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WEEKLY DIGEST  
MAY 8, 2020



**250 'FREEDOM' PROTESTERS  
WANT ALL FRESNO  
BUSINESSES OPEN NOW »**

**CALIFORNIA DOOM:  
STAGGERING \$54 BILLION  
BUDGET DEFICIT LOOMS »**

**PELOSI PUSHES AHEAD ON VIRUS  
BILL, BUT GOP WARY »**



# 250 'FREEDOM' PROTESTERS WANT ALL FRESNO BUSINESSES OPEN NOW

May 6, 2020 | David Taub

Flag- and sign-waving protesters yelling “freedom” called for the city of Fresno to immediately re-open the economy amid the coronavirus pandemic Wednesday. The City Hall crowd, which police esti-

**“I want to thank Mayor Lee Brand for standing up to the governor to show Sacramento and our great country that Fresno for once, instead of being the butt of jokes, can be the model for the safe reopening of this great country.”  
— Bernie Siomiak, owner of Crazy Bernie Furniture**

imated at 250, heard dozens of speakers — business owners and elected leaders — talk about the Constitution and the reeling economy that has sent unemployment soaring. Speakers addressed the crowd from the back of a box truck parked

on the street facing the entrance to City Hall. At one point, conservative activist and event organizer Ben Bergquam led chants of “Open up! Open up!”

**Related Story: Many Fresno Businesses Allowed to Re-open Starting Monday**

## ‘Crazy Bernie’ Praises Brand

On Tuesday, Fresno Mayor Lee Brand announced that all retail stores will be allowed to reopen in some fashion next Monday. That includes Crazy Bernie Furniture, and its namesake owner Bernie Siomiak, who has publicly attacked Brand and his handling of the pandemic. His furniture store received two citations for a total of \$6,000 in fines for operating curbside pickup as a nonessential business. That’s why it was surprising when Siomiak, wearing his trademark crown, praised Fresno’s mayor. “I want to thank Mayor Lee Brand for standing up to the governor to show Sacramento and our great country that Fresno for once, instead of being the butt of jokes, can be the model for the safe reopening of this great country,” Siomiak said.

**Fresno Isn’t Reopening Fast Enough for Some**  
Speakers talked about the inequity of big box stores

remaining open, but smaller stores being deemed non-essential. Tara Smith, who owns Creative Tile with her husband, told the crowd simply “We need to open up now!” Dine-in restaurants, hair-care, gyms, and entertainment venues will remain on the sideline, subject to more stringent criteria before the state allows them to reopen. Restaurant owner Mike Shirinian, attending the event, said Brand isn’t acting fast enough. “It’s a step in the right direction. The whole process needs to get accelerated. I think it’s better than nothing,” Shirinian said. “We need to get this open. Like yesterday.” Shirinian served on Brand’s Fresno Recovery Advisory Committee before quitting last week, questioning Brand’s leadership.

**Related Story: Shirinian Quits as Brand Advisor: I Don’t Think He is a Good Leader**

## Vibrant Atmosphere

Police were visible at the event, but kept their distance, usually across the street. Police chief Andy Hall roamed around, cheerfully greeted by well-wishers asking for pictures. Many cars passing along O Street honked their horns, creating a festive atmosphere. A few elected leaders spoke including councilman Garry Bredefeld — who has been critical of the city’s process of closing businesses — and county supervisors Steve Brandau and Nathan Magsig, who urged the audience to contact Gov. Gavin Newsom. The only commerce taking place was a booth selling Donald Trump merchandise. Not a single food truck capitalized on the crowd and ideal weather. Councilman Miguel Arias, a supporter of the way the city has been handling COVID-19, passed through the crowd on the way to City Hall. “This will be the best parking revenue day we’ve had in a while,” he said...

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# DROPOUTS, DROPPED CLASSES AT STATE CENTER SOAR IN COVID-19 SEMESTER

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May 6, 2020 | Nancy Price

More than twice as many State Center Community College District students dropped all their courses this spring semester compared to a year ago, and the number of courses dropped this semester is up 15% compared to spring 2019, officials report. At Fresno City College, 1,000 students dropped courses after mid-March, when the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic caused campus closures.

