



# GWIRE

WEEKLY DIGEST  
AUGUST 7, 2020



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# ELECTION CHALLENGE: SAFE, ACCURATE VOTING IN PANDEMIC ERA

August 6, 2020 | David Taub

Despite skeptics in high places — President Donald Trump, for example — of mailing a ballot to every active registered voter in California, local election officials are answering with their own message: All

**“Automatic mailing appears to be an unnecessary overreaction to the situation.” — Ruth Weiss, Election Integrity Project**

votes will be accurately counted, and rigorous safeguards are in place to prevent election fraud. In fact, Fresno County Clerk Brandi Orth and Tulare County

Registrar of Voters Michelle Baldwin say that voters will have more options than ever to ensure their ballot counts. And, because of the coronavirus pandemic, there will be changes in the way in-person voting takes place as well.

## A Ballot for Every Voter

Fresno County was one of the early adopters of mailing out ballots to all active registered voters. It was one of 14 Voter's Choice Act counties, meaning it engaged in extra measures to increase access to voting. Those included establishing voting centers and mass-mailing ballots. Madera County adopted those techniques in 2018. (The state designates voters who have moved out of state or have deliverable mail as inactive; they won't receive voting materials.)

For the 2020 presidential primary in March, Fresno County saw a 42% voter turnout, with 87% voting by mail. For comparison, in the June 2016 presidential primary, 41% of registered voters cast a ballot with 60% coming via mail. Voters can complete the ballots at their convenience and return them by mail without having to add postage (it's already covered), drop them in one of 60 secure boxes in Fresno County, or turn them in at voting centers, which will open prior to the Nov. 3 general election. As in March, voters can register on Election Day. Spurred by the pandemic, state legislators approved mailing ballots throughout the state, not just those in counties that

opted into the special program — like Fresno and Madera counties. Two months from now, on Oct. 5, election clerks throughout California will mail out ballots. And, Orth said that if voters don't receive their ballot by Oct. 12 to call her office at (559) 600-8683 for a replacement. But, this method has skeptics. Ruth Weiss with the Election Integrity Project says 75% of voters already were receiving a mail-in ballot.

“Any voter in the remaining 25% need only make a phone call to request a ballot for this election up to and including seven days before Election Day if they feel it is unsafe for them to go out to cast a vote in person. Automatic mailing appears to be an unnecessary overreaction to the situation,” Weiss told GV Wire<sup>SM</sup> by email. In his Thursday KMJ radio commentary, conservative Michael Der Manouel Jr. also said mailing a ballot to every California voter is likely to cause mistakes and fraud.

## Drop Box Preferred

Orth recommends mailing ballots by Oct. 27, one week prior to the election. A new law this year allows the clerk to accept ballots 17 days later, through Nov. 20, as long as they were postmarked by Nov. 3. However, Orth also is urging voters to return ballots to one of 60 secure drop boxes throughout the county. “The drop box program is the best program going. It was so successful in March, and now with COVID and no contact voting being the way to go, we have added an additional 20-plus drop boxes to be deployed through Fresno County,” Orth said. On this issue, Weiss agrees. “If the drop boxes are staffed by two people from the elections office and emptied daily, then that is an excellent option. Otherwise, we recommend...

**“The drop-box program is the best program going. It was so successful in March, and now with COVID and no contact voting being the way to go, we have added an additional 20-plus drop boxes to be deployed through Fresno County.” — Fresno County Clerk Brandi Orth**

