



WEEKLY DIGEST

MAY 15, 2020



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GV Wire File

LOCAL

IN STATE'S EYES, FRESNO COUNTY ISN'T CLOSE TO REOPENING

May 14, 2020 | Jim Jakobs

Testing doesn't appear to be an issue. Nor is housing the homeless or having the hospital capacity to handle a surge in COVID-19 cases. But, if Fresno County wants to reopen, state officials say it must flatten the coronavirus curve and

Vohra said the state wants to see only seven new cases per day in Fresno County. Right now, the county is recording between 30 and 40 new cases daily.

not have any pandemic-related deaths for 14 consecutive days. Without satisfying those two benchmarks, the state won't let the

county open more businesses. Meanwhile, 17 counties have received the green light from Gov. Gavin Newsom to reopen many parts of their economies. The nearest county to receive approval is Mariposa, which got the OK on Wednesday.

Tuesday Call With the State

Dr. Rais Vohra, Fresno County's interim health officer, and others on his team talked with state officials Tuesday. "The real disqualifiers for us here in Fresno County is that, according to the state, we just haven't flattened the curve," Vohra said. "What they're looking at is new cases per day, and (zero) deaths over a two-week period."

Related Story: Newsom Reopening Metrics Unreachable? Fresno County Says at Least One Is.

Vohra said the state wants to see only seven new cases per day in Fresno County. Right now, the county is recording between 30 and 40 new cases daily. "These are really hard metrics," Vohra said. "They're quite restrictive." He added that the state made it clear there was little or no wiggle room on those requirements.

Fresno Teams with Other Valley Counties

Nonetheless, Vohra said he will continue to press the fight to ask the state to allow the county to reopen some businesses under closure orders. In fact, Fresno

and other nearby counties are working on a joint letter to send to Newsom. Health officers in Fresno, Madera, Stanislaus, Kings, and Tulare counties have talked at length about approaching the state in unison. "We're just hoping that doesn't fall on deaf ears and (it) helps to advance this conversation," Vohra said. "That we learn from them and that they learn from us about what our needs are and how we can move forward together." The county believes it can meet the required 1,500 daily COVID-19 tests in a matter of weeks. And, it already has the capacity to house 15% or more of the homeless population. As to whether the state is open to allowing certain specific parts of Fresno County to reopen, the answer so far is no. "I think they're just looking at the county as a unit. Which again, it's problematic. But that's how the state is looking at it right now," Vohra said.

Related Story: Free COVID Test Site Opens in NW Fresno With 'Painless' Swabs

Governor's Stage 2 Reopening

According to the Governor's COVID-19 website, a county that has met certain criteria in containing COVID-19 may consider increasing the pace at which it advances through Stage 2 of the roadmap to modify the stay-at-home order. Here's what can be open in stage 2.

Fresno and other nearby counties are working on a joint letter to send to Newsom. Health officers in Fresno, Madera, Stanislaus, Kings, and Tulare counties have talked at length about approaching the state in unison.

Early Stage 2: California is now open with modifications:

- Curbside Retail
- Manufacturers
- Logistics
- Childcare for those outside of the essential workforce
- Office-based businesses (telework remains strongly encouraged)

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FREE COVID TEST SITE OPENS IN NW FRESNO WITH 'PAINLESS' SWABS

GV Wire/ Jchz Tello

May 13, 2020 | Jim Jakobs

Quick, painless, easy, and best of all, free. COVID-19 testing in Fresno ramped up in a big way Wednesday with the addition of a drive-up testing site at United Health Centers' Fresno location near Herndon and Milburn avenues. District 2 Fresno City Councilmember Mike Karbassi helped launch the site and was first to get a test. The test itself took little more than five minutes, and the results will be available in two or three days.

Related Story: Free COVID-19 Testing Site Comes to Sanger

"The test was quick and painless, just a light swab in my nose. Barely felt anything," Karbassi said. "The whole process for me took no more than 30 minutes." The cost of the test is completely covered. "So, there is no cost if you have insurance. But, even if you don't have insurance there's no cost to you,"

Karbassi said. Explained UHC Deputy CEO Justin Preas: "The type of swabs we are now using are the nasal swabs, which are the shorter ones. Previously we were using the longer nasal pharyngeal swabs."