Overall, about 1,000 more students had enrolled in State Center courses at the start of the spring semester compared to last year, but the withdrawals apparently erased that gain — and then some. Robin Torres, the district’s enrollment management director, reported that by mid-April, 4,293 students had dropped all their courses this semester, compared to 1,741 a year ago; 24,217 sections were dropped this semester, com-

pared to 20,985 a year ago. The semester started with 39,404 students enrolled, compared to 38,444 a year ago. Torres said the enrollment comparison was for the first 15 weeks of the spring semesters of 2019 and 2020, “so there could be additional considerations not related to COVID” that explain the higher numbers in 2020.

**Related Story: State Center Faces Massive Budgets Cuts as COVID Strips Revenues**

And there could be more dropped courses to come. The deadline to withdraw was extended to May 15 because of the pandemic, district spokeswoman Lucy Ruiz said. In recognition that some students lacked access to the internet or devices, or faced economic hardships because of lost employment, rules...

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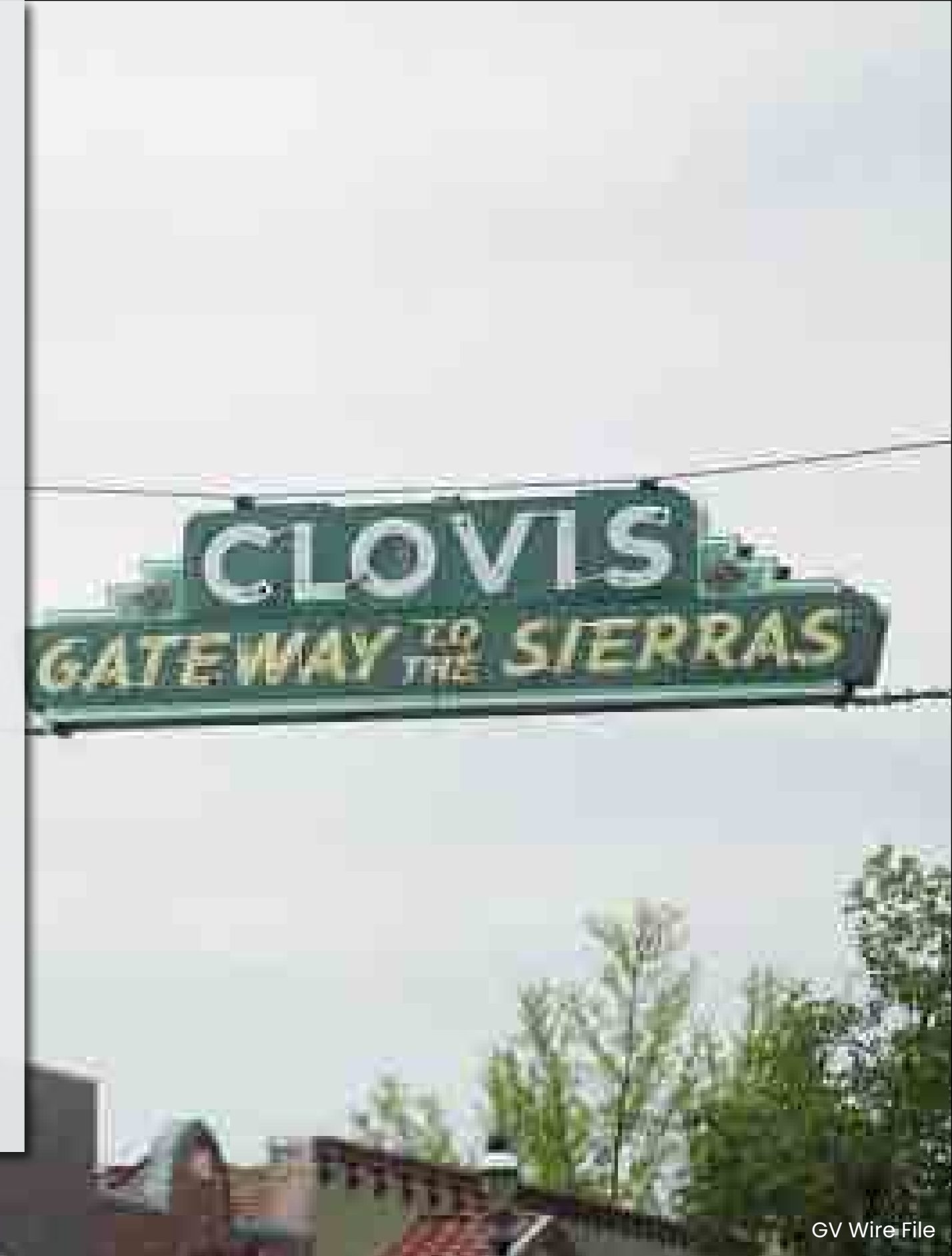
## CLOVIS WON’T ENFORCE STATE NONESSENTIAL BUSINESS BAN

May 5, 2020 | David Taub

The city of Clovis will no longer enforce the state’s shelter-in-place order. That doesn’t mean all businesses are cleared to reopen with impunity. But it does mean the city will no longer enforce the order or penalize businesses in violation — that will remain up to state and county authorities. The Clovis City Council debated the issue for nearly three hours Monday night, hearing from dozens of constituents inside the council chambers.

