virus risks for drivers.

Announcing a gradual easing of France's strict lockdown, Prime Minister Édouard Philippe called public transport a "key measure for the economic recovery" yet acknowledged concerns among passengers.

"I understand the apprehension of a good number of our compatriots before taking a metro, a train, a bus, a tram, which are sometimes very densely packed," he said.

In New York, where millions normally ride on crowded subways, buses and suburban trains daily but where ridership has fallen more than 90 percent, Gov. Andrew Cuomo has ordered officials to submit a plan for how train and subway cars will be disinfected every night, building on an enhanced cleaning regime put in place in early March.

Metropolitan Transportation Authority head Patrick Foye said last week that the MTA is also looking at other measures including expanding a program that has already performed temperature checks on 35,000 MTA employees. Foye urged government and business officials to consider including staggered work hours in any plans to reopen businesses, to help reduce crowding.

Amtrak, which carried more than 12 million passengers on its Boston-to-Washington, D.C. trains in the most recent fiscal year, already has limited bookings to 50 percent of capacity and restricted some seating areas in rail cars. Going forward, it will offer enhanced services on its mobile apps to reduce contact points; one would allow passengers to pre-order food to pick up on board, to reduce waiting time in the dining car.

When and how to ease restrictions, keep people safe and prevent a second wave of infections is a matter of intense debate around the world.

"There will never be a perfect amount of protection," said Josh Santarpia, a microbiology expert at the University of Nebraska Medical Center who is studying the coronavirus. "It's a personal risk assessment. Everybody has to decide, person by person, what risk they're willing to tolerate."

As restrictions loosen, health authorities will be watching closely for any sign of a resurgence of the virus. Germany has reported a slight uptick in the infection rate since some small businesses were allowed to reopen just over a week ago, but authorities said it was too soon to say whether the loosening was to blame.

France, Spain and Greece were among the latest countries to announce road maps for reopening businesses and schools. There will be more trains, trams and buses to spread passengers out and masked faces will be the new normal almost everywhere.

Starting Wednesday, the Dutch national railway service began boosting its skeleton coronavirus lockdown timetable by bringing longer intercity trains back into service to make it easier for passengers to stay apart.

The capacity of Milan's metro system will be slashed to just 350,000 passengers a day, compared to 1.3 million on normal workdays. Meanwhile, the region's commuter train service will be able to guarantee only 300,000 round-trip journeys, down over 60% from its earlier capacity.

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Milan's mayor, Giuseppe Sala, is calling for staggered working hours and more working from home to help deal with the decrease — in particular when more shops and commercial business open starting May 18. Access to train stations and metro stations also will be controlled and limited starting next Monday, when the first easing of the strict two-month lockdown begins.

In Spain, under a gradual easing of restrictions starting from May 10, capacity in most long-distance buses and trains will be gradually increased from the current 30% of the capacity.

Around the world, confirmed infections stood at more than 3.1 million — including 1 million in the U.S. — and the confirmed global death toll topped 219,000, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University. The true toll is believed to be much higher because of limited testing, differences in counting the dead and deliberate under-counting by some governments.

For millions around the world, the advice so far is still to stay home.

5 things to know today - that aren't about the virus

By The Associated Press

Your daily look at nonvirus stories in the news:

1. **DOZENS KILLED IN SOUTH KOREA FIRE** At least 36 people were killed Wednesday when one of South Korea's worst fires in years broke out at a construction site near the capital, officials said. They said the death toll could rise because more people were believed to be trapped inside the warehouse that was under construction in Icheon, just south of Seoul.

2. **WHAT DO WE REALLY KNOW ABOUT KIM JONG UN** The answer is crucial because the North Korean leader's intentions, and the as-yet-unknown state of his health, play an outsized role in the workings of Northeast Asia.

3. **'THIS IS THE DARKEST AGE FOR YEMENI WOMEN'** Former detainees and other activists tell the AP that hundreds of women have vanished into secret prisons where they are tortured and sometimes raped by Houthi rebels.

4. **KANSAS VOTING RIGHTS** — A federal appeals court panel rules that a Kansas law requiring proof of citizenship to register to vote is unconstitutional.