COVID-19 Testing 5 Days a Week

UHC's Milburn testing site is open five days a week. The hours: Mondays, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., and Tuesday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 pm. You can register ahead of time by calling 1 (800) 492-4227 and answering the pre-screening questions. Or, just drive up and fill out the forms. "We are taking the proactive steps to help minimize the risks and taking preventative measures to protect the communities from the spread of the COVID-19 virus and expand our testing capacity to detect and avoid the virus rapid transmission in the..."

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PLANET HAIR, SPYN CYCLE STUDIO, SWEET TOMATOES LATEST COVID CASUALTIES

May 14, 2020 | Jim Jakobs

The social media posts left in the wake of COVID-19 are gut-wrenching. It was the best of times for many of these businesses leading up to the pandemic. To say it was the worst of times since is an understatement. Lifelong dreams of building up a business, the American dream, literally vanished in a matter of weeks. Some of these establishments were more established than others. They've all now established themselves on a list that keeps growing as the hours, days, and weeks drag on.

Related Story: \$5,000 Grants Available for Fresno County Small Businesses

Planet Hair

According to its website, Planet Hair was locally owned by husband and wife, Roy and Marlena Silva. Their salon was centered in the Shops at River Park on the corner between Macy's and Edwards Cinema. But, after 15 years of taking care of others, the pandemic shut the salon down. The owners made the...

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CENTRAL UNIFIED PROPOSES INCREASE IN DEVELOPER FEES FOR NEW HOMES

May 13, 2020 | Nancy Price

Central Unified School District proposes higher fees on new home and apartment construction to offset the number of new students and the resulting need for more classrooms. The Level 2 fees would increase from \$5.16 to \$5.20 per square foot. For a 2,000-square-foot home, the buyer would pay an extra \$80. The district will hold a public hearing and then vote on the proposal at the June 23 board meeting.

Developer fees are "a part of how we as a district are able to build our new schools, such as our new high school that's being built right now," said assistant superintendent Steve McClain at Tuesday's board of trustees meeting. "The fact that our own local bond Measure C did not get approval on March 3 makes it even more critical that we are able to access developer fee funds as well as other avenues." Granville Homes President and CEO Darius Assemi asked the trustees to reconsider the fee increase, and not just because it would add to the cost for home buyers. Assemi is the publisher of GV Wire. Assemi, who was...

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CALIFORNIA BOOZE REGULATORS SEEK SWIFT SANCTIONS AMID VIRUS

May 14, 2020 | AP News

SACRAMENTO — California’s bar and restaurant regulators are seeking emergency powers to immediately crack down on businesses that refuse to follow state rules intended to slow the spread of the coronavirus. “Bad actors are gaming the system,” the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control said in its filing this week. “Because they see an impending death sentence for their business on the horizon, they have no reasonable incentive to correct their behavior and abide by the rules.”

The new proposed regulations take a tougher tone even as the state is relaxing rules for sit-down dining in select counties. Bars and restaurants elsewhere can only sell alcohol in sealed containers for takeout, and it must be sold with food.

The new proposed regulations take a tougher tone even as the state is relaxing rules for sit-down dining in select counties. Bars and restaurants elsewhere can only sell alcohol in sealed containers for takeout, and it must be sold with food. The pending regulations would allow the

department to immediately but temporarily suspend or limit licenses while the normal disciplinary process continues. Businesses could still appeal regulators’ emergency decisions to Superior Courts.

Under the current rules, businesses can remain open while they fight the sanctions through administrative appeals and the courts, “profiting for as long as they can with an absolute disregard for the law,” the department said. The California Restaurant Association did not immediately comment Wednesday. Modoc, Sutter and Yuba counties last week allowed businesses to reopen despite the threat of state sanctions. Supervisors in Stanislaus County this week unanimously voted to not spend county money enforcing the state’s restrictions. “The ends don’t justify the means to what we’re doing right now,” Stanislaus County Supervisor Terry Withrow said Wednesday. The enforced isolation is causing its own mental and economic hardships, he said, while the

county’s infections and deaths have been mainly tied to a few coronavirus hotspots.