On Tuesday, Clovis businesses were sent a letter with a link to Clovis Re-Launch, which provides a checklist of preparations for getting up and running again. “Businesses must adhere to the State of California’s Shelter in Place order. It is the City’s intent to allow businesses to operate as soon as possible,” the website states. The council by a 4-1 vote, repealed three emergency orders said to be redundant because of the state’s orders. They pertain to the closure of bars and dine-in restaurants, gyms and entertainment venues, and restrictions at local parks. Lynne...

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GV Wire File

## WHERE’S THE BEEF? WENDY’S, COSTCO RUN LOW ON MEAT.

May 5, 2020 | Jim Jakobs

Costco now limits buyers to three items of beef, pork, and poultry. Signs at Wendy’s alert customers that some menu items might be out of stock. What in the name of COVID-19 is going on? “The food supply chain is breaking,” says Tyson Foods, one of the world’s largest food companies. Tyson ran a full-page advertisement in The New York Times and other newspapers Sunday warning that as “pork, beef and chicken plants are being forced to close, even for short periods of time, millions of pounds of meat will disappear from the supply chain.”

**Idled Capacity, Coronavirus Outbreaks**  
U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds represents South Dakota, which is home to many meat processing plants, including Smithfield Foods. In a statement to GV Wire sent Tuesday, he said, “Because of COVID-19 outbreaks, many meat processing facilities have closed down.” The senator estimates that as of May 1, 25% of the nation’s beef packing capacity and 40% of pork packing...

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# SLO COUNTY DOESN'T WANT 'OUT-OF-TOWNERS' ON ITS BEACHES

May 7, 2020 | AP News

SACRAMENTO — California will have a budget shortfall of \$54.3 billion because of the economic devastation wrought by the coronavirus, Gov. Gavin Newsom's administration announced Thursday, a stunning reversal for a state that had a \$21 billion surplus a year ago. The state has been under a mandatory stay-at-home order since mid-March, forcing nonessential businesses to close and prompting more than 4 million Californians to file for unemployment benefits. After recording record

The state has been under a mandatory stay-at-home order since mid-March, forcing non-essential businesses to close and prompting more than 4 million Californians to file for unemployment benefits. After recording record low unemployment of 3.9% at the start of the year, the Newsom administration now predicts a jobless rate of 18% for the nation's most populous state — 46% higher than the height of the Great Recession a decade ago.

low unemployment of 3.9% at the start of the year, the Newsom administration now predicts a jobless rate of 18% for the nation's most populous state — 46% higher than the height of the Great Recession a decade ago.

Newsom hinted at the bleak numbers on Wednesday when he called the unemployment figures "Depression-era numbers." "These numbers are jaw dropping," Newsom said. "I just hope that people are preparing

themselves ... for the effort that we all need to engage together to undertake to unwind that and get back on our feet." It's not yet clear what state programs will be cut or by how much. Newsom is scheduled to reveal his new spending proposal next week. But the revenue shortfall means the state's constitutionally required funding level for public schools and community colleges will fall by \$18.3 billion. The virus-induced business closures, unemployed workers and cratering of the restaurant, tourism and entertainment industries has resulted in a staggering loss of tax revenue for California. The Newsom administration projects personal income will

fall by close to 9% for the state's nearly 40 million residents while permits for new housing construction — a key measure of the economy's health — will drop more than 21%. After facing budget deficits of more than \$40 billion following the Great Recession, California lawmakers have been saving money for the next economic downturn to try and avoid a repeat of cuts to state services. For the past 10 years, the state has had an unprecedented run of economic growth, adding more than 3.4 million new jobs.

After facing budget deficits of more than \$40 billion following the Great Recession, California lawmakers have been saving money for the next economic downturn to try and avoid a repeat of cuts to state services.