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## FRESNO RANKS LAST IN PET FRIENDLINESS AMONG US CITIES

August 5, 2020 | GV Wire

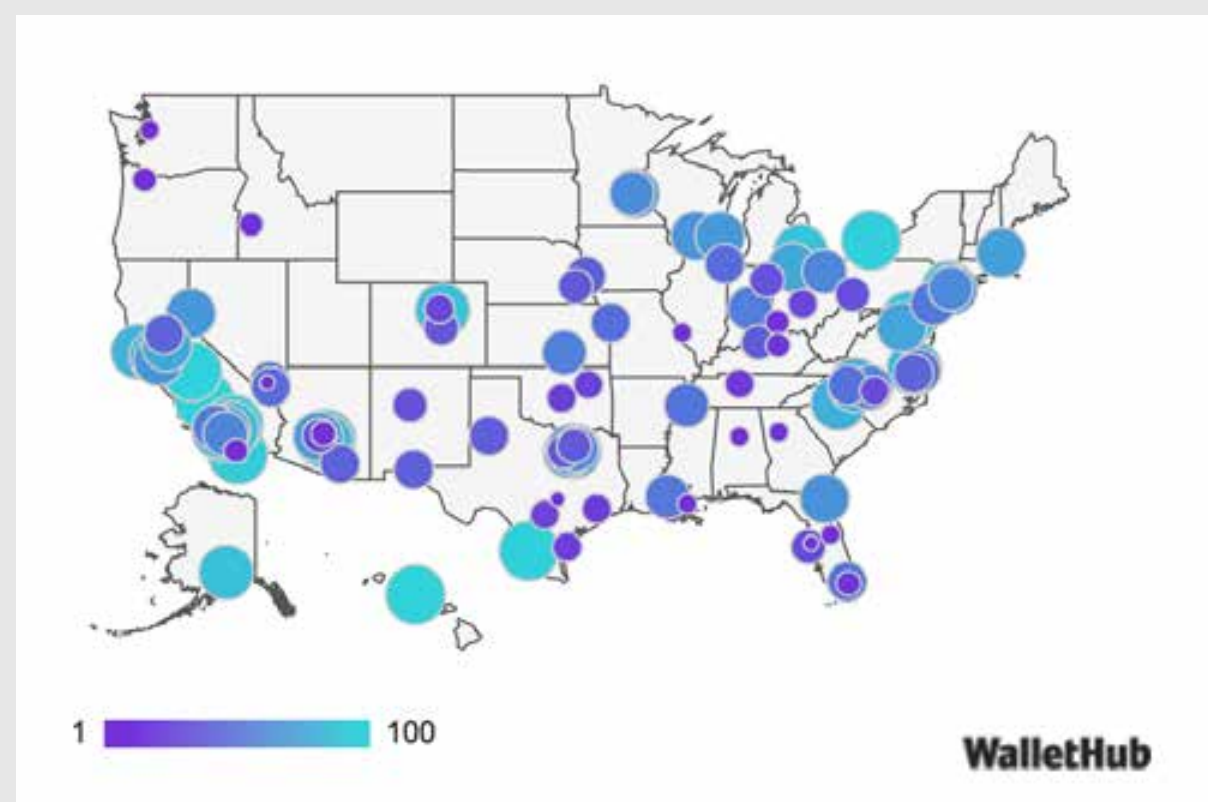
Fresnans pet owners pretty much have to solve challenges on their own, according to WalletHub.

Among the nation's biggest 100 cities, Fresno ranks last in "pet friendliness" the credit score website said Wednesday. WalletHub rated the cities for things like veterinary costs, dog-friendly shops and restaurants, dog parks, pet-friendly rental markets, and animal shelters.

Tampa earned the nod as the nation's friendliest pet city, followed by Austin and Las Vegas. San Diego, which checked in at No. 10, was the top-rated California city.

WalletHub based the rankings on a city's actual boundaries, not the metropolitan area.

### Ranking US Cities for Pet Friendliness



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## Decreasing pediatric mental health emergencies

July 31, 2020 | Sponsored by Community Medical Centers



The mental health crisis was growing. Three Clovis West High School boys took their own lives during the first few months of the 2016-2017 school year. Within a few months another Clovis Unified School District teen committed suicide. And the number of students being transported from CUSD schools to mental health facilities for observation had jumped nearly 350% from the previous...

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ER Holds  
**29%  
DECREASE**

Crisis  
Transports  
**53%  
DECREASE**

CRMC



## WHAT WILL ONLINE LEARNING LOOK LIKE THIS TIME FOR FRESNO UNIFIED STUDENTS?

August 3, 2020 | Nancy Price

Fresno Unified School District students will have daily live instruction with their teachers when they start the school year with online learning on Aug. 17 — and for all students, from transitional kindergarten through high school, the school day starts at 9 a.m. Their teachers will instruct either from home or from the classrooms where they and the students will reunite once the COVID-19 crisis has eased.

Unlike the distance learning that went into effect in mid-March when schools first closed due to the coronavirus pandemic, attendance will be mandatory, and classwork will be graded. But some details — such as how classes like art or ROTC will be taught online, or whether students will be issued textbooks — have yet to be announced. The district late Friday unveiled the initial version of its strategic plan for the new school year that outlines how the district will present distance learning, plus nutrition, supports for special needs, foster, and homeless students, and technology support, and also what school will...

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AP File

# STATE

## TECHNICAL ISSUE HAS CALIFORNIA UNDER-REPORTING VIRUS CASES

August 5, 2020 | AP News

LOS ANGELES — A technical problem has caused a lag in California's tally of coronavirus test results, casting doubt on the accuracy of recent data showing improvements in the infection rate and number of positive cases, and hindering efforts to track the spread, the state's top health official said Tuesday. Health and Human Services Secretary Dr. Mark Ghaly said in recent days that

California has not been receiving a full count of tests conducted, or positive results, through electronic lab reports because of the unresolved issue, which he did not describe in detail.

The state's data page now carries a disclaimer saying the numbers "represent an underreporting of actual positive cases" per day. The latest daily tally posted Tuesday showed 4,526 new

confirmed positives, the lowest total in more than six weeks and a precipitous drop from the record nearly 13,000 reported two weeks ago.

County health officials have posted notices on their sites advising of the lag and that a drop in cases might not paint a full picture. Wendy Hetherington, Riverside County's chief of epidemiology and program evaluation, said she believes hundreds of cases a day haven't been reported in her county since late last week. The undercount impedes the ability to find newly infected individuals and quickly contact those who have been in close contact with them so they can quarantine to avoid spreading the disease. "We're delaying case investigations. We're delaying follow up," she said, adding: "We can't tell how well we're doing until this issue is resolved."

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### On Monday, Gov. Gavin Newsom Gave His Most Optimistic Report

Even with the under-reporting of cases, California has recorded more positive tests than any other state, about 520,000. On Monday, Gov. Gavin Newsom gave his most optimistic report on the state's virus efforts since a second surge of cases in early June. He noted daily cases had dropped by an average of 2,200 in the last week and the infection rate of 6.1% was significantly lower than the nearly 8% recorded last month.