Regulators Contact Licensees in 43 Counties

El Dorado County, east of Sacramento, was one of the first counties that have permission to more swiftly reopen businesses, including sit-down restaurants. But county spokeswoman Carla Hass said it would be up to state regulators to crack down on state licensees who violate safety requirements, while county officials would only seek to educate rule-breakers. State regulators have tried to work with the industry to allow flexibility, department spokesman John Carr said Wednesday. “The goal is to get people back to work, but to do it safely,” he said.

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At last count, regulators had contacted 111 licensees in 43 of the state’s 58 counties, but they had begun just three disciplinary actions while other investigations were ongoing, Carr said. He said most businesses readily complied. However, the department’s filing asserts: “Many businesses and citizens have demonstrated an unwillingness to abide by the public health orders and have instead opened for business.” That creates public health risks that require immediate enforcement, it argues. For most people, the virus causes mild or moderate symptoms for up to three weeks. The vast majority recover. Some older adults and people with existing health problems can experience severe illness, including pneumonia, and death. The department said it was already planning to toughen its rules before the coronavirus, but it now is speeding up the effort. Its filing projects that businesses will appeal to a Superior Court just once or twice each year...

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CROPS GROWN WITH KERN OILFIELD WATER ARE SAFE, PANEL FINDS

May 13, 2020 | SJV Water

Fruits and vegetables grown with recycled oilfield water in Kern County got a final stamp of approval in April, nearly five years after the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board began what it thought was going to be a three-month process investigating the water's safety.

Findings from numerous, wide-ranging studies commissioned by a Food Safety Advisory Panel assembled by the Water Quality board showed "no red flags" in crops grown with the water, according to Water Quality board chair Karl Longley. The recycled oilfield water, blended with regular irrigation water, was tested for more than 140 chemical compounds.

And 13 different crops — some grown with the oilfield water, some not — showed no uptake of potentially hazardous chemicals from oil production methods. "The bottom line is, there is no significant increase in health hazards from consuming produce that's treated versus untreated," Longely said in reference to the different types of irrigation water used.

The issue had become highly contentious in 2015 as numerous environmental and food safety activist groups rallied to end the use of oilfield water in irrigation. The world's largest produce buyers began getting calls, and, in turn, making calls, asking about the safety of Kern County fruits and...

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CVS HEALTH SUBSIDIARY SETTLES OPIOIDS CASE WITH \$15.3M PENALTY

May 13, 2020 | GV Wire

Omnicare Inc., a subsidiary of CVS Health, has agreed to pay a \$15.3 million civil penalty to resolve allegations that it violated federal law by allowing opioids and other controlled substances to be dispensed without a valid prescription, U.S. Attorney McGregor W. Scott said Wednesday in Sacramento.

"Failure to control access to prescription drugs can lead to the diversion of medication that could fall into the wrong hands with potentially devastating consequences," said DEA Special Agent in Charge Daniel C. Comeaux in a statement released Wednesday.

"Today's settlement demonstrates DEA's commitment in protecting the health and safety of the public by ensuring all entities involved in the distribution of controlled substances follow the law." Omnicare operates "closed-door" pharmacies, which are not open to the public, the U.S. Attorney's Office said. The company delivers controlled substances...

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TRUMP GETS ALLY AS EX-NAVY PILOT WINS CALIFORNIA HOUSE SEAT

May 14, 2020 | AP News

LOS ANGELES — Mike Garcia grew up a single-minded kid from Southern California: He just wanted to fly fighter jets. His decision to enter national politics wouldn't come until decades later, after he had seen one California election too many. A career as a Navy aviator would lead to a decade in the defense industry. But it was the 2018 elections that prompted the Republican to enter public life, as his home state moved deeper into Democratic-dominated government that he faults for job-crushing regulation and climbing taxes.