**General Fund Revenues Will Decline by \$41.2 Billion** That led to increased state spending and huge budget surpluses in recent years, pushing the state's "rainy day fund" to more than \$16 billion. But the projected budget shortfall announced Thursday is nearly three-and-a half times that number, dispelling any notion of a quick recovery once the state's coronavirus restrictions are lifted. The Newsom administration estimates state general fund revenues will decline by \$41.2 billion compared to the \$222.2 billion spending proposal Newsom revealed in January. Plus, California must pay for an extra \$7.1 billion for increased enrollment in some social safety net programs, including Medicaid, the joint state and federal health insurance program for the poor and disabled.

Another \$6 billion in anticipated emergency spending on the coronavirus for things like protective gear, hotel rooms for the homeless, and cash payments for low-income adults living in the country illegally pushes the projected deficit past \$50 billion. Meanwhile, lawmakers are already being asked to bail out the state's essential industries. California hospitals say they have...

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# CALIFORNIA COURT DENIES BID TO BLOCK PAYMENTS TO IMMIGRANTS

May 6, 2020 | AP News

SACRAMENTO — The California Supreme Court on Wednesday denied a bid to block the state’s first-in-the-nation plan to give money to immigrants living in the country illegally who are hurt by the coronavirus.

It was the second time in two days that judges refused to stop Gov. Gavin Newsom’s \$75 million plan to aid an estimated 150,000 unemployed adults who were left out of the stimulus package approved by Congress because of their immigration status. The program offers each adult \$500 to be distributed through nonprofit groups in an effort to protect recipients from providing personal information that might

cost them other benefits or increase their danger of being deported. The state’s high court in a one-sentence order rejected the petition filed by the Center for American Liberty, which contended the program violates the state Constitution’s ban on giving gifts to organizations outside of the state’s exclusive control.

It was filed by attorney Harmeet Dhillon, who is also a Republican Party official, on behalf of two long-shot Republican candidates for the state Assembly. A Los Angeles Superior Court on Tuesday similarly rejected a request from the conservative group Judicial Watch to stop the program...

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# CALIFORNIA RESTAURANTS ENVISION BIG CHANGES IN REOPENING

May 7, 2020 | AP News

LOS ANGELES — California restaurants have drafted a plan to allow the industry to reopen for sit-down dining with an array of safeguards while avoiding possible requirements imposed in other states that customers have their temperature taken or the number of tables be dramatically limited.

The recommendations, obtained by The Associated Press, are to be submitted to Gov. Gavin Newsom on Thursday. They envision a changed world within dining rooms, as an industry built on face-to-face contact and crowded tables looks for ways to safely conduct business and avoid the spread of coronavirus.

Only family members or people who live together would sit at the same table. Buffets, salad bars and shared bread baskets would be out. Salt and pepper shakers could be replaced by bottles of hand sanitizer. And meals could arrive from food servers sheathed in face masks. Restaurant...

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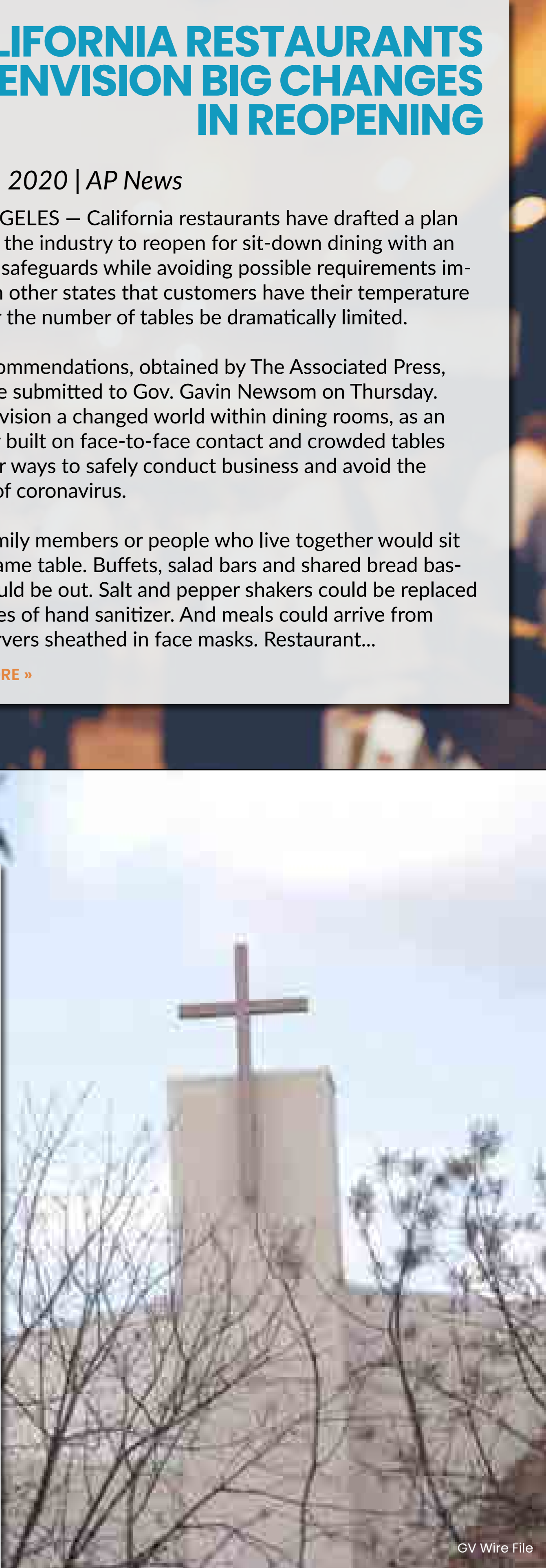
# COURT UPHOLDS CALIFORNIA BAN ON CHURCH SERVICES IN PANDEMIC

