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WEEKLY DIGEST
APRIL 17, 2020

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LOCAL

WILL HOUSE CAUCUS DELIVER ON COVID-19 SUPPORT FOR FARMWORKERS?

April 15, 2020 | Bill McEwen

Rep. Jim Costa of Fresno and Rep. Salud Carbajal of Santa Barbara are overseeing a charge to bring protection and financial help to farmworkers during the coronavirus pandemic. The congress-

"We have deemed farmworkers essential, yet we need to do more to ensure they are safe and secure."
— Rep. Jim Costa

men wrote a letter signed by everyone in the 38-member Congressional Hispanic Caucus. On Wednesday, the letter was

sent to Democratic and Republican leadership in the House and Senate. House Has Two Partisan

Hispanic Caucuses

The caucus formed as a bipartisan group in 1976, but membership is now limited to Democrats. In 2003, Republican House members formed their own group, the Congressional Hispanic Conference. "During this crisis, our frontline farmworkers are laboring every day to put food on America's dinner table and maintain the world food supply. As this virus threatens the resiliency of our food supply chains, it has never been more important to ensure the well-being of our agricultural producers and workforce," the letter states. "Farmworkers need our support. They should not live in fear. As this crisis evolves and Congress continues to explore response packages, we stand ready to work with you to ensure these protections are made available."

Related Story: Unsung Heroes: Mexican Laborers Still Working Hard In The Fields, Providing Our ...

Costa's Statement

In a statement released Wednesday, Costa said: "Our national security depends on the dedicated men and women working on farms here in the San Joaquin Valley and across the country. We have

deemed farmworkers essential, yet we need to do more to ensure they are safe and secure. I'm proud that my colleagues in the Congressional Hispanic Caucus are working together to keep these valued workers safe during this crisis."

White House Wants to Cut Farmworker Wages

The effort by the caucus comes as the White House is trying to support America's hard-hit growers and ranchers — while ignoring the needs of farmworkers. On April 10, NPR reported that White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows was working with Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue to reduce wages for foreign guest workers on American farms.

The White House's motivation for seeking wage cuts: Helping struggling farmers during the pandemic. "The administration is considering all policy options during this unprecedented crisis to ensure our great farmers are protected, and President Trump has done and will do everything he can to support their vital mission," a White House official told NPR.

The effort by the caucus comes as the White House is trying to support America's hard-hit growers and ranchers — while ignoring the needs of farmworkers.

Trump's Support for Farmers

On Wednesday, Perdue said that the Trump administration plans to buy milk and meat from farmers as part of an initial \$15.5 billion effort to help them withstand the virus. "We want to purchase as much of this milk, or other protein products, hams, and pork products, and move them into where they can be utilized in our food banks, or possibly even into international humanitarian aid," Perdue told Fox News. Also on Wednesday, the Department of Homeland Security announced the temporary...

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FRESNO STATE COVID-19 LAB WILL SPEED COUNTY'S PANDEMIC RESPONSE

April 14, 2020 | David Taub

Local COVID-19 infections could be confirmed in as little as 24 hours when a new testing lab at Fresno State comes on line in the days ahead. The state-licensed lab, housed at the university's Jordan Agricultural Research Center, can test between 40-60 specimens a day. It will analyze samples collected elsewhere, but will not offer in-person testing services.

"Governor Newsom has urged all Californians to meet this important moment in our lives. And we are pleased to answer that call," Fresno State President Joseph Castro said at a news conference Tuesday afternoon. The project is a collaboration between the school and Fresno County. As of Tuesday afternoon, Fresno County reported 251 cases of COVID-19, with seven deaths and 53 recoveries. Interim Health Director Dr. Rais Vohra said the new lab will help local officials manage the

pandemic more effectively. "We will be able to test dozens of specimens every day on people who will very rapidly know whether or not they have the COVID infection," Vohra said. "That will actually guide many different decisions related to their medical care and and other and other items related to the rest of the pandemic response."