5. **NCAA TAKES MAJOR STEP** - The NCAA is moving forward with a plan to allow college athletes to earn money for endorsements and a host of other activities involving personal appearances and social media content.

No 'Black Widow' or 'F9' leaves a muted summer movie season

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The six-year fan campaign for a standalone Black Widow movie was paying off: at long last, a film would put Scarlett Johansson's popular Avenger front and center. And, like many of Marvel's biggest spectacles, it was set to open the weekend of May 1.

"Black Widow" was to kick off what promised to be a typically lucrative summer moviegoing season, which runs Memorial Day through Labor Day and generally accounts for \$4 billion, nearly 40% of the yearly North American box office. And there was a lot more to look forward to: Tom Cruise's return to one of his most iconic roles, a "Wonder Woman" sequel, original fare from Christopher Nolan and Wes Anderson and more. Then the unthinkable happened.

Now modern Hollywood is faced with a gutted summer season that at the very earliest will kick off months late — and even that is changing by the minute. On Monday, Judd Apatow's Pete Davidson movie "The King of Staten Island" switched to a June 12 home video release, following in the path of Disney's "Artemis Fowl," out on Disney Plus June 12, and Warner Bros.' "Scoob!" available May 15.

A few states are talking about allowing movie theaters to reopen soon — Texas as early as Friday. But no major blockbusters are set to open until mid-July. The first is Christopher Nolan's thriller "Tenet," a Warner Bros. film, which has ardently stood its ground on July 17. Shortly after, Disney plans to open

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"Mulan" on July 24, four months after its original date. And then comes "Wonder Woman 1984" on Aug. 14, two months later than planned. It's something, but it's still a shell of what summer 2020 at the movies was supposed to be.

"We're down 50% right now," said Comscore senior media analyst Paul Dergarabedian. "If theaters open in mid-July it'll offset some of the really disastrous models. But it would be naive to think that we're going to make up all that box office."

Studios have depended on massive revenues from the summer months for decades, but in recent years discovered that movies can do blockbuster numbers in nearly any month.

That will be tested with Hollywood's massively revamped schedule. Wes Anderson's "The French Dispatch" will open on Oct. 16, "Black Widow" will get her day on Nov. 6 and "Top Gun: Maverick" is now set for Christmas time.

Some films abandoned 2020 entirely, including the "Fast and Furious" movie "F9," the Dwayne Johnson, Emily Blunt adventure "Jungle Cruise," and "Ghostbusters: Afterlife," which all pushed to 2021.

It's not as simple as just allowing venues to reopen. Theaters need new movies to show and the biggest on the horizon, "Tenet," is still almost three months away.

"The movie theater industry is also a national one," the National Association of Theatre Owners said in a statement. "Until the majority of markets in the U.S. are open, and major markets in particular, new wide release movies are unlikely to be available."

The nation's largest movie theater chain, AMC, which operates over 630 theaters in the U.S., said in a statement that in order to reopen they "need a line of sight into a regular schedule of new theatrical blockbusters that get people truly excited."

AMC said it would open in the weeks ahead of blockbusters like "Tenet" and "Mulan" using "creative programming" of previously released films.

Eric Wold, a Wall Street analyst for B. Riley FBR, said there's simply a lot of uncertainty right now around when theaters can open, what the guidelines will be and how moviegoers will respond.

"Do you open now and show 'Jaws' and 'Harry Potter' and older titles? Or are people going to say, 'I can watch that at home?'" Wold said. "I think (theaters will) be smart and wait. There's no rush. You might as well wait until June and see how it goes and slowly open from there."

Should restrictions stay in place longer, Wold said the bigger chains have raised enough cash to last to at least until Thanksgiving for AMC, and even into 2021 for Cinemark with no revenue coming in.

"Black Widow" will still have her day in the sun, even if it is in November, and all of the movies will eventually come out in one form or another. On Tuesday, theater owners and Universal squabbled over "Trolls World Tour's" straight-to-VOD strategy and what it means for the future of theatrical windows.

But perhaps the turbulence of the lost 2020 summer movie season will result in some strategic rethinking — at least that's what film critic and "Unspooled" co-host Amy Nicholson hopes.