Ghaly acknowledged the rate Newsom highlighted was based on incomplete data and that missing data is being inputted manually. He stressed that looking at one- and two-week trends can help account for missing data from individual days. Ghaly said hospitalization data — which doesn't run through the same troubled system — has seen signs of improvement. The latest count Tuesday showed 6,302 people were hospitalized, a 12% drop from the high recorded in July. Deaths have now topped 9,500. In California, laboratories send virus testing data and results to a state database that is accessible to county health officials. Counties including Orange and Sacramento have noted the delays, and Placer County posted on its website that its virus cases are likely underestimated as a result.

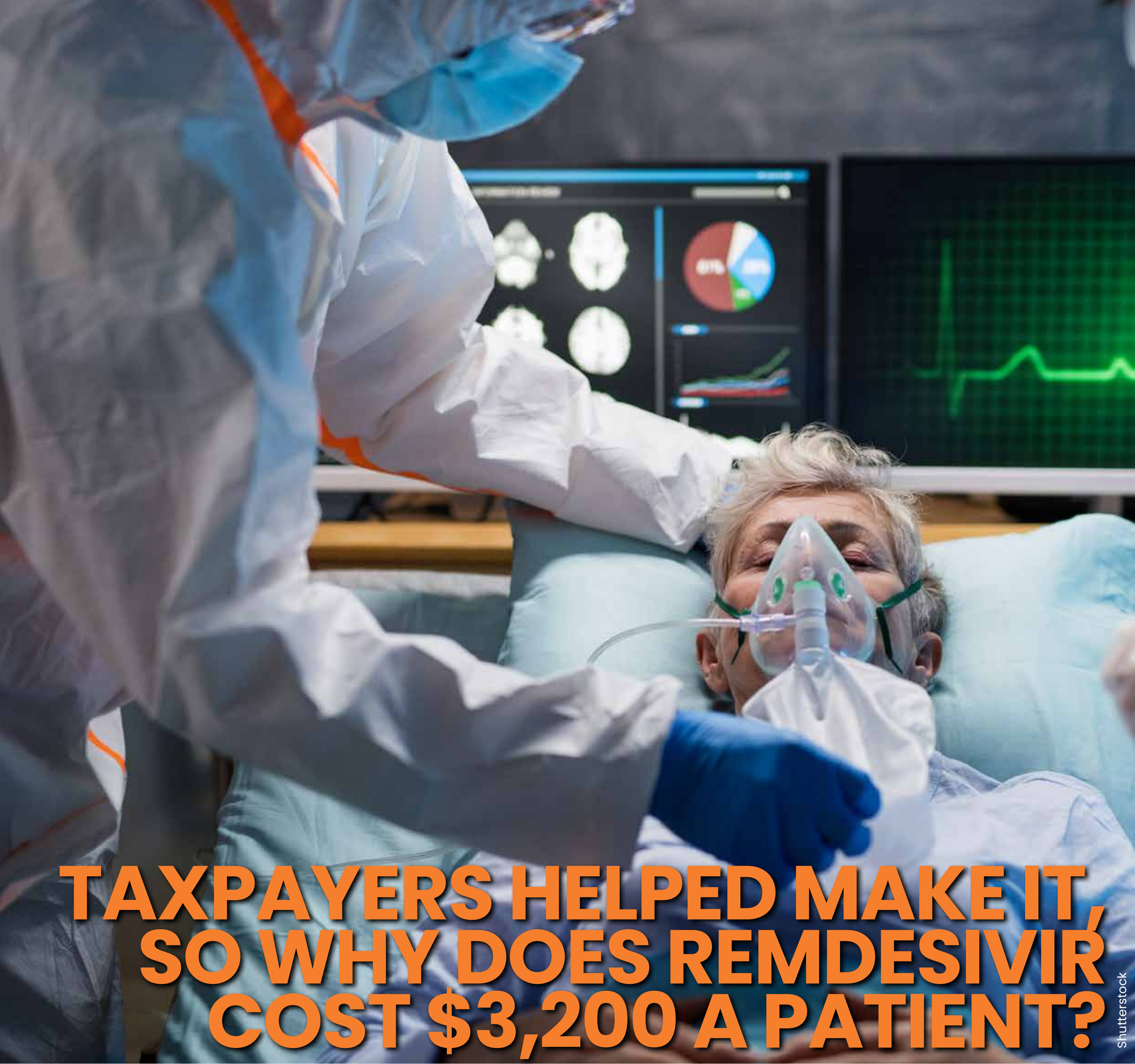
### Number of Infections Is Thought to Be Higher Than the Reported Cases

Los Angeles County health officials said the state convened an emergency call Monday night to discuss the issue. Now, a team from the county is reaching out to more than 80 labs to obtain test results for the past...

The latest daily tally posted Tuesday showed 4,526 new confirmed positives, the lowest total in more than six weeks and a precipitous drop from the record nearly 13,000 reported two weeks ago. County health officials have posted notices on their sites advising of the lag and that a drop in cases might not paint a full picture.

