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Southern DAILY

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Southern Daily News is published by Southern News Group Daily

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Tuesday June 30 2020 | www.today-america.com | Southern News Group

U.S. home contracts post record jump, factory activity improves in Texas



FILE PHOTO: A new apartment building housing construction site is seen in Los Angeles, California, U.S. July 30, 2018. REUTERS/Lucy Nicholson/File Photo

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Contracts to buy U.S. previously owned homes rebounded by the most on record in May, suggesting the housing market was starting to turn around after being hammered by the COVID-19 pandemic along with the rest of the economy.

FILE PHOTO: A new apartment building housing construction site is seen in Los Angeles, California, U.S. July 30, 2018. REUTERS/Lucy Nicholson/File Photo
Other data on Monday showed an improvement in manufacturing activity in Texas in June after three months of record or near-record declines in output. But surging infections of the respiratory illness in many regions, including the densely populated Texas, Florida and California, pose a risk to the nascent recovery. The economy fell into recession in February.

The National Association of Realtors said its Pending Home Sales Index, based on contracts signed last month, surged 44.3%, the largest gain since the series started in 2001. Still, contracts remain 10.6% below their level in February before businesses were shuttered in a bid to slow the spread of coronavirus, almost grounding the economy to a halt.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast pending home contracts, which become sales after a month or two, rebounding 18.9% in May. Pending home sales fell 5.1%

from a year ago.

Home resales tumbled to a more than 9-1/2-year low in May. Economists believe the housing market could emerge more quickly from the recession, which started in February, thanks to historic low interest rates.

Applications for home loans are near an 11-year high and building permits rebounded sharply in May as did new home sales. But record unemployment, with 30.6 million collecting unemployment checks in the first week of June, is a challenge.

Stocks on Wall Street were trading higher after a sharp selloff last week. The dollar was steady against a basket of currencies. U.S. Treasury prices were mixed.

GREEN SHOOTS

In May, pending home contracts soared 43.3% in the populous South. They jumped 56.2% in the West and increased 44.4% in the Northeast. Contracts rose 37.2% in the Midwest.

There were also signs of green shoots in manufacturing. In a separate report on Monday, the Dallas Federal Reserve said its Texas Manufacturing Outlook Survey production index, a key measure of state manufacturing conditions, increased to a reading of 13.6 this month from -28.0 in May.

It said other measures of manufacturing activity also pointed to a rebound in growth this month, with the new orders index

racing 34 points to 2.9, its first positive reading in four months. Nearly a third of manufacturers reported an increase in orders. Measures of capacity utilization and shipments also returned to positive territory in June.

But manufacturers' views of broader business conditions were mixed. The general business activity index surged 43 points but stayed negative at -6.1. The outlook index pulled back into positive territory, rising to a reading of 2.7 from -34.6 in May. About 29% of manufacturers said the outlook had improved, up from 12% last month.

Factory employment measures remained weak. The employment index rose 10 points to a reading of -1.5, with 15% of firms reporting hiring, while 17% said they had laid off workers. The hours worked index rose to -4.3 from -22.8 in May.

Though manufacturers reported paying more for raw materials, a gauge of prices for finished goods remained negative for the sixth straight month. The wages and benefits index returned to positive territory after two negative readings.

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WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

06/29/2020

CORONAVIRUS DIARY

We Are In A National Crisis Again

Tens of millions of confirmed cases of the coronavirus have been reported all over the world today.

agreed on. And at the federal, local and state levels of government, because of different ideologies, there are no firm agreements on the many issues we are facing in the crisis.

Today, America is facing three major issues: the Coronavirus and public health, the economy and the radical problem.

Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar has warned that our time was running out for the U.S. to curb the spread of coronavirus as cases rise cross the country, particularly in the west and south.



We were very sad to learn that our dear friend, the mayor of the City of Stafford, Leonard Scarcella, passed away last night.

has been confirmed with the coronavirus. We admire her leadership at this critical time and we wish her all the best.

As a nation, we are facing this unprecedented challenge. It is everybody's responsibility to carry out your duties and to contribute however you can from your position as a citizen.

In this crisis time, we have also learned that Harris County Judge Linda Hidalgo



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Publisher Southern Daily Wea H. Lee

Stay Home!

BUSINESS

Wear Mask!