"For decades, the major studios have wandered away from producing mid-budget comedies and adult dramas to gamble their money on gargantuan summer blockbusters," said Nicholson. "I'd love to see the industry recover by greenlighting an eclectic slate of \$5-\$15 million flicks that could make moviegoing fun again. Time to swap out financial risks for creative risks."

Irrfan Khan, of 'Slumdog Millionaire,' 'Life of Pi,' dies

NEW DELHI (AP) — Irrfan Khan, a veteran character actor in Bollywood movies and one of India's best-known exports to Hollywood, has died. He was 54.

Khan played the police inspector in "Slumdog Millionaire" and the park executive Masrani in "Jurassic World." He also appeared in "The Amazing Spider-Man" and the adventure fantasy "Life of Pi."

Khan died Wednesday after being admitted to Mumbai's Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani hospital with a colon infection.

"Irrfan was a strong soul, someone who fought till the very end and always inspired everyone who came close to him," a statement released by the actor's team said.

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Khan made his screen debut in the Academy Award-nominated 1988 drama "Salaam Bombay!," a tale of Mumbai's street children. He worked with directors Mira Nair, Wes Anderson and Ang Lee.

Khan in 2018 was diagnosed with a rare neuroendocrine cancer and underwent months of treatment in the United Kingdom.

"I trust, I have surrendered," he wrote in a heartfelt note after he broke the news of his battle with cancer.

Khan won a number of film awards in India, including a 2012 Indian National Film Award for best actor for his performance in "Paan Singh Tomar," a compelling tale of a seven-time national champion athlete who quit India's armed forces to rule the Chambal ravines in central India.

Khan received an Independent Spirit Award for supporting actor in 2006 for the Indian-American drama "The Namesake" and a viewers' choice award at the Cannes festival 2013 for his role in the Indian romantic drama "The Lunchbox."

Khan also starred in the Hamlet-inspired "Haider," a Bollywood film set in militarized Himalayan Kashmir.

Tributes came from Bollywood, including from fellow actor Amitabh Bachchan, who said Khan was an "incredible talent" and "a prolific contributor to the World of Cinema."

Khan "left us too soon," Bachchan wrote on Twitter.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted that "Khan's demise is a loss to the world of cinema and theatre."

In an interview with The Associated Press in 2018, Khan said: "I've seen life from a completely different angle. You sit down and you see the other side and that's fascinating. I'm engaged on a journey."

Khan's last Bollywood movie, "Angrezi Medium," a sequel to one of his biggest hits, "Hindi Medium" (2017), was released before India went into a lockdown in March because of the coronavirus pandemic.

He is survived by his wife, television writer and producer Sutapa Sikdar, and sons, Babil and Ayan.

Pandemic brings fortunes to Amazon - and headaches too

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO and ALEXANDRA OLSON AP Retail Writers

Amazon has spent years honing the business of packing, shipping and delivering millions of products to doorsteps around the world.

Now it has a captive audience.

With much of the globe in various stages of a lockdown because of the coronavirus pandemic, the world's largest online retailer has become a lifeline to many shoppers. But it is also grappling with delivery delays and mounting complaints from workers who worry about contagion while on the job.

The company's website hit 2.54 billion visitors for the entire month of March, according to online research company Comscore. That marks a 65% jump from the same period last year. Amazon will report quarterly earnings on Thursday, providing a first glimpse into its financial performance during the pandemic.

Discounters like Walmart and Dollar General that sell essential products have seen their shares soar 8% and 15% respectively. But Amazon has been a standout, with its stock up 22% so far this year. That's in contrast to the S&P, which has slid 11%. Amazon is also hiring 175,000 more workers at a time when many businesses have cut back and are seeking federal aid.

At the same time, Amazon's vast empire is showing cracks. Deliveries that used to take just hours to arrive can instead take weeks or even months. High demand items like toilet paper and paper towels are frustratingly out of stock.

Probably the biggest issue facing the \$1.1 trillion company is persistent complaints by warehouse workers of grueling hours of backbreaking work with little protection against catching the coronavirus. A growing number of infections has increased pressure on the company to take steps that could further slow down operations, including shutting down some of its warehouses and easing productivity quotas.

