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U.S. coronavirus death toll rises; New York, Los Angeles region confirm new cases



Inside C2

Southern DAILY

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Southern Daily News is published by Southern News Group Daily

Monday March 30, 2020 | www.today-america.com | Southern News Group

China's Wuhan, where the coronavirus emerged, begins to lift its lockdown



Passengers wearing face masks arrive at a railway station in Wuhan on the first day inbound train services resumed following the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, in Wuhan of Hubei province, the epicentre of China's coronavirus outbreak, March 28, 2020. REUTERS/Aly Song

WUHAN, China (Reuters) - The Chinese city of Wuhan, where the coronavirus outbreak first emerged, began lifting a two-month lockdown on Saturday by restarting some metro services and reopening borders, allowing some semblance of normality to return and families to reunite. After being cut-off from the rest of the country for two months, the reopening of Wuhan, where the epidemic first erupted in late December, marks a turning point in China's fight against the virus, though the contagion has since spread to over 200 countries. Among those on the first high-speed trains allowed into the city on Saturday morning was Guo Liangkai, a 19-year-old student whose one-month work stint in Shanghai stretched to three months due to the clamp down on movement.

"It makes me very happy that I can see my family," Guo told Reuters after being greeted by his mother at the main station. "We wanted to hug but now is a special period so we can't hug or take any actions like these." Authorities took draconian measures to stop people from entering or leaving the industrial city of 11 million people in central China. Families were confined to their homes. Bus and taxi services were shut, and only essential stores were allowed to remain open. "I think the resumption of work represents a kind of hope. It at least shows that China is victorious," said Zhang Yulun, 35, returning to Wuhan for work.

China's National Health Commission said on Saturday that 54 new coronavirus cases were reported on the mainland on Friday, all involving so-called imported cases. Mainland China now has 81,394 cases, with the death toll rising by three to 3,295, the commission said. People wearing face masks wait for a subway train on the first day the city's subway services resumed following the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, in Wuhan of Hubei province, the epicentre of China's coronavirus outbreak, March 28, 2020. The Chinese characters REUTERS/Aly Song Wuhan accounts for about 60% of China's coronavirus cases, but they have fallen sharply in recent weeks, a sign that the measures are working. The last confirmed locally transmitted case of the virus in Wuhan was on Monday. With the United States, Italy and Spain and other countries now battling soaring infections, China is focusing on the risk posed by imported cases - most of them Chinese returning home. Effective Saturday, China suspended the entry of foreign nationals with valid Chinese visas and residence permits. DISINFECTANT AND MASKS But even with the decline in cases and loosening of restrictions, Wuhan authorities were taking few chances. Staff, some in full-body protective gear, and volunteers bustled around the railway station in the morning, setting out hand disinfectant and putting up signs reminding travelers they need a mobile-phone based health code to take public transport.

A worker walked through one metro train carrying a signboard reading: "Wear a mask for the entire journey, people should not gather and when you disembark please scan the health code." "Everyone is taking the right precautions. So, there shouldn't be a problem," Yuan Hai, 30, a passenger on a reopened metro line said when asked about the risks. "But you have to be careful." The existence of an unknown number of asymptomatic carriers of coronavirus in China has raised concerns among the public that lifting the restrictions may release thousands of people who could still be spreading the virus that causes COVID-19, without knowing they are sick. Life in Wuhan remains far from normal. The vast majority of shops are shut while bright yellow roadblocks remain. Wuhan will not let people leave the city until April 8. Some people at the railway station, such as a woman who only gave her surname as Zhang, said they were there to see if there was any chance people could leave earlier.

Her grandson came to visit her for the week-long Lunar New Year holiday in January and has been separated from his parents in the southern city of Shenzhen ever since. With schools there possibly reopening, she hopes he can get back soon.

"He was supposed to leave on the fifth day (of the holiday) but has now been here for a few months," she said.



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As virus threatens, U.S. embraces big government, for now

WASHINGTON, March 28 (Reuters) - It may, as House Majority Leader and Maryland Democrat Steny Hoyer said on Friday, be out of love that the United States agreed to shut down much of its economy to stop a viral epidemic and save lives.

It may, as Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said, be out of necessity that the federal government agreed to foot the bill.

Whatever the motivation, in the scope of two frantic weeks, U.S. elected officials and central bankers have engineered an economic intervention unparalleled outside of wartime.