Vohra said test results will now be available much faster than before. Previously, Fresno County samples were either sent to a private lab, or public labs in Tulare or Richmond. Getting answers back could take three days or longer, he said. A speedy result could also help preserve the amount of protective gear hospital staff use. "Whenever you have a patient that's waiting for a test, if they're hospitalized ... we have to assume that they are COVID positive," Vohra said. A negative result...

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TEMPERATURE CHECKS, FEWER TABLES? 'DRACONIAN,' SAY RESTAURANT OWNERS

April 16, 2020 | Jim Jakobs

Temperature checks could be required of you. Masks and gloves might be mandatory for your server. Fewer tables might be a requirement for your favorite restaurant. Gov. Gavin Newsome laid out these possible changes as he and other state leaders looked ahead as part of a plan on how to reopen after the worst of the pandemic passes. "You may be having dinner with a waiter, wearing gloves, maybe a face mask," said Newsom."Dinner, where the menu is disposable, where half of the tables in that restaurant, no longer appear. Where your temperature is checked before you walk into the establishment. These are likely scenarios."

Local Restaurant Owners

Chuck Van Fleet, owner of Vino Grille & Spirits, and president of the Fresno chapter of the California Restaurant Association, said that Fresno has the most stringent screening or rules of any cities. Van Fleet says his legislative contacts tell him it will be up to the city and county health departments to determine...

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GV Wire/Jim Jakobs

HOLY MACKEREL! RARE GREEN STURGEON FOUND ON SAN JOAQUIN RIVER.

April 15, 2020 | SJV Water

A rare, wild green sturgeon was found on the San Joaquin River upriver from the confluence of the Merced last weekend by U.S. Bureau of Reclamation crews checking salmon traps at Hills Ferry. The discovery caused some excitement as this endangered fish had not been seen that far up the San Joaquin in many years, according to the National Marine Fisheries Service staff. Though the San Joaquin River Restoration Program is concentrated on bringing back spring-run Chinook salmon populations, green sturgeons were also native to the area and evolved in the same habitat. So it's not surprising to see them return as the river is brought back to life.

Still, "I think most people thought it would be years and years before these guys came back," Hilary Glenn, an NMFS fish biologist in the San Joaquin River Branch, told an NMFS spokesman. Green sturgeon, added to the federal and California list of endangered species in 2006, have existed for more than 200 million years. They spawn from April to July in the...

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Bay Nature



AP File

CALIFORNIA TO GIVE CASH PAYMENTS TO IMMIGRANTS HURT BY VIRUS

April 15, 2020 | AP News

SACRAMENTO — California will be the first state to give cash payments to immigrants living in the country illegally who are hurt by the coronavirus, offering \$500 apiece to 150,000 adults who were left out of the \$2.2 trillion stimulus package approved by Congress. Many Americans began receiving \$1,200 checks from the federal government this week, and others who are unemployed are getting an additional \$600 a week from the government that has ordered them to stay home and disrupted what had been a roaring economy. But people living in the country illegally are not eligible for any of that money, and advocates have been pushing for states to fill in the gap. Wednesday, Gov. Gavin Newsom announced he would spend \$75 million of taxpayer money to create a Disaster Relief Fund for immigrants

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living in the country illegally. “We feel a deep sense of gratitude for people that are in fear of deportations that are still addressing essential needs of tens of millions of Californians,” said Newsom, who noted 10% of the state’s workforce are immigrants living in the country illegally who paid more than \$2.5 billion in

state and local taxes last year. Newsom said the money will not be distributed based on income. In fact, the government won’t distribute it at all, instead giving it to a network of regional nonprofits who are trusted in the immigrant community and have experience supporting them. “Their personal information will not be required to get those supports,” he said.