"Amazon has gone from a nice-to-have to a necessity," said Jon Reily of Isobar, a global digital agency. "It's becoming a public utility like the electric company or the water company. But they're putting pressure on workers. And workers are scared."

The most dramatic fallout came in France when a court ordered Amazon last week to stop delivering non-essential products for a month while it works out better worker safety measures. An appeals court

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upheld the ruling, although it expanded the number of products the company is allowed sell. Amazon responded by closing all its French warehouses, saying it is too complicated to separate out its activities.

Small groups of workers have staged walkouts at Amazon warehouses in New York, Chicago and Detroit, demanding that the facilities be closed for deep cleaning after workers there tested positive for the virus. Kentucky's governor ordered a warehouse in Shepherdsville closed for several days last month after workers there got infected.

Amazon has refused to say how many workers have fallen ill. It says it has stepped up protection measures, ramping up cleaning, implementing temperature checks, racing to distribute masks, staggering shifts and spreading out tables in break rooms. It is also allowing any worker who feels unsafe to stay home without pay through April, while offering a \$2 hourly pay bump for those who stay on the job.

Amazon also says it's developing an internal lab that could potentially provide coronavirus tests for all employees, even those without symptoms.

It's unclear how many of Amazon's workers are staying home without pay or how many have been put into isolation because of contact with infected workers. But employees at some warehouses say absences are common.

Guiselle Diaz, 23, said she has not reported to her job at the Staten Island warehouse for weeks because she worries her asthma makes her vulnerable and she fears passing the virus to her 81-year-old grandmother, who lives with her.

"A lot of people are afraid, and a lot of people have conditions that stop them from going," Diaz said.

Amazon's competitors have faced similar challenges with delays, product scarcity and worker discontent. Walmart faced calls to step up safety measures after two workers from the same store contracted the virus and died. Some workers at grocery delivery services Instacart and Shipt, which is owned by Target, have walked off their jobs to demand greater safeguards against the virus.

Many shoppers have been forgiving of Amazon, in large part because there are few better alternatives for getting essentials online.

"That's the only place you can shop for most everything you need," said Marlina Fol, a caregiver in Manhattan, who said she was able to buy masks and hand sanitizer from Amazon in early March but now struggles to get a window for grocery delivery from Whole Foods, which Amazon acquired two years ago.

Amazon accounts for about 40% of online sales in the U.S., according to eMarketer, an online research firm. It has developed fierce loyalty among its more than 110 million U.S. Prime members, who pay \$129 a year to get practically anything shipped to them in up to two days. That accounts for half of American households. Many experts believe Amazon is only picking up more subscribers during the pandemic and expect its dominance to grow further.

The company is also providing essential cash flow to third-party sellers who've seen their physical stores closed because of lockdowns. Aaron Krahling, whose vitamin store in Waldorf, Maryland, has been shuttered since mid-March, has been able to pay the rent for his business and other bills because of income he's received from selling home accessories on Amazon.

"Everything would have come down to a screeching halt," Krahling said. "It's helped me cover all overhead without freaking out."

Craig Johnson, president of retail consultancy Consumer Growth Partners, says Amazon has a "high class problem" considering how many other stores have gone dark.

"Given all that is going on, they have done remarkably well," Johnson said. "Yes, there are glitches. But there are glitches all over. We have never been through this."

'U ok?' Virus-era friendships can be both crucial & fraught

By JOCELYN NOVECK AP National Writer

A single mother hunkering down at home with a teenage daughter, Sharon Litwin sees her friends, like most people these days, only virtually. Even so, they've been a crucial lifeline.

"Sometimes I just need to have a conversation with adults," she says. "And sometimes I just need to cry,

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which I really don't want to do in front of my daughter." Two of Litwin's friends, especially, have become valued sounding boards in daily calls she coordinates with her walks outside.

But then there are friends she's tried to check on — good friends — who haven't answered. She doesn't know what that means. Are they struggling? Are they or a loved one sick? Or are they afraid SHE is sick or struggling and don't want to add to her stress? "I don't know what the message is," says Litwin, 45, of Teaneck, New Jersey. "I just worry about everybody."