May 6, 2020 | AP News

LOS ANGELES — Gov. Gavin Newsom had the right to ban church assemblies in the interest of public health during the coronavirus outbreak, a federal judge ruled Tuesday. Newsom’s stay-at-home order did not violate the constitutional rights to free assembly and religion when the Cross Culture Christian Center in Lodi was ordered to cease holding services, Judge John Mendez ruled in Sacramento. Pastor Jonathan Duncan had continued to assemble his congregation after the governor banned public gatherings in March despite warnings it was in violation of state and local orders.

The church of fewer than 50 members said it was obeying federal guidelines to prevent spread of the virus. Lodi police entered the church during a service attended by about 30 worshipers in late March and said they were defying the governor’s order. The church responded with a “cease and desist” letter sent to the city and argued they had a First Amendment right to gather and practice their religion. “Constitutional...

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# PELOSI PUSHES AHEAD ON MASSIVE VIRUS BILL, BUT GOP WARY

May 6, 2020 | AP News

WASHINGTON — Even in absentia, House Democrats are seeking to drive the debate on the fifth coronavirus response bill, promising to produce a mega-package stuffed with Democratic priorities despite a chorus of Republicans voicing hesitation about more spending. Speaker Nancy Pelosi promises that the Democratic-controlled House will deliver legislation to help state and local governments through the COVID-19 crisis, along with additional money for direct payments to individuals, unemployment insurance and a third installment of aid to small businesses. The amount of funding is to be determined.

The California Democrat is leading the way as Democrats fashion a sweeping package that is expected to be unveiled soon even as the House stays closed while the Senate is open in the pandemic. On the other side of the Capitol, Republicans controlling the Senate face internal divisions over spending and how ambitious to

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be in the upcoming round to respond to Depression-era jobless levels. The contours of the next package are taking shape despite Republican resistance to more spending and a deepening debate over how best to confront the pandemic and its economic devastation. Some Republicans such as Sen. Mitt Romney of Utah and a group of GOP governors want to be more generous

to states confronting furloughs and cuts to services as revenues plummet and unemployment insurance and other costs spike. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said Tuesday it's time to push "pause" on more aid legislation — even as he repeated a "red line" demand

that any new aid package include liability protections for hospitals, health care providers and businesses operating and reopening.

## Trump Is Encouraging States to Reopen

McConnell and other Republicans, however, ducked the chance to endorse President Donald Trump's demand for a cut to Social Security payroll taxes as a salve for the economy. Many lawmakers think the payroll tax cut is a bad idea because it only boosts paychecks but doesn't help people thrown out of a job. "I've never thought that really would be very effective," Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine. She said she's working with a bipartisan, bicameral group on a state and local aid package.

Trump is encouraging states to reopen and Republicans hope the gradual comeback will kick-start the economy, reducing the pressure for more pricey aid. Trump took to Twitter on Tuesday with a repackaged set of demands. "Well run States should not be bailing out poorly run States, using CoronaVirus as the excuse! The elimination of Sanctuary Cities, Payroll Taxes, and perhaps Capital Gains Taxes, must be put on the table," Trump tweeted. Romney on Tuesday urged his colleagues to pass additional state aid, with a chart titled "Blue states aren't the only ones who are screwed," based on Moody's Analytics data showing Louisiana, Missouri, Florida, Kansas, and Kentucky competing with New York and New Jersey and the states facing the worst revenue shortfalls. Details on the package are a ways away, but it's likely to be anchored by money for state and local governments, including smaller cities left out in last month's massive relief bill...