California Has Estimated 2.2 Million Immigrants Living in the Country Illegally

A group of charities has committed to raise another \$50 million for the fund, begun by a \$5.5 million in contri-

butions from the Emerson Collective, Blue Shield of California Foundation, the California Endowment, the James Irvine Foundation, the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative and an anonymous donor. California has an estimated 2.2 million

Since mid-March, 2.7 million Californians have filed for unemployment benefits — more than all of the claims California processed in 2019 combined.

immigrants living in the country illegally, the most of any state, according to the Pew Research Center. Jacqueline Martinez, CEO of the Latino Community Foundation, said it’s not clear which nonprofits will get the money and how they will distribute it. But she said it was critical for California not to try and hand out the money itself. “You need to use organizations that have trusted relationships with these families,” she said. “Will these families even step out of their homes to gain access to these resources?”

California has been the most aggressive state in the nation when it comes to giving benefits to immigrants living in the country illegally. Last year, California became the first state to give taxpayer-funded health benefits to low-income adults 25 and younger living in the country illegally. This year, Newsom had proposed expanding those benefits to seniors 65 and older.

Republicans and conservative groups have mostly opposed those measures, arguing the state should not use public money for people who are not citizens. But immigrants rights advocates say California — the fifth largest economy in the world with a population of nearly 40 million people — has a responsibility to care for all of its residents.

California Has More Than 26,600 Confirmed Coronavirus Cases and More Than 850 Deaths

The spending announced Wednesday means Newsom has committed to spending more than \$2 billion responding to the coronavirus, an extraordinary...

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REOPEN CALIFORNIA? THAT'S TOUGHEST PHASE YET, NEWSOM SAYS

April 15, 2020 | *CalMatters*
By *Ben Christopher and Rachel Becker, CalMatters*

When will Californians emerge from house confinement? What will life look like? In a roadmap unveiled Tuesday with top public health officials, Gov. Gavin Newsom said he will not lift his shelter-in-place order until adequate suppression and mitigation measures are in place to prevent future flare-ups.

That means tracking down the sick and isolating clusters of new infections, arming hospitals with adequate equipment and setting new guidelines for schools and businesses to

reopen. In short, it might be a while. The governor told reporters not to even ask him about the timeline until hospitalizations and intensive care caseloads begin to drop. To his point, Monday marked California's deadliest day so far with 71 deaths for a total of 758 lives lost.

"In two weeks, if we see a continued decline, not just flattening, but a decline ... ask me then," Newsom said. Nearly four weeks in with signs that a state lockdown was slowing the spread of the coronavirus, the governor offered a glimpse of post-pandemic life where restaurants check temperatures at the door, servers in masks offer disposable menus and...

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AP File

NEW VIDEO SHOWS COVID-19 DROPLETS GREATLY CONTAINED BY

April 16, 2020 | *Jim Jakobs*

Talking emits droplets from your mouth. Loud talking generates even more droplets. These droplets can harbor infectious virus particles. The National Institutes of Health published a letter with video and visual accompaniment Wednesday to prove a noticeable point. The scientists write, "The act of speaking generates oral fluid droplets that vary widely in size, and these droplets can harbor infectious virus particles." In other words, when you talk, you can infect others around you.

Laser Light-Scattering Experiment

In the NIH experiment, droplets produced flashes as they passed through a light sheet. An iPhone 11 Pro video camera aimed at the light sheet through a hole (7 cm in diameter) on the opposite side of a box recorded sound and video of the light-scattering events at a rate of 60 frames per second. The size of the droplets was estimated from ultrahigh-resolution recordings. Video clips of the events while the person was...

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CALIFORNIA ALLOWS SOME FRESHWATER FISHING BANS OVER VIRUS

April 16, 2020 | *AP News*

LOS ANGELES — California regulators on Wednesday voted to allow temporary limits on freshwater fishing in some rural communities where local officials are concerned out-of-towners could spread the coronavirus to residents. The unanimous vote by the Fish and Game Commission grants emergency authority to the director of the state Department of Fish and Wildlife to postpone the spring trout season at the request of a few counties.

Opening day is celebrated among anglers as "fishmas" and draws thousands of people to the eastern Sierra. This year it's set for April 25. But fears over COVID-19 led the counties of Alpine, Inyo and Mono to urge fisheries regulators to postpone the unofficial holiday for their rivers, streams and lakes. The online public meeting was rescheduled from an April 9 teleconference that was canceled when it became overwhelmed by hundreds of callers, some of whom branded officials as "fascists" and shouted obscenities. Rumors had...