In Riverside County, Hetherington said doctors are still getting notified of positive tests so they can inform their patients. She urged people to stay home if they are sick or test positive to avoid infecting others.





# TAXPAYERS HELPED MAKE IT, SO WHY DOES REMDESIVIR COST \$3,200 A PATIENT?

August 4, 2020 | Jim Jakobs

Valley hospitals can barely keep the potential life-saving COVID-19 drug remdesivir in stock. And, when they can get it, the cost is \$3,200 per patient. Fresno-based Community Medical Centers was completely out of remdesivir for 24 hours a few weeks ago.

Visalia-based Kaweah Delta Medical Center — which is in one of the hardest-hit counties in the state — says it routinely runs out of the drug. Now, California Attorney General Xavier Becerra is asking the federal government for help. Becerra wants third-party manufacturers to scale up production and distribution and ensure that the drug is available to

all those in need at a reasonable price. Becerra and 33 other attorneys general sent a letter to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services asking for that help. The drug's maker, Gilead Sciences, says it is manufacturing the treatment in record time. Originally, the drug took up to a year to make. That's been cut to six-to-eight months.

The Wall Street Journal reported that the United States is "the only developed country where Gilead will charge two prices"— one for government buyers (\$390 per dose) and one for non-government buyers like hospitals (\$520 per dose). The typical remdesivir treatment course consists of...

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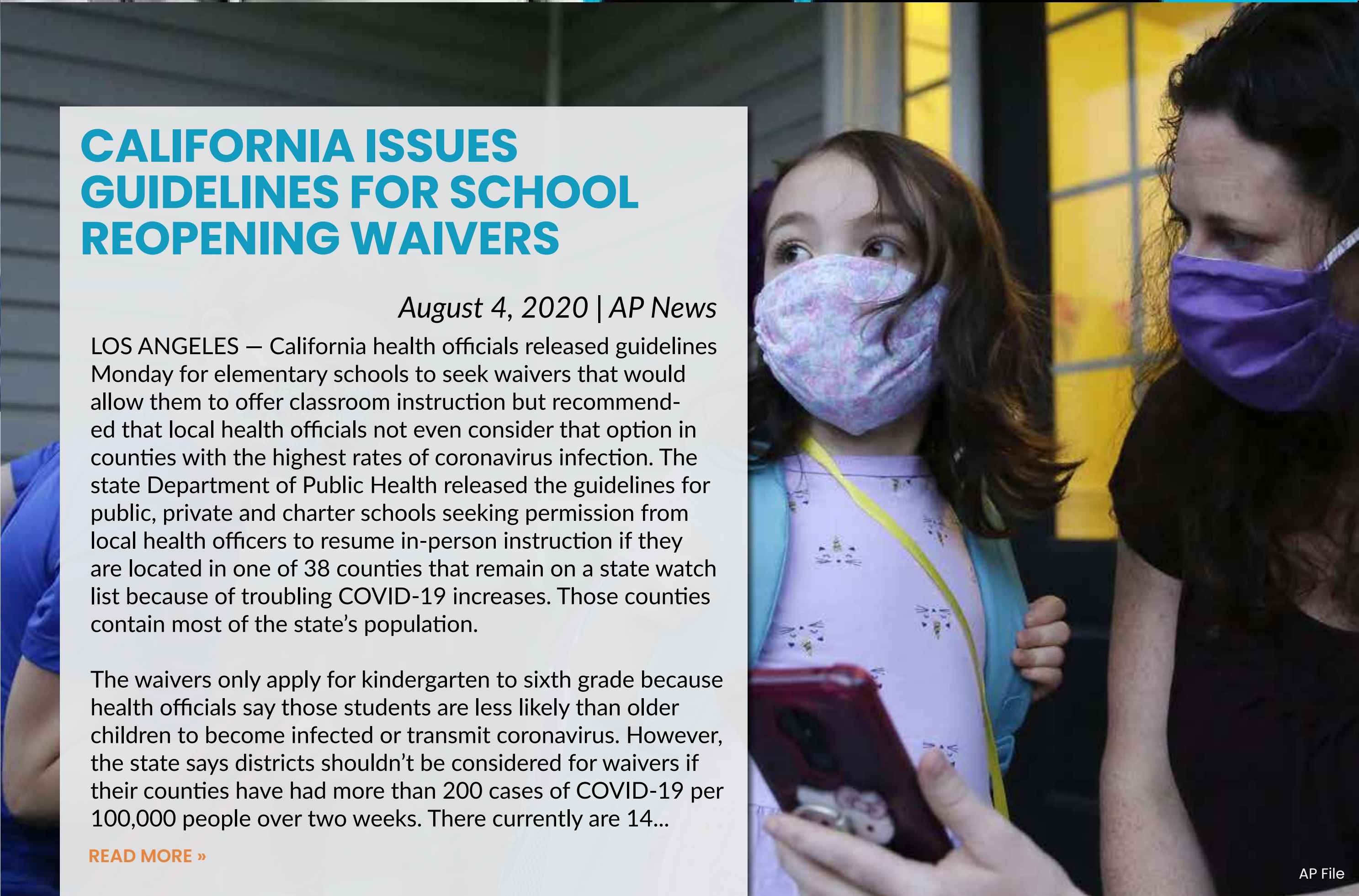
# MANDATE DIVERSITY? CALIFORNIA BILL WOULD BAN ALL-WHITE CORPORATE

August 5, 2020 | CalMatters

All-white corporate boards would be prohibited in California under a bill in the Legislature that follows in the footsteps of a controversial law that mandated women in corporate boardrooms. More than 600 publicly held companies with California headquarters would be required to have at least one person of color serving on their corporate boards by the end of 2021 under the legislation introduced by Assembly members Chris Holden, a Pasadena Democrat, and Cristina Garcia, a Bell Gardens Democrat. Holden said many corporations need to be prodded into racially diversifying their boards.