All in it would supplant perhaps 30% of gross domestic product with government spending and loans, drive the federal deficit as high as needed to make that happen, and broaden U.S. social spending in ways that just a few weeks ago Republicans and President Donald Trump were branding as “socialist.”

After Congress delivered final approval following a week of negotiation, Trump on Friday signed legislation that would authorize more than \$2 trillion in direct payments to households, loans to small and large companies, and funding that the Federal Reserve may leverage into as much as \$4 trillion more in credit - money that will leave a deep government imprint on a pre-crisis economy of \$21 trillion.

That has happened with striking speed and, in a country known for its paralyzed and polarized politics, remarkably little haggling over either the moral qualms liberals often have about bailing out companies, or that conservatives often have about increasing benefits for those out of work.

Confronting an outside enemy that is imperiling both employers and employees, the well-buffered as well as the uninsured, those concerns have fallen away.

“No question that officials and politicians, even Republi-



FILE PHOTO: U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin walks from a meeting during negotiations on a coronavirus disease (COVID-19) relief package on Capitol in Washington, U.S., March 23, 2020. REUTERS/Joshua Roberts

cans in the Senate, are prepared to abandon old shibboleths like ‘government should keep its hands off the private sector,’ while the crisis is underway, said University of California, Berkeley economics professor Barry Eichengreen.

STATISTICS ‘NOT RELEVANT’

As of Friday the coronavirus had infected more than 100,000 people in the United States, now the world leader in cases of COVID-19, the illness named after the new virus was first identified in China late last

year

Ten of millions will likely face at least a short spell of unemployment - not because business conditions became soft, but because they became dangerous. Epidemiologists have warned that every human interaction increases the risk that the coronavirus spreads uncontrolled. “Economic statistics, at the moment, are not relevant. We’re in an unprecedented situation,” Mnuchin said on Thursday,

making what has now become a broadly understood point: The current economic turmoil is by design. No doubt there will be second-guessing in the months ahead. “There will be plenty of soul searching,” once the crisis is past, Eichengreen said. “Attitudes about the appropriate role for government are going to be contested even more than was the case.”

Stay home!

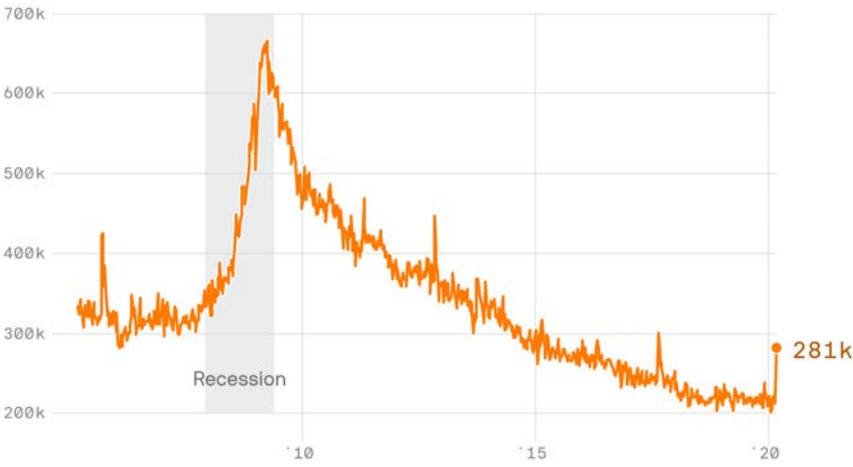
BUSINESS

Work safe!

U.S. Unemployment Claims Hit 3.3 Million, Nearly Five Times The Previous Record

Weekly U.S. initial unemployment claims

Seasonally adjusted, March 5, 2005 to March 14, 2020



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

Nearly 3.3 million Americans applied for unemployment benefits last week — almost five times the previous record set in 1982 — amid a widespread economic shutdown caused by the coronavirus.

The surge in weekly applications was a stunning reflection of the damage the viral outbreak is inflicting on the economy. Filings for unemployment aid generally reflect the pace of layoffs.

Layoffs are sure to accelerate as the U.S. economy sinks into a recession. Revenue has collapsed at restaurants, hotels, movie theaters, gyms and airlines. Auto sales are plummeting, and carmakers have closed factories. Most such employers face loan payments and other fixed costs, so they’re cutting jobs to save money.

As job losses mount, some economists say the nation’s unemployment rate could approach 13% by May. By comparison, the highest jobless rate during the Great Recession, which ended in 2009, was 10%.