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STIMULUS CHECKS TO BEAR TRUMP'S NAME IN UNPRECEDENTED MOVE

April 15, 2020 | AP News

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's name will be printed on the stimulus checks that the Internal Revenue Service will be sending to tens of millions of Americans around the country, in an unprecedented move finalized this week. The Treasury Department confirmed the decision in a statement Wednesday. It marks the first time a president's name has appeared on any IRS payments, either refund checks or other stimulus checks that have been mailed during past economic crises.

Treasury said that the decision to add Trump's name will not delay issuance of the paper checks, which will be mailed to people who are not set up to receive direct deposit payments from the IRS. "Economic Impact Payment checks are scheduled to go out on time and exactly as planned — there is no delay whatsoever," Treasury's statement said. "In fact, we expect the first checks to be in the mail early next week, which is well

The Treasury Department confirmed the decision in a statement Wednesday. It marks the first time a president's name has appeared on any IRS payments, either refund checks or other stimulus checks that have been mailed during past economic crises.

in advance of when the first checks went out in 2008 and well in advance of initial estimates." Two administration officials who spoke to The Associated Press said that "President Donald J. Trump" will appear on the left side in the memo section of the checks. They spoke to the

AP on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about the plans.

Earlier This Month, Trump Denied Wanting to Sign the Checks

The Washington Post, which first reported that Trump's name would appear on the checks, said the name would be below a line that reads, "Economic Impact Payment."

The checks will be mailed to people who do not have information on file with the IRS to allow for direct deposits, many of them low-income individuals. The checks will carry a signature of an official from the Bureau of the Fiscal Service, the Treasury division that prints the checks. The checks are signed by civil servants to ensure government payments are nonpartisan. A president is not an authorized signer for money sent by the U.S. Treasury. Earlier this month, Trump denied wanting to sign the checks when he was asked about published reports stating the opposite. "No. Me sign? No," Trump said at an April 3 briefing. "There's millions of checks. I'm going to sign them? No. It's a Trump administration initiative. But do I want to sign them? No."

The checks will be mailed to people who do not have information on file with the IRS to allow for direct deposits, many of them low-income individuals.

The payments are part of the \$2.2 trillion rescue package signed into law at the end of last month aimed at combating the economic free-fall caused by shutdown orders in the coronavirus pandemic.

The Payment Amount Steadily Declines for Those Who Make More

A memo obtained last week by the AP from the House Ways and Means Committee said the IRS would make about 60 million payments to Americans through direct deposit in mid-April, likely this week. The IRS has direct deposit information for these individuals from their 2018 or 2019 tax returns. Then, starting the week of May 4, the memo said, the IRS would begin issuing paper checks to individuals. It said the paper checks would be issued at a rate of about 5 million per week, which means it could take up to 20 weeks to get all the checks out. Anyone who earns up to \$75,000 in adjusted gross income and who has a Social Security number will receive a \$1,200 payment. That means married couples filing joint returns will receive the full...

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TRUMP QUIETLY SHUTS DOWN ASYLUM AT US BORDERS TO FIGHT VIRUS

AP File

April 14, 2020 | AP News

WASHINGTON — Beaten down by the coronavirus outbreak, the world economy in 2020 will suffer its worst year since the Great Depression of the 1930s, the International Monetary Fund says in its latest forecast.

The IMF said Tuesday that it expects the global economy to shrink 3% this year — far worse than its 0.1% dip in the Great Recession year of 2009 — before rebounding in 2021 with 5.8% growth. It acknowledges, though, that prospects for a rebound next year are clouded by uncertainty. The bleak assessment represents a breathtaking downgrade by the

IMF. In its previous forecast in January, before COVID-19 emerged as a grave threat to public health and economic growth worldwide, the international lending organization had forecast moderate global growth of 3.3% this year. But far-reaching measures to contain the pandemic — lockdowns, business shutdowns, social distancing and travel restrictions — have suddenly brought economic activity to a near-standstill across much of the world.