"I don't want my country to turn into what my state has become," says Garcia, who claimed a vacant U.S. House seat Tuesday north of Los Angeles. The political newcomer's win over Democrat Christy Smith marked the first time in over two decades that a Republican captured a Democratic-held congressional district in California. What was supposed to be a tossup election ended up with Garcia holding a comfortable 12-point edge in an incomplete tally Wednesday. Garcia...

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Cynthia Smalley/Mike Garcia For Congress via AP



AP/Manuel Balce

DEMS' NEW \$3T VIRUS BILL BOOSTS STATE AID, ESSENTIAL WORKERS

May 12, 2020 | AP News

WASHINGTON — House Speaker Nancy Pelosi unveiled a more than \$3 trillion coronavirus aid package Tuesday, providing nearly \$1 trillion for states and cities, “hazard pay” for essential workers and a new round of cash payments to individuals. The House is expected to vote on the package as soon as Friday, but Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has said there is no “urgency.” The Senate will wait until after Memorial Day to act. Lines drawn, the pandemic response from Congress will test the House and Senate — and President Donald Trump — as Washington navigates the crisis with the nation’s health and economic security at stake.

The so-called Heroes Act from Democrats is built around nearly \$1 trillion for states, cities and tribal governments to avert layoffs, focused chiefly on \$375 billion for smaller suburban and rural municipalities largely left out of earlier bills. The bill will offer a fresh round of \$1,200 direct cash aid to individuals, increased to up

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to \$6,000 per household, and launches a \$175 billion housing assistance fund to help pay rents and mortgages. There is \$75 billion more for virus testing. It would continue, through January, the \$600-per-week boost to unemployment benefits. It adds a 15% increase for food stamps and new help for paying employer-backed health coverage. For businesses, it provides an employee retention tax credit. There’s \$200 billion in “hazard pay” for essential workers the front lines of the crisis. Majority Leader Steny Hoyer said the bill “will be ready” to call lawmakers back to Washington for the vote. But the 1,800-page package is heading straight into a Senate roadblock. Senate Republicans are not planning to vote on any new relief

until June, after a Memorial Day recess. Trump has already signed into law nearly \$3 trillion in aid approved by Congress.

McConnell Said He Is Working With the White House on Next Steps

McConnell on Tuesday called the emerging Democratic bill a “big laundry list of pet priorities.” He said it’s not something that “deals with reality.” The new package extends some provisions from previous aid packages, and adds new ones. There are other new resources, including \$25 billion for the U.S. Postal Service. There is help for the 2020 Census. For the November election, the bill provides \$3.6 billion to help local officials prepare for the challenges of voting during the pandemic. The popular Payroll Protection Program, which has been boosted in past bills, would see another \$10 billion to ensure under-served businesses and nonprofit organizations have access to grants through a disaster loan program.

At least a dozen Capitol police officers and other staff have tested positive for the virus, and at least one senator, Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, is in isolation at home after exposure from a staff member who tested positive. Other lawmakers have cycled in and out of quarantine.

For hospitals and other health care providers, there’s another \$100 billion infusion to help cover costs and additional help for hospitals serving low-income communities. There’s another \$600 million in funding to tackle the issue of rapid spread of the virus in state and federal prisons, along with \$600 million in help to local police departments for salaries and equipment. McConnell said he is working with the White House on next steps. His priority is to ensure any new package includes liability protections for health care providers and businesses that are reopening. Trump is expected to meet Tuesday with a group of Senate Republicans...

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US IMMUNOLOGIST WARNS OF 'DARKEST WINTER' IF VIRUS REBOUNDS



BIGGEST US SOLAR PROJECT APPROVED IN NEVADA DESPITE CRITICS

May 12, 2020 | AP News

RENO, Nev. — The Trump administration announced final approval Monday of the largest solar energy project in the U.S. and one of the biggest in the world despite objections from conservationists who say it will destroy thousands of acres of habitat critical to the survival of the threatened Mojave desert tortoise in Nevada. The \$1 billion Gemini solar and battery storage project about 30 miles northeast of Las Vegas is expected to produce 690 megawatts of electricity — enough to power 260,000 households — and annually offset greenhouse emissions of about 83,000 cars.