As the world has changed in overwhelming ways since the coronavirus era took hold, the complicated ripple effects have been well documented in terms of family life, but less so with friendships. Yet these relationships, too, were key to our previous lives. And they, too, are complicated — especially now that virtually all communication is, well, virtual.

The challenges can be as simple as learning how to navigate a relationship via FaceTime (am I calling too much, or too little?) or as deep as re-evaluating who one's best friends are, and what one needs or expects of them.

There have been surprises both welcome and not.

There's the friend you haven't seen in months who pops up to offer a much-needed item — a thermometer for your kid, a load of groceries when you can't get out. There's the neighbor three floors up whom you hardly knew before, who reaches out to say "I'm here if you need me." There's that person you rarely got to see in normal times, but suddenly has become a soothing voice helping you navigate the unknown.

Then there's the friend who seems callous or focused on trivial matters — someone you'd rather just not be speaking to right now.

Tracy Wakeford knows she's among the lucky. She's sheltering in her Rockport, Maine house with a screened porch where her young daughters can play. Still, she finds it frustrating to see millennial friends posting about entertainment options being limited.

"I want to kill all my single friends or friends with no kids who are 'bored' and don't know what to watch on Netflix," Wakeford, 44, recently posted on Facebook.

"My toddler is being very clingy. We have no daycare and we're not leaving the house," explains Wakeford, whose daughters are 8 and 2, in an interview. Her answer to those friends: "I don't want to hear about Netflix, and I don't want to hear about how you're macrameing a blanket."

Wakeford tries not to judge, but admits to "snoozing" friends on Facebook whose posts sound like they're on a mini-vacation. "Are people really listening to other people and the struggles they're going through?"

Family therapist Catherine Lewis says communication can be fraught when friends are experiencing the pandemic differently. Front-line workers, or simply those who must stay in essential jobs, don't have the freedom to stay home. It's also harder for some to be cooped up in an urban setting than a suburban house. "It's a luxury to be bored," Lewis says.

Melba Nicholson Sullivan, a clinical community psychologist in New York, says the huge stress of the moment can shine a light on temperament differences that were manageable in easier times. "People are now having to pick and choose what works in a friendship, and what's maybe no longer a good fit."

For many, virtual communication has been a blessing. Recently, Bruce Leiserowitz, a Los Angeles lawyer, sent one of those "checking in" emails to an old friend, someone he hadn't spoken to in months. Instantly he received an email from that very friend: "Checking in."

He assumed his own email was bouncing back. But no: The two had reached out at exactly the same moment. They picked up the phone for a 30-minute catchup.

Leiserowitz has made a point to reach out to friends, offering help. Not everyone has done the same for him. "Maybe some people haven't been as communicative as I'd have liked, but I have to understand they've got their own situations to deal with," he says.

For Jenny Englander, Zoom socializing is frustrating; she's withdrawn for now. "I used to be super extroverted," says the mother of four, who recently posted about it on a parenting site. "Now I rarely talk to friends." It's not their fault, but such communication "feels shallow."

In New York, writing coach Cathy Altman avoids virtual group meetings, favoring old-school emails,

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one friend at a time. That can have pitfalls, too; a friend recently shared texts documenting a fight with a partner. "Next time," Altman quips, "call your therapist."

The disorientation many feel trying to navigate virtual friendships is hardly limited to adults. One recent evening, Sam Junnarkar, a fifth-grader in Westchester County, New York, connected with friends over Zoom to plan a joint movie night. The experience turned out to be fun. But Sam, 10, professes a longing for his in-person, pre-pandemic playdates.

"I can talk to my friends online, but it's not the same," he says. "It feels different. I can only see their faces, and sometimes the internet goes down."

Things feel different, too, to Kathe Mazur, a Los Angeles actress and audiobook narrator, but it's not her friendships that seem altered. It's the communication with casual colleagues, which somehow, on virtual channels, feels unexpectedly profound.

The usual introductory small talk, Mazur says, feels deeper, more vulnerable and more personal, with substantive questions about how people are coping. People seek advice. And they ask, "How're you doing?" — the difference being that now, they really want to know.