“The world has been put in a great lockdown,” the IMF’s chief economist, Gita Gopinath, told reporters. “This is a...

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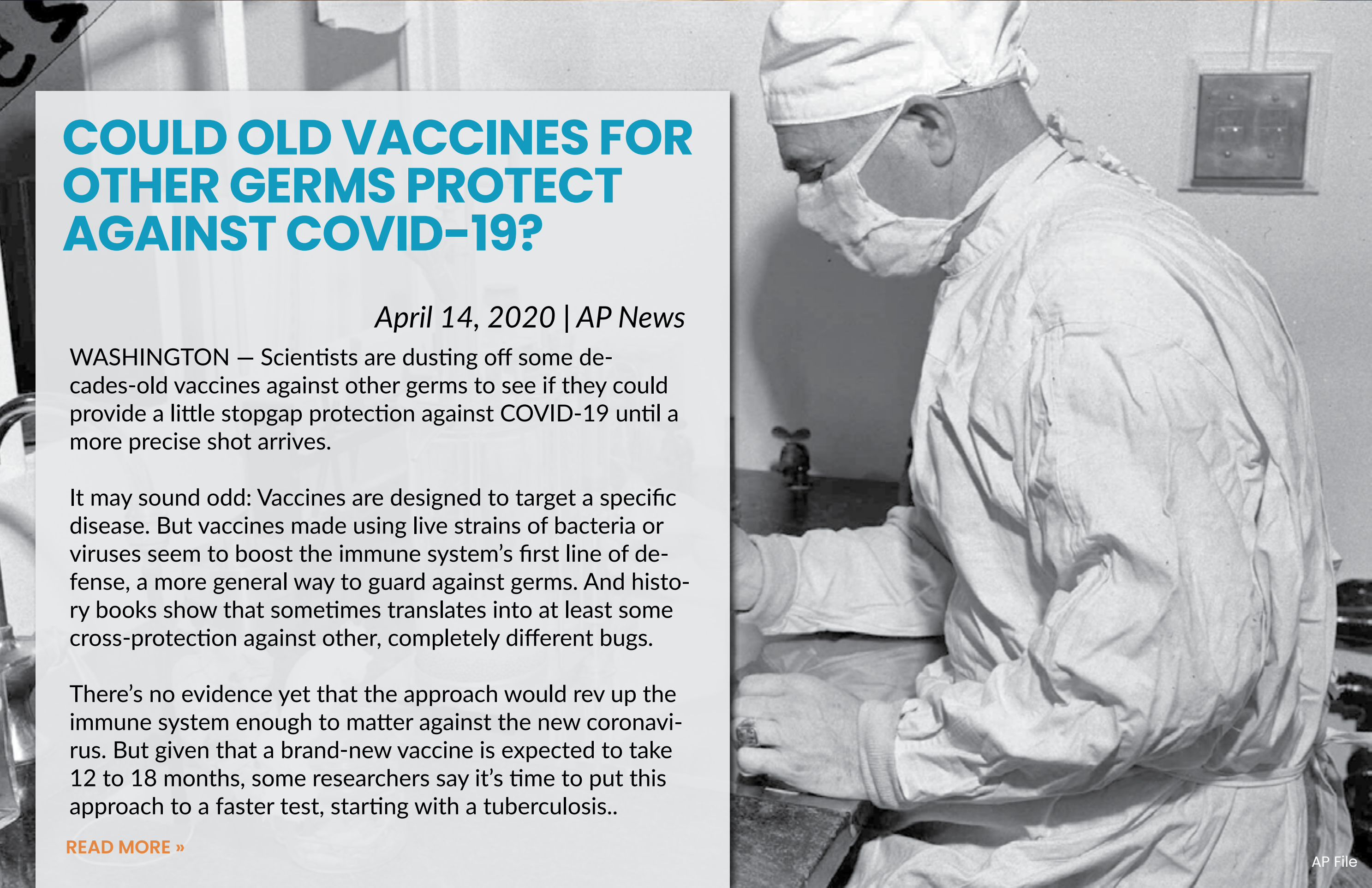
WOLF THAT CAPTIVATED CALIFORNIA AND WORLD IS BELIEVED DEAD