"This is the time to do something bold," he said. People of color "need to have the same access as those who have benefitted for so long, and the time is now." Nationally, 19.5% of board members of Fortune 100 companies are people of color, according to a 2018 report by the Alliance for Diversity. In California, many large corporations — including...

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# CALIFORNIA ISSUES GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOL REOPENING WAIVERS

August 4, 2020 | AP News

LOS ANGELES — California health officials released guidelines Monday for elementary schools to seek waivers that would allow them to offer classroom instruction but recommended that local health officials not even consider that option in counties with the highest rates of coronavirus infection. The state Department of Public Health released the guidelines for public, private and charter schools seeking permission from local health officers to resume in-person instruction if they are located in one of 38 counties that remain on a state watch list because of troubling COVID-19 increases. Those counties contain most of the state's population.

The waivers only apply for kindergarten to sixth grade because health officials say those students are less likely than older children to become infected or transmit coronavirus. However, the state says districts shouldn't be considered for waivers if their counties have had more than 200 cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 people over two weeks. There currently are 14...

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AP File

# ‘SEE YOU IN COURT’: ACLU FILES NEARLY 400 CASES VERSUS TRUMP

August 6, 2020 | AP News

NEW YORK — The day after Donald Trump’s election in November 2016, the American Civil Liberties Union posted a message to him on its website: “See you in court.” As president, Trump hasn’t personally squared off against the ACLU from the witness stand, but the broader warning has been borne out. As of this week, the ACLU has filed nearly 400 lawsuits and other legal actions against the Trump administration, some meeting with setbacks but many resulting in important victories.

Among other successes for the ACLU, it prevailed in a U.S. Supreme Court case blocking the administration from placing a citizenship question on the 2020 census. It also spearheaded legal efforts that curtailed the policy of separating many migrant children from their parents. “The assault on civil liberties and civil rights is greater under this administration than any other in modern history,” said the ACLU’s president, Anthony Romero. “It’s meant we’ve been living with a three-

Since the day Trump took office, the ACLU — according to a breakdown it provided to The Associated Press — has filed 237 lawsuits against the administration and about 160 other legal actions, including Freedom of Information Act requests, ethics complaints and administrative complaints.

alarm fire in every part of our house.” Since the day Trump took office, the ACLU — according to a breakdown it provided to The Associated Press — has filed 237 lawsuits against the administration and about 160 other legal actions, including Freedom of Information Act requests, ethics complaints and administrative complaints.

Of the lawsuits, 174 have dealt with immigrant rights, targeting the family separation policy, detention and deportation practices and the administration’s repeated attempts to make it harder to seek asylum at the U.S.-Mexico border. The other lawsuits address an array of issues high on the ACLU’s agenda: voting rights,

LGBT rights, racial justice and others. In one long-running case, the ACLU succeeded in blocking the administration’s policy of barring young immigrant women in government custody from getting abortions. “Donald Trump has provided a full employment program for ACLU lawyers on all of our issues,” Romero said.

## Many of the ACLU’s Recent Lawsuits Remain Unresolved

By comparison, the ACLU says it filed 13 lawsuits and other legal actions against President George W. Bush’s administration in his first term, mostly alleging encroachments on civil liberties related to counter-terrorism policies. Many of the ACLU’s recent lawsuits remain unresolved. Of those that have been decided, Romero said, the ACLU has won far more often than it has lost, though a precise breakdown was unavailable. Among the setbacks, ACLU national legal director David Cole said, one of the most disappointing involved Trump’s efforts to ban foreign nationals from several predominantly Muslim countries. Lawsuits by the ACLU and its allies successfully blocked implementation of the first two versions of the ban, but the Supreme Court allowed a third version to go into effect in 2018.

By a similar 5-4 vote, the Supreme Court also allowed the implementation of the Trump administration policy barring transgender people from enlisting in the military. Lower courts had supported efforts by the ACLU and other groups to scrap the ban. Another LGBT rights case recently ended in a major victory for the ACLU and its allies when the Supreme Court ruled 6-3 in June that gays, lesbians and transgender people were protected from employment discrimination under the Civil Rights Act of 1964. One of the ACLU’s clients, Aimee...