"There's a sense that everyone has permission to really communicate," Mazur says. "This would never have happened before."

VIRUS DIARY: A positive test, then a Mumbai hotel quarantine

By RAFIQ MAQBOOL Associated Press

MUMBAI, India (AP) — I was on assignment April 20 outside Mumbai, India's financial center. My phone rang nonstop. Fellow news photographers checked whether I'd heard about the COVID-19 tests we had taken days earlier at the Mumbai Press Club. I hadn't yet, and I was anxious.

Then I received the news: I was positive.

I'd covered the Kashmir conflict, a devastating tsunami in Sri Lanka, the war in Afghanistan and other dangerous assignments. I'd never flinched. But this terrified me.

I called my office and told them. We called off the shoot.

As I drove home, questions circled my brain: What next? What about my wife and kids? How would my mum take the news?

I spent that evening on the phone with other COVID-19-positive photographers. We decided to demand that city authorities quarantine us. We wanted to be away from our families, and we wanted to be together. Authorities said they'd put us up at a hotel in north Mumbai.

There were hurried hugs and goodbyes. My younger daughter pressed something into my hand. "Keep it with you, Daddy. We made you a good luck charm. It has special powers," she said. They made two, the other for my wife.

In a car full of photographers, one said, "Bhai log (brothers), we don't know what's next. Let's enjoy our last drive on the empty streets of the city. We may never get another chance!" We looked at each other; in sync, we stuck our heads out of the windows and took gulps of fresh air. Suddenly we were laughing. We knew that we were going to be OK — scared, worried but together.

The first day in the hotel began with a call from the on-site doctor. Any cough? Any fever? Neither. A few hours later, my wife informed me that our building had been sealed.

I got out my prayer mat and beads. I don't know how long I prayed. When I rose, I decided to be strong and to count my blessings.

One blessing was a big tree outside my window. The green leaves dancing in the sunlight, and the birds visiting its twisted branches, brought me the comfort I desperately needed.

That evening, my wife told me that our daughters asked, "If everyone was told to remain at home, why did Daddy go out?" She explained that just as doctors and farmers and police and administrators were facing risks every day to ensure that we were safe and healthy, journalists, too, had to do their bit — to gather information about living through this unimaginable time.

By the second day, my routine was down pat. Breakfast, lunch, snack, dinner: A doorbell meant food.

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Every morning included a phone health check with the medical staff. Calls from friends, family and colleagues reminded me that I wasn't alone.

On day three, I noticed an ambulance entering a cemetery and then a lonely burial. Had the person died of COVID-19? There was no way of knowing. It unsettled me. If I died, would my wife be allowed to bury me? My mother would never make it in time. I spent a sleepless night tossing and turning.

A breathing exercise the doctor sent us over WhatsApp helped. So did talking to others quarantined in the hotel. Taking pictures occupied my mind. But the image of the burial remained.

On day five of the quarantine, we were tested again — a swab in the nose and mouth.

Two days later, the frenzied calls among the photographers resumed. "Did the doctor call you yet? Mine is negative," a colleague said. Another reported the same. Then it was my turn: no sign of the virus. We were ordered to spend the next 14 days in self-isolation.

Coming home never felt better.

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Thursday, April 30, the 121st day of 2020. There are 245 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 30, 1945, as Soviet troops approached his Berlin bunker, Adolf Hitler committed suicide along with his wife of one day, Eva Braun.

On this date:

In A.D. 311, shortly before his death, Roman Emperor Galerius issued his Edict of Toleration ending persecution of Christians.

In 1789, George Washington took the oath of office in New York as the first president of the United States.

In 1803, the United States purchased the Louisiana Territory from France for 60 million francs, the equivalent of about \$15 million.

In 1900, engineer John Luther "Casey" Jones of the Illinois Central Railroad died in a train wreck near Vaughan, Mississippi, after staying at the controls in a successful effort to save the passengers.

In 1911, a fire broke out in Bangor, Maine, destroying much of the downtown area before it was brought under control the next morning; two deaths were blamed on the blaze.