April 16, 2020 | AP News

SALEM, Ore. — A wolf that wandered thousands of miles from Oregon and became the first wild wolf spotted in California in almost 90 years before returning to Oregon and starting a pack is believed to be dead, wildlife officials said. The wandering wolf, known as OR7, leaves behind a pack composed of its mate and three other wolves in the mountains of southern Oregon, wildlife biologists said in an annual wolf report released Wednesday.

It’s one of 22 packs documented in Oregon, up from 16 in 2018. The number of wolves in the state increased 15% to 158 during that time. OR7, with a thick coat of gray and cream-colored fur, was dubbed Journey after a naming contest. A GPS collar allowed millions of people to track the animal when it left its pack in northeastern Oregon and headed southwest. In 2011, Journey became the first gray wolf to roam west of the Cascade Range since 1946. He...

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COULD OLD VACCINES FOR OTHER GERMS PROTECT AGAINST COVID-19?

April 14, 2020 | AP News

WASHINGTON — Scientists are dusting off some decades-old vaccines against other germs to see if they could provide a little stopgap protection against COVID-19 until a more precise shot arrives.

It may sound odd: Vaccines are designed to target a specific disease. But vaccines made using live strains of bacteria or viruses seem to boost the immune system’s first line of defense, a more general way to guard against germs. And history books show that sometimes translates into at least some cross-protection against other, completely different bugs.

There’s no evidence yet that the approach would rev up the immune system enough to matter against the new coronavirus. But given that a brand-new vaccine is expected to take 12 to 18 months, some researchers say it’s time to put this approach to a faster test, starting with a tuberculosis...

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WORLD

MUST MUSLIMS FAST FOR RAMADAN DURING COVID-19?

April 15, 2020 | AP News

When Islam's holy month of Ramadan begins next week, there will still be prayers, fasting, and feasting, but because of the COVID-19 pandemic the prayers and celebrations will be in the homes of the Muslim faithful instead of in mosques. Shelter-at-home orders prevented communal gatherings of Christians and

Shelter-at-home orders prevented communal gatherings of Christians and Jews celebrating Easter and Passover earlier this month. The restrictions pose similar challenges for Muslims during Ramadan.

Jews celebrating Easter and Passover earlier this month. The restrictions pose similar challenges for Muslims during Ramadan.

The holy month, which this year begins April 24, commemorates the Prophet

Mohammad's first revelation of the Quran, Islam's holy book. Fasting from food, drink, tobacco, and caffeine starts at sunrise and ends at sunset each day and is intended to bring Muslims closer to Allah.

Fasting Is Individual Decision

But with the coronavirus in our midst, some may decide to postpone fasting to a later time so they can remain properly hydrated and healthy. Muslims have always been free to choose whether to fast during Ramadan if they have health concerns, said Imam Seyed Ali Ghazvini of the Islamic Cultural Center of Fresno in northeast Fresno. Many Muslims in the Fresno area have already been engaging in mini-fasts — abstaining from tobacco and caffeine for a few days at a time in the weeks leading up to Ramadan so they are better prepared for full fasting once the month begins, he said. Muslims will still be able to engage in the same activities as in past years, but in a more virtual environment at home, said Imam El Sayed Ramadan of the Masjid Fresno Islamic Center on Shaw Avenue in central Fresno.

Social Media Takes Center Stage

Ramadan said he has been posting prayers and recita-

tions from the Quran on the mosque's YouTube channel, and Muslims also can pray and read on their own at home. If there is any silver lining to the quarantines, it's that people have more time to reflect on their faith and their connection to it, he said. "We need to remember something, because religion is not practiced only as a community activity," Ramadan said. "It is basically an individual connection between a person and his almighty god." While the traditional meals at the mosque to mark the breaking of the daily fast won't be possible this year, Ramadan said, the mosque is making sure the needy will be fed and is handing out food cards on Thursday so families can stock up on groceries ahead of time.