**For her part, Pelosi recognizes that any bill drafted by Democrats will need more thorough culling than early Democratic efforts, which came under GOP attack for easy-to-criticize items like aid to Washington, D.C.'s Kennedy Center and material taken from the so-called Green New Deal.**

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# 33 MILLION HAVE SOUGHT US UNEMPLOYMENT AID SINCE VIRUS HIT

May 7, 2020 | AP News

WASHINGTON — Nearly 3.2 million laid-off workers applied for unemployment benefits last week as the business shut-downs caused by the viral outbreak deepened the worst U.S. economic catastrophe in decades.

Roughly 33.5 million people have now filed for jobless aid in the seven weeks since the coronavirus began forcing millions of companies to close their doors and slash their workforces. That is the equivalent of one in five Americans who had been employed back in February, when the unemployment rate had reached a 50-year low of just 3.5%. The Labor De-

partment’s report Thursday suggests that layoffs, while still breathtakingly high, are steadily declining after sharp spikes in late March and early April. Initial claims for unemployment aid have now fallen for five straight weeks, from a peak of nearly 6.9 million during the week that ended March 28.

Applications for jobless aid rose in just six states last week, including Maine, New Jersey, and Oklahoma, and declined in the 44 others. The report showed that 22.7 million people are now receiving unemployment aid — a rough measure of job losses since the shutdowns began. That figure lags a...

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## ‘IF THIS THING BOOMERANGS’: SECOND WAVE OF INFECTIONS FEARED

May 6, 2020 | AP News

WASHINGTON — As Europe and the U.S. loosen their lockdowns against the coronavirus, health experts are expressing growing dread over what they say is an all-but-certain second wave of deaths and infections that could force governments to clamp back down in a drawn-out, two-steps-forward-one-step-back process.

“We’re risking a backslide that will be intolerable,” said Dr. Ian Lipkin of Columbia University’s Center for Infection and Immunity. Around the world, German authorities began drawing up plans in case of a resurgence of the virus. Experts in Italy urged intensified efforts to identify new victims and trace their contacts. And France, which hasn’t yet eased its lockdown, has already worked up a “reconfinement plan” in the event of a new wave. “There will be a second wave, but the problem is to which extent. Is it a small wave or a big wave? It’s too early to say,” said Olivier Schwartz, head of...

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AP/Gemunu Amarasinghe

## STILL WAITING FOR A COVID-19 STIMULUS CHECK? THIS MAP MAY EXPLAIN

May 6, 2020 | AP News

Some Valley residents are still waiting for their \$1,200 federal COVID-19 stimulus check to arrive. And government data shows it could take several more weeks for the promised relief money to reach them. That’s because Visalia and Fresno residents are ranked at the very bottom of the list of Americans who previously set up direct deposit accounts with the IRS, according to the personal finance website MagnifyMoney. Those without direct deposit have to wait for a paper check to show up in their mailbox.

Mailed checks started going out in late April, several weeks after most direct deposit payments were issued. But government officials have said that check printing limitations could result in some payments not arriving for months. “Paper checks will be issued at a rate of about 5 million per week, which could take up to 20 weeks,” according to an April 16 memo circulated by the House Ways and Means...

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AP/Frank Augstein

# BRITAIN'S DEATH TOLL FROM THE CORONAVIRUS RIVALS ITALY'S

May 5, 2020 | AP News

LONDON — Britain on Tuesday became the first country in Europe to confirm more than 30,000 coronavirus deaths, and infections rose sharply again in Russia, even as other nations made great strides in containing the scourge. China marked its third week with no new reported deaths, while South Korea restarted its base-

**The British government said about 28,700 people with COVID-19 had died in hospitals, nursing homes and other settings, while Italy reported close to 29,100 fatalities. Both figures are almost certainly underestimates because they include only people who tested positive, and testing was not widespread in Italian and British nursing homes until recently.**

ball season. In the U.S., some states took continued steps to lift the lockdown restrictions that have thrown millions out of work, even as the country recorded thousands of new infections and deaths every day. Underscoring the stakes, New York state reported 1,700 more people died in nursing homes than it had previously counted. President Donald Trump headed for Arizona to visit a Honeywell factory that makes respirator masks, in what could be a return to more regular travel for the president.