In 1945, the radio show "Queen for Today" (later "Queen for a Day") premiered on the Mutual Network.

In 1970, President Richard M. Nixon announced the U.S. was sending troops into Cambodia, an action that sparked widespread protest.

In 1973, President Richard Nixon announced the resignations of top aides H.R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst and White House counsel John Dean, who was actually fired.

In 1975, the Vietnam War ended as the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon fell to Communist forces.

In 1983, blues singer and guitarist Muddy Waters died in Westmont, Ill., at age 68.

In 1993, top-ranked women's tennis player Monica Seles was stabbed in the back during a match in Hamburg, Germany, by a man who described himself as a fan of second-ranked German player Steffi Graf. (The man, convicted of causing grievous bodily harm, was given a suspended sentence.)

In 2004, Arabs expressed outrage at graphic photographs of naked Iraqi prisoners being humiliated by U.S. military police; President George W. Bush condemned the mistreatment of prisoners, saying "that's not the way we do things in America."

Ten years ago: Heavy winds and high tides complicated efforts to hold back oil from a blown-out BP-operated rig that threatened to coat bird and marine life in the Gulf of Mexico; President Barack Obama halted any new offshore projects pending safeguards to prevent more explosions like the one that unleashed the spill.

Five years ago: Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont formally entered the race for the Democratic presidential

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nomination with a news conference on Capitol Hill. Vietnam marked the 40th anniversary of the day communist forces seized control of the country with a parade through the capital of Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon). Rhythm-and-blues singer Ben E. King, 76, died in Hackensack, New Jersey.

One year ago: Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó took to the streets to call for a military uprising against Nicolas Maduro; street battles erupted in the Venezuelan capital. The Trump administration quickly declared enthusiastic support for the Venezuelan opposition effort. President Donald Trump and Democratic congressional leaders agreed to work toward a \$2 trillion infrastructure plan but put off the question of how to pay for it. A gunman killed two students and wounded four others in a lecture hall at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte; a student who helped end the shooting by tackling the gunman was one of the two killed. (Former student Trystan Terrell pleaded guilty to first-degree murder and other charges.) Japanese Emperor Akihito announced his abdication; his 30-year reign ended at midnight, when his son, Crown Prince Naruhito, became the new emperor. Peter Mayhew, the towering actor who donned a huge, furry costume to give life to Chewbacca in the original "Star Wars" trilogy and two other films, died at his north Texas home at the age of 74. The musical "Hadestown" earned a leading 14 Tony Award nominations.

Today's Birthdays: Actress Cloris Leachman is 94. Singer Willie Nelson is 87. Actor Burt Young is 80. King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden is 74. Movie director Allan Arkush is 72. Actor Perry King is 72. Singer-musician Wayne Kramer is 72. Singer Merrill Osmond is 67. Movie director Jane Campion is 66. Movie director Lars von Trier is 64. Former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper is 61. Actor Paul Gross is 61. Basketball Hall of Famer Isiah Thomas is 59. Country musician Robert Reynolds is 58. Actor Adrian Pasdar is 55. Rock singer J.R. Richards (Dishwalla) is 53. Rapper Turbo B (Snap) is 53. Rock musician Clark Vogeler is 51. Rhythm-and-blues singer Chris "Choc" Dalyrimple (Soul For Real) is 49. Rock musician Chris Henderson (3 Doors Down) is 49. Country singer Carolyn Dawn Johnson is 49. Actress Lisa Dean Ryan is 48. Rhythm-and-blues singer Akon is 47. Rhythm-and-blues singer Jeff Timmons (98 Degrees) is 47. Actor Johnny Galecki is 45. Singer-musician Cole Deggs (Cole Deggs and the Lonesome) is 44. Actor Sam Heughan is 40. Actor Kunal Nayyar is 39. Rapper Lloyd Banks is 38. Actress Kirsten Dunst is 38. Country singer Tyler Wilkinson (The Wilkinsons) is 36. Actress Dianna Agron is 34. Country singer Brandon Lancaster is 31. Rapper/producer Travis Scott is 29.

Thought for Today: "There's a difference between a philosophy and a bumper sticker." — Charles M. Schulz, American cartoonist (1922-2000).

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