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## VIRUS TESTING IN THE US IS DROPPING, EVEN AS DEATHS MOUNT

August 5, 2020 | AP News

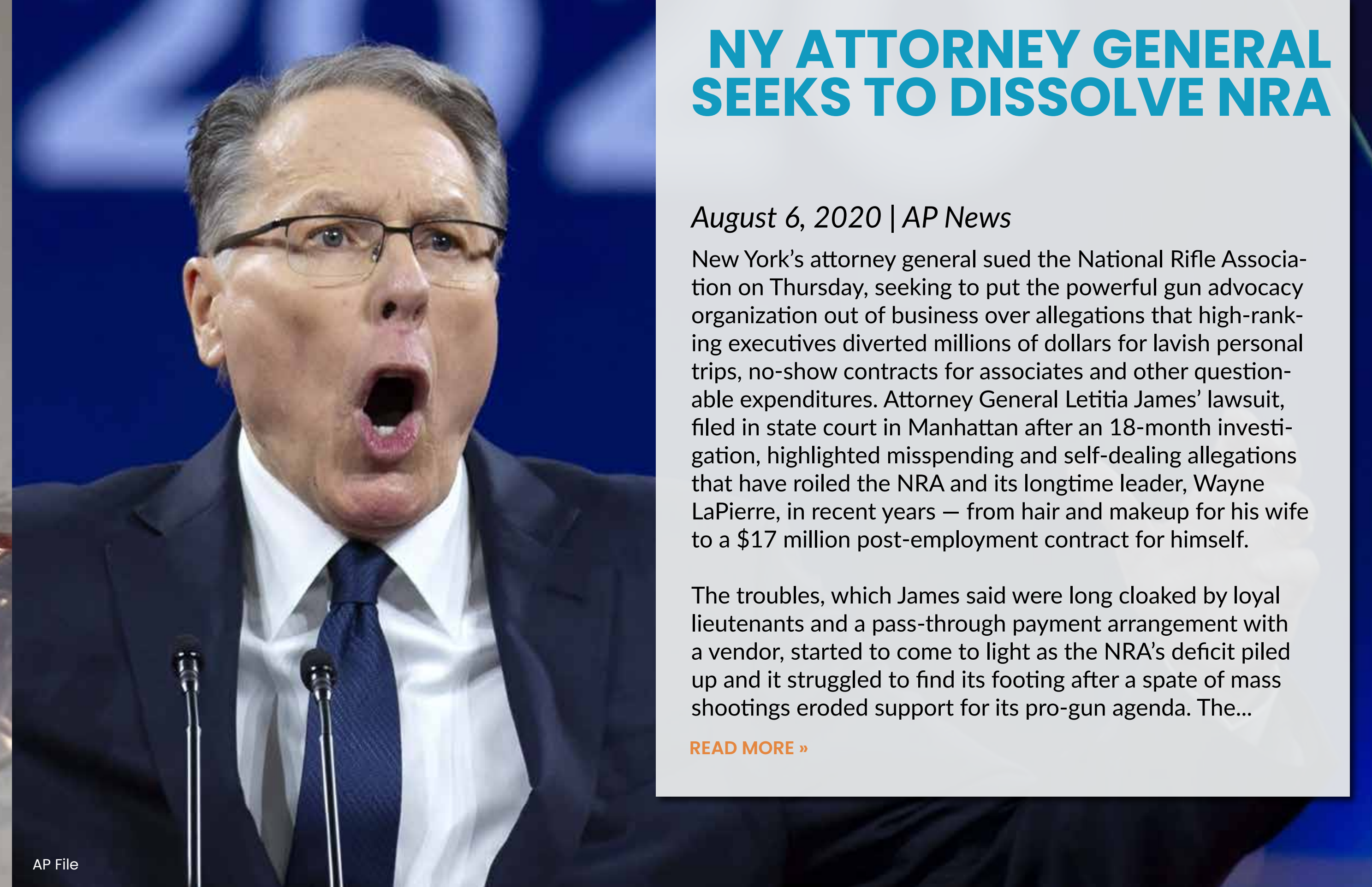
U.S. testing for the coronavirus is dropping even as infections remain high and the death toll rises by more than 1,000 a day, a worrisome trend that officials attribute largely to Americans getting discouraged over having to wait hours to get a test and days or weeks to find out the results.

An Associated Press analysis found that the number of tests per day slid 3.6% over the past two weeks to 750,000, with the count falling in 22 states. That includes places like Alabama, Mississippi, Missouri and Iowa where the percentage of positive tests is high and continuing to climb, an indicator

that the virus is still spreading uncontrolled. Amid the crisis, some health officials are calling for the introduction of a different type of test that would yield results in a matter of minutes and would be cheap and simple enough for millions of Americans to test themselves — but would also be less accurate.

“There’s a sense of desperation that we need to do something else,” said Dr. Ashish Jha, director of Harvard’s Global Health Institute. Widespread testing is considered essential to containing the outbreak as the U.S. approaches a...