"The people of our country should think of themselves as warriors. Our country has to open," Trump said before boarding Air Force One. Britain appeared set to surpass Italy as Europe's hardest-hit nation, even as the rate of deaths and hospitalization declined and the government prepared to take tentative steps out of lockdown. The British government said about 28,700 people with COVID-19 had died in hospitals, nursing homes and other settings, while Italy reported close to 29,100 fatalities. Both figures are almost certainly underestimates because they include only people who tested positive, and testing was not widespread in Italian and British nursing homes until recently. Yet official British statistics released Tuesday on people who

died with suspected COVID-19 put the country's toll at more than 30,000 as of April 24, or one-third higher than the government count at the time. A comparable figure for Italy was not available. In Russia, the number of infections rose sharply again, with Moscow reporting more than 10,000 new cases for three days in a row. At the same time, many European countries that have relaxed strict lockdowns after new infections tapered off were watching their virus numbers warily.

## Italy This Week Allowed 4.4 Million People to Go Back to Work

"We know with great certainty that there will be a second wave — the majority of scientists are sure of that. And many also assume that there will be a third wave," said Lothar Wieler, the head of Germany's national disease control center. French President Emmanuel Macron took heat from parents, teachers and mayors, who pushed back against his plans to gradually reopen schools next week with classes capped at 15 students. Italy this week allowed 4.4 million people to go back to work and eased restrictions on personal movement for the first time in two months. The coming weeks are essentially an "experiment" to see how the infection curve reacts to the easing of the West's first lockdown, the head of infectious diseases at Italy's Superior Institute of Health told the La Repubblica newspaper. "We are not out of the epidemic. We are still in it," said Dr. Giovanni Rezza. "I don't want people to think there's no more risk and we go back to normal." Widely seen as a success story, South Korea reported only three new cases of the virus, its lowest total since Feb. 18. Schools will reopen in phases starting with...

**In China, it has been three weeks since any new deaths have been reported in the country where the pandemic began late last year. Just one new case of infection was confirmed, and fewer than 400 patients are still being treated for COVID-19, health officials said.**

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# ISRAELI SUPREME COURT: NETANYAHU MAY FORM GOVERNMENT

Abir Sultan/Pool via AP

May 6, 2020 | AP News

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's Supreme Court ruled Wednesday that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu may form a new government while under indictment for corruption charges, clearing the way for him and his rival-turned-uneasy ally to join together in a controversial power-sharing deal.

The unanimous decision, released just before midnight, ended a 17-month political stalemate and prevented the country from plunging into a fourth consecutive election in just over a year. Netanyahu and his rival-turned-partner, Benny Gantz, said they expected their coalition to be sworn into office next week. After battling to three inconclusive elections

over the past year, Netanyahu and Gantz, a former military chief, announced their "emergency" government last month, saying they would put aside their rivalry to steer the country through the coronavirus crisis.

Critics and good-government groups said the deal was illegal and challenged it in the Supreme Court. They argued that the law should bar an official charged with serious crimes from continuing as prime minister. They also objected to the newly created position of "alternate prime minister," a post that could allow Netanyahu to remain in office throughout his corruption trial and a potential appeals process...

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AP File

## UK SCIENTIST WHO WARNED OVER VIRUS QUILTS FOR LOCKDOWN BREACH

May 6, 2020 | AP News

LONDON — Britain's health secretary said Wednesday that national lockdown rules were "for everyone," after one of the government's key scientific advisers quit for receiving secret visits from his girlfriend amid the coronavirus pandemic. Imperial College epidemiologist Neil Ferguson developed models that predicted hundreds of thousands would die unless the U.K. imposed drastic restrictions to slow the spread of the coronavirus. His advice was key in triggering Britain's lockdown in March. Under the rules, people are barred from visiting friends and family that they don't live with.

Ferguson quit the government's scientific advisory panel late Tuesday after the Daily Telegraph newspaper reported that a woman he is in a relationship with had crossed London to visit him at his home. Ferguson said in a statement that he had "made an error of judgment and took the wrong course of action." "I deeply regret any undermining of the clear messages around the continued need for social distancing to...