The Vice President Spoke At First Baptist Church And Later Met With Gov. Greg Abbott About The Dire Coronavirus Situation In Texas

VP Pence Visits Dallas As Texans Deal With Major Coronavirus Spikes



Vice President Mike Pence spoke at First Baptist in Dallas on Sunday. (Photo credit: Youtube)

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

Vice President Mike Pence, during a trip to Dallas on Sunday, promised Texas would bounce back from a recent surge in cases of the new coronavirus while urging Americans to turn to their faith during a tumultuous period for the nation.

"Working with your governor, we will put the health of the people of the Lone Star State first, and every single day we'll continue to reclaim our freedom and our way of life, as each day we are one day closer to the day we put this pandemic in the past," Pence said during an event at First Baptist Dallas.

Pence's agenda. For over a week, the vice president had been scheduled to appear at First Baptist for its annual Celebrate Freedom Sunday, but he added the meeting with Abbott in recent days as the state confronted its worst week yet for the pandemic.

The number of daily new cases hit a record high Thursday of nearly 6,000, and the number of hospitalizations has reached new highs every day for the past 16 days.



The vice president also emphasized the importance of wearing a mask to reduce further spread.

The positivity rate — the ratio of tests that come back positive — has also spiked. The rate, presented by the state as a seven-day average, reached 13.23% on Friday, which is nearly as high as it was in mid-April when it hit an all-time high of 13.86%.

The numbers led Abbott to begin reversing the state's reopening process Friday, shutting down bars and ordering restaurants to scale back their capacity to 50%, among other measures. In his remarks at First Baptist, which lasted for about half an hour, Pence thanked Abbott "for his courageous and compassionate leadership for the people of Texas during this challenging time."



The federal government had been poised to withdraw financial support for seven testing sites in Texas at the end of the month. But after bipartisan outcry, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced on Friday it would extend support for five of seven testing sites that had received aid.

Speaking to reporters after their meeting, Abbott, Pence and Birx all urged Texans to wear masks. Birx was particularly emphatic, saying she was "appealing to every Texan to wear a mask. ... Every single one of them." Pence, Birx and his two other high-profile travel companions, Texas Sen. John Cornyn and U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson, all had face coverings on when they disembarked Air Force Two in Dallas on Sunday morning, as did their three greeters: Abbott, Texas House Speaker Dennis Bonnen and Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton.



Abbott says he regrets reopening the state.

The church did not release any information about how many people it expected for the event, but WFAA reported Friday that the church would operate at "70% capacity, which equates to about 2,200 people inside the main sanctuary where Pence will speak." While Abbott has tightened restrictions on some gatherings amid the coronavirus surge, he has not imposed occupancy limits on religious services, deeming them essential activities. The campaign of former Vice President Joe Biden, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, released a statement ahead of Pence's trip that said it "epitomizes the dismissive attitude this administration has taken in addressing this crisis from the onset."

Editor's Choice



A man arrives at Houston Methodist Hospital emergency room on a stretcher amid a coronavirus outbreak in Houston, Texas. REUTERS/Callaghan O'Hare



A couple draws their firearms on protesters as they enter their neighborhood during a protest against St. Louis Mayor Lyda Krewson, in St. Louis, Missouri. REUTERS/Lawrence Bryant



A participant wears a face mask during the Berlin Pride 2020 event, in Berlin, Germany. REUTERS/Hannibal Hanschke



Lawmakers from Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) scuffle with lawmakers from the main opposition Kuomintang (KMT) party, who have been occupying the Legislature Yuan, in Taipei, Taiwan. REUTERS/Ann Wang



A health worker collects a sample using a swab from a person at a local health center to conduct tests for the coronavirus in New Delhi, India. REUTERS/Adnan Abidi



A police officer aims a gun before firing at protesters gathered near the Minneapolis Police third precinct after a white police officer was caught on a bystander's video pressing his knee into the neck of African-American man George Floyd



U.S. President Donald Trump listens during a meeting of the American Workforce Policy Advisory Board in the East Room at the White House in Washington. REUTERS/Carlos Barria



People wearing protective masks make their way during rush hour at Shinjuku station on the first day after the Japanese government lifted the state of emergency in Tokyo, Japan. REUTERS/Kim Kyung-Hoon

Residents Encouraged To Stay Home

Harris County Raises COVID-19 Threat Level To 1-Red – The Most Critical Level



Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo, shown here April 20, will issue an order mandating that businesses require their customers to wear face masks to reduce the chances of spreading the novel coronavirus. (Photo/Houston Chronicle / Staff Photographer)

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo is asking residents to stay home and minimize all contacts with a new stay-home advisory after a surge in cases has moved the county to the highest possible COVID-19 threat level. Level 1, or “Code Red,” signals severe and worsening outbreaks that have strained contact tracing and testing. Thursday marked the second highest single-day increase for COVID-19 cases in Texas; the statewide total is now at 135,648 cases.