It will create about 2,000 direct and indirect jobs and inject an estimated \$712.5 million in the economy as the nation tries to recover from the downturn brought on by the coronavirus outbreak, Interior Secretary David Bernhardt said. “As our economy rebounds from the invisible enemy, President Trump is working to make the United States...

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May 14, 2020 | AP News

ROME — European governments promised more relief to their citizens on Thursday as a top U.S. immunologist told Congress that America faces its “darkest winter in modern history” unless leaders act decisively to prevent a rebound of the coronavirus.

France’s government announced an 18-billion-euro (\$19.4 billion) plan to support restaurants, hotels and other tourist facilities which have been closed since mid-March amid the coronavirus crisis. Prime Minister Edouard Philippe promised the French on Thursday that they will be able to go on

vacation in France in July and August, including in French overseas territories, as the country has started lifting its lockdown this week.

Germany’s parliament approved plans to increase the amount paid to people who spend months in a government-backed short-time work program during the coronavirus crisis. Companies are making extensive use of the program, which was credited with keeping down unemployment in the financial crisis over a decade ago. It allows them to keep employees on the payroll while they await better...

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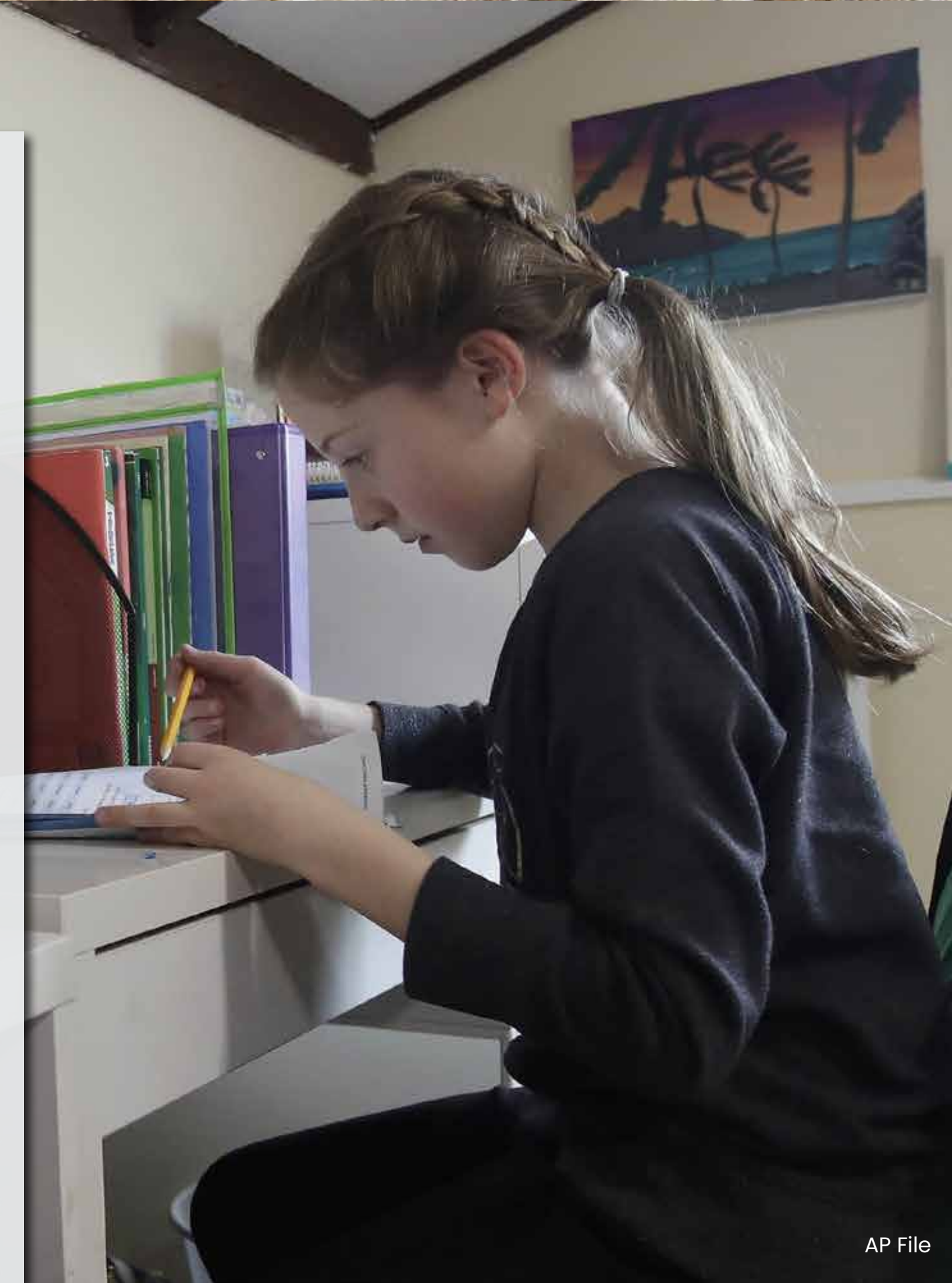
SATURDAY CLASSES? SCHOOLS MULL WAYS TO MAKE UP LOST TIME