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## NEW BANKSY ART UNVEILED AT HOSPITAL TO THANK DOCTORS, NURSES

May 7, 2020 | AP News

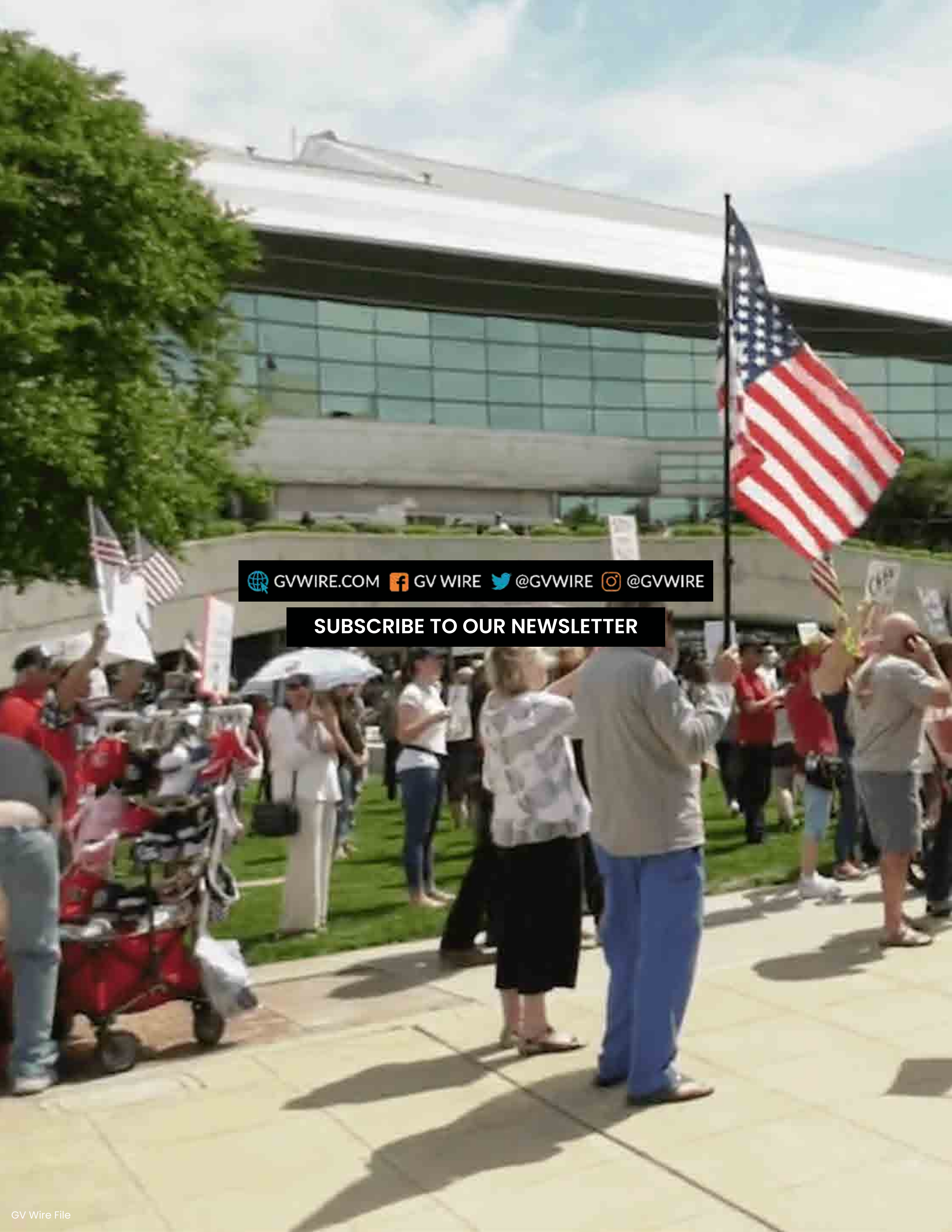
LONDON — A new work by the elusive street artist Banksy, honoring health workers, has been unveiled at a British hospital. The framed picture, titled "Game Changer," depicts a young boy sitting on the floor playing with a nurse superhero toy. Batman and Spiderman action figure toys lie in a wastepaper basket next to the boy.

The nurse figure, complete with a cape and a face mask, wears an apron featuring a red cross — the only spot of color in the black-and-white work. The piece has been placed on display in a corridor at Southampton General Hospital in southern England Wednesday. The artist left a note for hospital workers, saying: "Thanks for all you're doing. I hope this brightens the place up a bit, even if (it's) only black and white." Health officials said it was a "massive boost to morale" for everyone at the hospital, which has seen at least two members of staff die after contracting the new...

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