Hidalgo said during a Friday press conference that the COVID-19 outbreak is leading the county toward a “catastrophic and unsustainable” situation and that it is quickly becoming a hotspot in one of the worst-hit places in the world. “Our situation is far worse today than when we issued our first stay-home order in Harris County and when the state issued their first stay-home order,” Hidalgo said.

Because state orders supersede local

rules and Hidalgo is not able to issue an enforceable stay-home order, the judge is issuing a stay-home advisory that almost exactly mirrors the previous stay home order. The advisory asks residents to stay home except for essential needs, cancel all gatherings of any size, avoid non-essential personal travel, cancel nursing home and long-term facility visits and practice health precautions for essential workers who must remain on the job.

Harris County Has Raised The

COVID-19 Threat Level To 1-Red.

Leaders of the Texas Medical Center said on Thursday that the hospital system is still in good shape, despite issuing a statement less than 24 hours before warning the public of dangerously high capacity levels. Hidalgo said hospitals have reached 100 percent of their base capacity and that relying on contingency plans is a gamble on human life.

“When did we lose our respect for human life...to the degree that we say let’s fill our ICU and surge capacity before we take any meaningful action?” Hidalgo said. “...lives are not collateral damage.”

The county’s emergency temporary medical shelter is ready to deploy within 48 hours if needed. Hidalgo said that would only happen if hospitals reach a point where they need to convert beds to ICU beds.

Gov. Greg Abbott has responded to the troubling uptick in cases by halting the state’s reopening plan and ordering all bars and tubing venues to close down, reducing capacity levels at restaurants to 50 percent and requiring any outdoor gathering of 100 or more people be approved by local governments. In response to the order, Hidalgo said the county will prohibit outdoor gatherings over 100 people and that residents who attend July 4 fireworks shows must remain in their cars.



Hidalgo issued an order last week mandating that businesses must require customers and employees to wear face masks. That order includes a \$1,000 penalty for violators. She added that issuing a fine for violating the new stay-home advisory will depend on area cities, but as with the mask order, education is the priority.

“If we really want to get to the other side of this...we need to buckle down now,” Hidalgo said.

Go here for breakdown of the threat levels: <https://www.click2houston.com/news/local/2020/06/12/heres-a-breakdown-of-the-covid-19-threat-levels-laid-out-by-harris-county-judge-hidalgo-thursday/>

For additional information, go to: <https://www.click2houston.com/> (Courtesy click2houston and Chron.com)

Judge Lina Hidalgo In Isolation After Potential COVID-19 Exposure

HOUSTON, Texas (KTRK) -- Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo says she’s in self-quarantine after a member of her office tested positive for COVID-19. According to a statement from Hidalgo issued on Sunday, she was potentially exposed to the virus on Monday, June 22.

The staff member’s positive test results were confirmed over the weekend, and that person is currently self-isolating, according to Hidalgo.

The judge and other staff who were potentially exposed will be tested for COVID-19 and will all self-quarantine for 14 days.

According to the statement, Hidalgo has not shown any symptoms.



Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo is in self-quarantine following exposure to a staff member who tested positive for coronavirus.

“Given what we have learned, I will be quarantining at home,” said the judge. “The reality of it is, there are thousands of residents across Harris County that are increasingly finding themselves in

the same position I am in today. There are rising numbers of residents testing positive for this virus, and more and more requiring hospitalization. We are at Threat Level 1 - Red - and I continue to call on everyone to stay home except for essential activities. That is the only way we avoid a crisis in our hospital system and put our community in a position to reopen in a smarter and more sustainable way. We will beat this threat together as a community and I will continue to ensure we are pursuing every option we have to bring this back under control.”

Hidalgo will continue her duties virtually, and normal county operations will continue without interruption. Most of her staff have already been following work-from-home protocols, read the statement. She said the limited staff working from the office have been consistently wearing masks in the workplace and maintaining social distancing practices. (Courtesy abc13.com)



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