May 13, 2020 | AP News

When students return to school after a lengthy pandemic-induced absence, the consensus is they will have lost significant academic ground. Still unresolved for governments and educators are the questions of how — or even whether — teachers should try to make up for lost learning. Some have proposed holding evening or Saturday classes for students to catch up. A Maryland senator has proposed school year-round. In California, the governor has suggested the next school year could begin as soon as July.

But any remediation plans will be complicated by social distancing mandates that may require smaller class sizes and budget cuts that appear imminent because of falling local and state revenues. In surveys, many educators say the fall will be no time to pile on additional schoolwork. “First and foremost, we need to recognize that we have young people in front of us who have gone through a traumatic...

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AP/Rehmat Gul

DEATH TOLL FROM ATTACK ON KABUL MATERNITY CLINIC RISES TO 24

May 13, 2020 | AP News

KABUL, Afghanistan — Officials on Wednesday raised the death toll from a militant attack on a maternity hospital in Kabul to 24, including mothers, nurses and two babies. A day after the shooting rampage, 20 infants were under medical observation, lying swaddled in blankets in hospital cribs. Militants had stormed the

Of those evacuated, 21 babies were taken to Kabul's Ataturk Hospital, where physician Sayed Fared. He said one infant had a broken bone and was transferred to a children's hospital. The other 20 babies "are in good health and under our observation," he said.

hospital on Tuesday, setting off an hours-long shootout with police. As the gunfight raged, Afghan security forces carried out babies and frantic mothers. The clinic in Dashti Barchi, a mostly Shiite neighborhood in Afghanistan's capital, is supported by international aid group Doctors Without Borders. The Interior Ministry initially said Tuesday that 16 people were killed and more than 100 wounded. Wahid Majroh, the deputy public health minister, on Wednesday raised the death toll to 24 and said 16 people were wounded.

Of those evacuated, 21 babies were taken to Kabul's Ataturk Hospital, where physician Sayed Fared. He said one infant had a broken bone and was transferred to a children's hospital. The other 20 babies "are in good health and under our observation," he said. Outside Ataturk Hospital, anxious relatives waited for news. Qurban Ali, a 27-year-old father, came to see his newborn daughter Bakhtawar who was among those evacuated from Dashti Barchi. His name was on a wristband the baby was given after she was born early Tuesday, a preterm baby. Ali said he was watching TV when he heard about the hospital attack. "I immediately rushed to the hospital, got there but couldn't find my wife or the baby," he said. His wife called him a short while later, crying and saying she had managed to flee the attack but couldn't recover their baby. The two rushed to

Ataturk Hospital after hearing the babies were evacuated there, and to their relief found Bakhtawar. "Thank God ... my child and my wife both are unhurt," said Ali.