Youth Center Also Goes Virtual

My Deen, the northeast Fresno center for Muslim youth and families, also has moved to virtual activities to keep children engaged, said Sheraz Gill, president of My Deen's board. The communal meals that mark the end of the daily fast are part of the social fabric that's hard to reproduce virtually, he said. "Generally we have a lot of people come to our center for that type of event. It's a long day, people are working, you're fasting, no food, no drink, it's an opportunity to break that fast collectively and thank Allah for all the blessings we have," Gill said. "So we're thinking, how do we do that virtually? Maybe we can partner with a restaurant, where people can go and get food."

Ramadan is usually a time for fellowship and community activities, and that will be sorely missed, especially for those older Muslims who live alone in isolation, Ghazvini said. "We are social animals," he said. "We're not meant to stay at home." The Islamic Cultural Center also has been posting activities online, using Zoom...

If there is any silver lining to the quarantines, it's that people have more time to reflect on their faith and their connection to it.

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NEW PHONE TRACKING SOFTWARE COULD SLOW COVID-19 SPREAD, OFFICIALS SAY

April 11, 2020 | AP News

Apple and Google have announced a joint plan to help contain the spread of COVID-19 by using mobile phone location tracking. The companies plan to add new software to phones, making it easier to use Bluetooth wireless technology to track down people who may have been infected by coronavirus carriers. The idea is to help national, state and local governments roll out apps for so-called “contact tracing” that will run on iPhones and Android phones alike.

Using Phones to Trace Contacts

Using the Apple-Google technology, contact-tracing apps would gather a record of other phones with which they came

into close proximity. Such data can be used to alert others who might have been infected by known carriers of the novel coronavirus, typically when the phones’ owners have installed the apps and agreed to share data with public-health authorities.

No such apps have yet been announced in the United States, but Gov. Gavin Newsom of California said Friday that state officials have been in touch with the companies as they look ahead at how to reopen and lift stay-at-home orders. “We were on the phone just this morning, for example, with Apple,” he said at a news conference. Singapore and China...

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FACEBOOK TO WARN USERS WHO “LIKED” CORONAVIRUS HOAXES

April 16, 2020 | AP News

NEW YORK — Have you liked or commented on a Facebook post about the COVID-19 pandemic? Facebook is about to begin letting you know if you’ve spread bad information. The company will soon be letting users know if they liked, reacted to, or commented on posts with harmful misinformation about the virus that was removed by moderators, by directing those who engaged with those posts to information about virus myths debunked by the World Health Organization.

Social media is awash in bad takes about the outbreak and platforms have begun to combat that misinformation. Facebook said Thursday that people will begin seeing warning messages in coming weeks. Facebook and other platforms have already taken steps to curb the wave of dangerous misinformation that has spread along with the coronavirus. Facebook has banned bogus ads promising coronavirus treatments or cures. No such thing exists. There is no vaccine...

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US SAYS CHINA MAY HAVE CONDUCTED LOW-LEVEL NUCLEAR TEST BLASTS

April 16, 2020 | Haaretz


China may have secretly set off low-level underground nuclear test explosions despite claiming to observe an international pact banning such blasts, the U.S. State Department said in a report on Wednesday that could fuel U.S.-Chinese tensions. The finding, first reported by the Wall Street Journal, may worsen ties already strained by U.S. charges that the global COVID-19 pandemic resulted from Beijing’s mis-handling of a 2019 outbreak of the coronavirus in the city of Wuhan.

U.S. concerns about Beijing’s possible breaches of a “zero yield” standard for test blasts have been prompted by activities at China’s Lop Nur nuclear test site throughout 2019, the State Department report said. Zero yield refers to a nuclear test in which there is no explosive chain reaction of the type ignited by the detonation of a nuclear warhead. “China’s possible preparation to operate its Lop Nur test site year-round...

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