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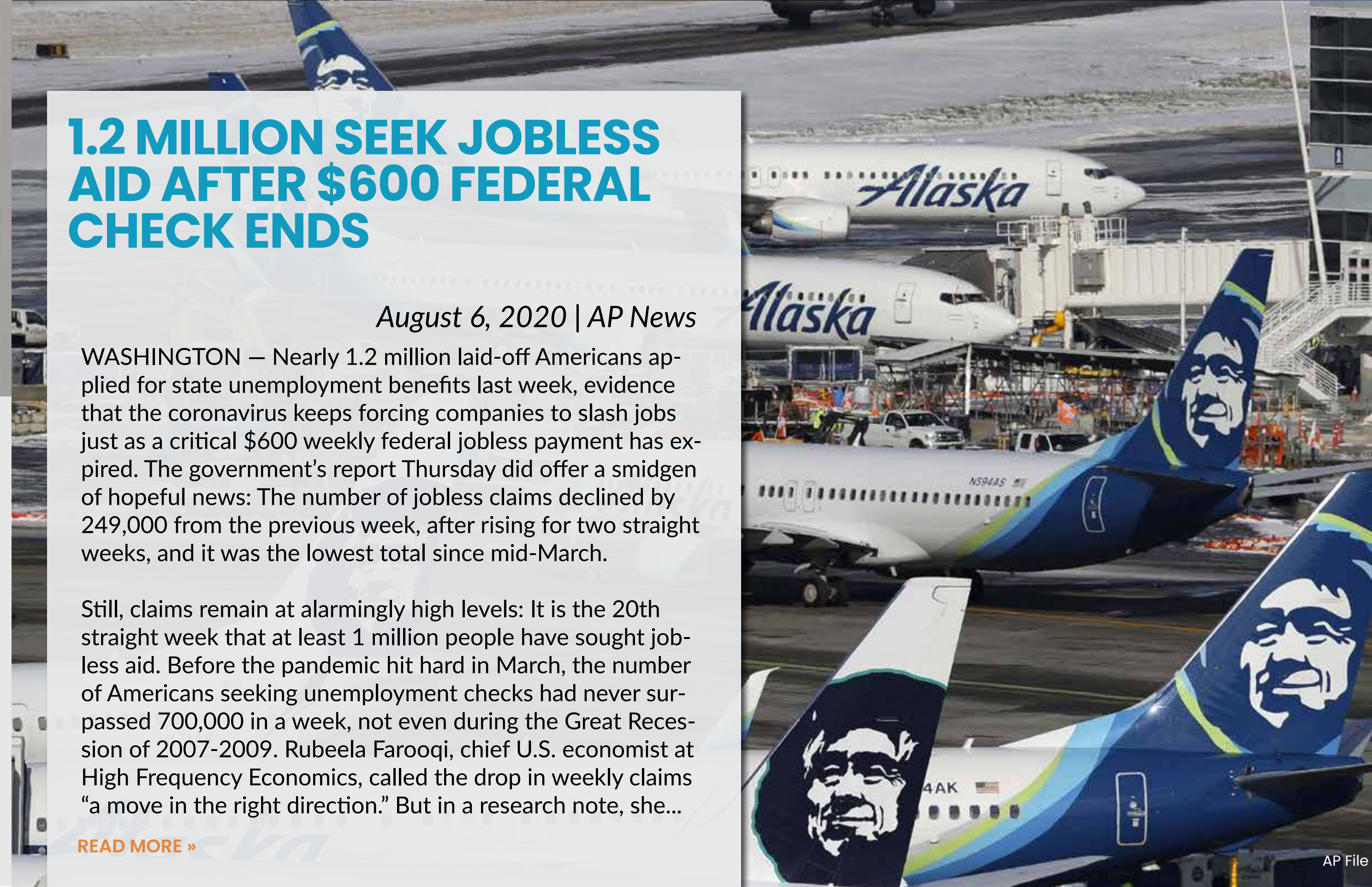
## NY ATTORNEY GENERAL SEEKS TO DISSOLVE NRA

August 6, 2020 | AP News

New York’s attorney general sued the National Rifle Association on Thursday, seeking to put the powerful gun advocacy organization out of business over allegations that high-ranking executives diverted millions of dollars for lavish personal trips, no-show contracts for associates and other questionable expenditures. Attorney General Letitia James’ lawsuit, filed in state court in Manhattan after an 18-month investigation, highlighted misspending and self-dealing allegations that have roiled the NRA and its longtime leader, Wayne LaPierre, in recent years — from hair and makeup for his wife to a \$17 million post-employment contract for himself.

The troubles, which James said were long cloaked by loyal lieutenants and a pass-through payment arrangement with a vendor, started to come to light as the NRA’s deficit piled up and it struggled to find its footing after a spate of mass shootings eroded support for its pro-gun agenda. The...

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## 1.2 MILLION SEEK JOBLESS AID AFTER \$600 FEDERAL CHECK ENDS

August 6, 2020 | AP News

WASHINGTON — Nearly 1.2 million laid-off Americans applied for state unemployment benefits last week, evidence that the coronavirus keeps forcing companies to slash jobs just as a critical \$600 weekly federal jobless payment has expired. The government’s report Thursday did offer a smidgen of hopeful news: The number of jobless claims declined by 249,000 from the previous week, after rising for two straight weeks, and it was the lowest total since mid-March.

Still, claims remain at alarmingly high levels: It is the 20th straight week that at least 1 million people have sought jobless aid. Before the pandemic hit hard in March, the number of Americans seeking unemployment checks had never surpassed 700,000 in a week, not even during the Great Recession of 2007-2009. Rubeela Farooqi, chief U.S. economist at High Frequency Economics, called the drop in weekly claims “a move in the right direction.” But in a research note, she...