No One Claimed Responsibility for the Attack but the Taliban Insisted They Were Not Involved

But others were not so fortunate. The family of 35-year-old nurse Maryam Noorzada, who worked at Dashti Barchi with Doctors Without Borders, also known by their French acronym MSF, could not find her after searching all of Kabul hospitals. Her brother-in-law, Mahdi Jafari, his eyes filled with tears, said the family would give DNA samples to see if the charred unclaimed body remaining at the morgue was her. No one claimed responsibility for the attack but the Taliban insisted they were not involved. In the past, most attacks in Dashti Barchi, home to the minority Shiite Hazara community, were carried out by the Islamic State group. In a televised speech hours after the attack, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani called on security forces to launch attacks on Taliban insurgents. After a U.S.-Taliban peace deal signed earlier this year, the Afghan government said it was maintaining a defensive posture.

"The Taliban have not given up fighting and killing Afghans, instead they have increased their attacks on our countrymen and public places," despite repeated calls for a cease-fire, Ghani said. The Taliban and Islamic State extremists are rivals. Afghan and American officials say the Islamic State affiliate in Afghanistan has been weakened in recent months as a result of U.S. bombing raids in the group's stronghold, the eastern Nangarhar province, as well as military operations by Afghan security forces and attacks by Taliban...

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‘INVESTIGATIVE TECHNIQUES’ INCLUDED SEX WITH VICTIMS IN FEDERAL TRAFFICKING

May 11, 2020 | AP News

PHOENIX — The women were forced to live and work in filth and near darkness, the federal agent said, surviving on only the tips they received from performing massages and sexual favors. Lon Weigand, deputy special agent in charge of Homeland Security Investigations in Arizona, described them as “Asian females” who may be sex-trafficking victims.

He praised the joint operation between federal agents and local police in western Arizona that led to their rescue and credited “investigative techniques” with helping to crack a “transnational criminal organization.” What Weigand didn’t say at that September 2018 press conference – although

HSI documents show some supervisors knew – was that federal undercover agents repeatedly paid for and engaged in sex acts with suspected victims. That fact, coupled with HSI’s refusal to let its agents testify, caused the collapse of a case that was more than three years in the making. All felony charges against the alleged ringleaders were dropped. And sex-trafficking experts said the women were likely re-traumatized.

Defense attorneys were outraged when they learned of the agents’ actions. “That’s our tax money,” said attorney Josephine Hallam, whose grandfather was former U.S...

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JEFF BEZOS POISED TO BECOME WORLD’S FIRST TRILLIONAIRE

May 14, 2020 | KRON 4

By Alexa Mae Asperin

SAN FRANCISCO – Amazon founder and CEO Jeff Bezos is projected to become the world’s first trillionaire. That’s according to Comparisun, a company which allows small- to medium-sized firms to compare different business products.

Their projection shows Bezos reaching trillionaire status by 2026. The company said their projection is based on taking the average percentage of yearly growth over the past five years and applying it to future years.

As of Thursday, Bezos’ net worth was estimated at \$143 billion, according to Bloomberg’s Billionaires Index, which tracks the worth of the world’s richest people daily. Compared to last year, Bezos’ worth has surged by more than \$28 billion. Amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, Amazon has continued to thrive as more people turn to online...

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VACCINE OPPONENTS ARE GAINING IN FACEBOOK ‘BATTLE FOR HEARTS AND MINDS’

May 13, 2020 | Science Magazine

A first-of-its-kind analysis of more than 1300 Facebook pages with nearly 100 million followers has produced a network map that’s alarming public health professionals. Antivaccine pages have fewer followers than pro-vaccine pages but are more numerous, faster growing, and increasingly more connected to undecided pages, the study finds.

If the current trends continue, the researchers predict, anti-vaccine views will dominate online discussion in 10 years—a time when a future vaccine against COVID-19 may be critical to public health.

“The reds are winning,” says anthropologist Heidi Larson, who directs the Vaccine Confidence Project at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, referring to the color of antivaccine Facebook pages on the new paper’s map. “They are covering a lot more ground with fewer of them...”

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