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# WORLD

## POOP SCOOP: SATELLITE IMAGES REVEAL ANTARCTIC PENGUIN HAUNTS

August 5, 2020 | AP News

BERLIN — British scientists say there are more emperor penguin colonies in Antarctica than previously thought based on evidence of bird droppings spotted from space. A study published Wednesday by scientists at the British Antarctic Survey counted 61 emperor penguin colonies dotted around the southernmost continent, 11 more than the number previously confirmed. Scientists used images from Europe's Sentinel-2 satellite mission to look for smudges on the ice that indicated large amounts of guano, or penguin poop.

**A study published Wednesday by scientists at the British Antarctic Survey counted 61 emperor penguin colonies dotted around the southernmost continent, 11 more than the number previously confirmed.**

The majestic emperor penguin breeds in remote areas where temperatures can drop as low as minus 50 degrees Celsius (minus 58 degrees Fahrenheit). Researchers have long relied on aerial photographs and satellites to spot colonies of the flightless marine birds. Peter Fretwell, a British Antarctic Survey geographer and the study's lead author, called the latest count "good news" but noted that the newly spotted colonies were small.

### Some of the Newly Discovered Colonies Are Located Far Offshore

"(They) only take the overall population count up by 5-10% to just over half a million penguins or around 265,500 – 278,500 breeding pairs," he said. Emperor penguins are vulnerable to the loss of sea ice predicted to occur because of man-made global warming. Some researchers suggest the number of colonies could drop by more than 30% by the end of the century. Some of the newly discovered colonies are located far offshore, on sea ice that has formed around grounded icebergs and which is particularly at risk of disappearing. Yan Ropert-Coudert, an ecologist who wasn't involved in the latest study, said that while satellite images are a

powerful tool for tracking penguin colonies, large-scale explorations and counts on the ground are also needed whenever possible.

Reliable assessment of local and global populations are necessary for conservation bodies to decide what actions are needed to protect the species, said Ropert-Coudert, who heads the biological sciences section of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research.

**Some of the newly discovered colonies are located far offshore, on sea ice that has formed around grounded icebergs and which is particularly at risk of disappearing.**

New colony





# OUTBREAK HITS NORWAY CRUISE SHIP, COULD SPREAD ALONG COAST

August 3, 2020 | AP News

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — A Norwegian cruise ship line halted all trips and apologized Monday for procedural errors after a coronavirus outbreak on one ship infected at least 5 passengers and 36 crew. Health authorities fear the ship also could have spread the virus to dozens of towns and villages along Norway's western coast.

The confirmed virus cases from the MS Roald Amundsen raise new questions about safety on all cruise ships during a pandemic even as the devastated cruise ship industry is pressing to resume sailings after chaotically shutting down in March. In response to the outbreak, Norway on Monday

closed its ports to cruise ships for two weeks. The Hurtigruten cruise line was one of the first companies to resume sailing during the pandemic, starting cruises to Norway out of northern Germany in June with a single ship, then adding cruises in July to the Arctic archipelago of Svalbard.

The 41 people on the MS Roald Amundsen who tested positive have been admitted to the University Hospital of North Norway in Tromsø, north of the Arctic Circle, where the ship currently is docked. The cruise line said it suspended the ship and two others — the MS Fridtjof Nansen and the MS Spitsbergen — from operating for an indefinite period. "A...

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## A LOOK AT SOME DEADLY EXPLOSIONS INVOLVING AMMONIUM NITRATE

August 6, 2020 | AP News

The investigation into an explosion in the harbor of Lebanon's port city of Beirut is focusing on how 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate, a highly explosive chemical used in fertilizers, came to be stored at the facility for six years, and why nothing was done about it. The explosion Tuesday blasted a crater into the port and hit the city like a freight train, killing more than 100 people and injuring thousands. Buildings were damaged for miles around the city. Some other recent deadly explosions involving ammonium nitrate:

**Aug. 12, 2015:** A massive warehouse explosion rocked the port city of Tianjin, China, killing 173 people and injuring nearly 800. Investigators found the warehouse held illegal stores of ammonium nitrate, which caught fire and caused a series of blasts.

**April 17, 2013:** A fire intentionally set at the West Fertilizer Co. facility in West, Texas, caused ammonium nitrate...

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## 3 MEN RESCUED FROM PACIFIC ISLAND AFTER WRITING SOS IN SAND

August 4, 2020 | AP News

WELLINGTON, New Zealand — Three men have been rescued from a tiny Pacific island after writing a giant SOS sign in the sand that was spotted from above, authorities say. The men had been missing in the Micronesia archipelago for nearly three days when their distress signal was spotted Sunday on uninhabited Pikelot Island by searchers on Australian and U.S. aircraft, the Australian defense department said Monday.

The men had apparently set out from Pulawat atoll in a 7-meter boat on July 30 and had intended to travel about 43 kilometers to Pulap atoll when they sailed off course and ran out of fuel, the department said. Searchers in Guam asked for Australian help. The military ship, Canberra, which was returning to Australia from exercises in Hawaii, diverted to the area and joined forces with U.S. searchers from Guam. The men were found about 190 kilometers from where they...

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Australian Defence Force via AP



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