“What seemed impossible just two weeks ago is now reality,” said Nancy

Vanden Houten, an economist at Oxford Economics, a consulting firm. “The U.S. economy will experience the largest economic contraction on record with the most severe surge in unemployment ever.”



In its report Thursday, the Labor Department said 3.283 million people applied for unemployment benefits last week, up from 282,000 during the previous week. Yet many people who have lost jobs in recent weeks have been unable to file for unemployment aid because state websites and phone systems have been overwhelmed by a crush of applicants and have frozen up.

That logjam suggests that Thursday’s re-

port actually understates the magnitude of job cuts last week. So does the fact that workers who are not on company payrolls — gig workers, free-lancers, the self-employed — aren’t currently eligible for unemployment benefits even though in many cases they’re no longer able to earn money.

With layoffs surging, a significant expansion of unemployment benefits for the millions who will lose jobs as a result of the coronavirus outbreak was included in an economic relief bill that got final approval in Congress last Friday. One provision in the bill would provide an extra \$600 a week on top of the unemployment aid that states provide. Another provision would supply 13 additional weeks of benefits beyond the six months of jobless aid that most states offer. The new legislation would also extend unemployment benefits, for the first time, to gig workers and others who are not on company payrolls.



Separate legislation passed last week provides up to \$1 billion to states to enhance their ability to process claims. But that money will take time to be disbursed.

Worldwide, the United Nations estimates that up to 25 million jobs could be lost in the economic upheaval from the viral outbreak. That would exceed the 22 million that were lost during the 2008 global financial crisis.

In Europe, companies are laying off workers at the fastest pace since 2009, according to surveys of business managers. Official statistics for Europe that would reflect the outbreak’s impact are not yet out. But companies have been announcing tens of thousands of job cuts, both permanent and temporary. Major car companies like Fiat Chrysler and airlines like Lufthansa are suspending most

of their operations, putting tens of thousands of workers on temporary leave, many with only a partial salary.

The rise in joblessness in Europe may not be as sharp as in the U.S. because it’s harder to fire workers in Europe, where many governments are supporting companies financially to keep employees on partially paid leave.



In the United States, the jump in applications for benefits is playing out in states across the country. In California, claims for unemployment benefits more than tripled last week to 187,000. In New York, they rose by a factor of five to 80,334. Nationwide, about 2.25% of the entire workforce applied for jobless aid last week. In Nevada, the figure was 6.8%, in Rhode Island 7.5%.

Gov. Gavin Newsom said 1 million claims for unemployment benefits had been filed in California since March 13. Many of those applications were likely filed this week, suggesting that next week’s report could show an even bigger number of claims.

In Florida, Jessie Morancy of Hollywood was laid off last week from her job as a wheelchair attendant and customer service agent at Fort Lauderdale Airport. Morancy, 29, called the state unemployment office on Monday to try to file for unemployment benefits but encountered just a recorded message telling her to call back later.

She was also concerned that even a full unemployment benefit of \$275 a week would be less than half of what she earned at her job and insufficient to provide for her children, ages 10 and 7.

Even for those able to file a claim, the benefits will take time to kick in. It typically takes two to three weeks before

applicants receive any money. State agencies must first contact their former employers to verify their work and earnings history. Only then can the employee’s weekly unemployment benefits be calculated.



Worsening the problem, most state agencies that handle unemployment claims are operating at historically low funding levels and staffing that are intended to handle a trickle of claims. Just weeks ago, the job market was in the strongest shape it had been in decades.

On Wednesday, the New York State Department of Labor tweeted, “If you have been unable to get through our phone and/or online system this week, please keep trying.”

“We are working as hard as we can to ensure that all benefits are paid and appreciate your patience,” the agency said on Twitter.

Ellen Zentner, an economist at Morgan Stanley, said in a note to clients that 17 million jobs could be lost through May — twice the entire 8.7 million jobs that were lost in the Great Recession. She expects the unemployment rate to average 12.8% in the April-June quarter, which would be the highest level since the 1930s.

Still, Zentner also expects the economy to start recovering by the second half of the year. It will take time for things to return to something close to normal, she projects: The unemployment rate could still top 5% at the end of next year. (Courtesy <https://www.chicagotribune.com/>)

Editor’s Choice



Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT) wearing protective gears wheel a sick patient to a waiting ambulance during the outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in New York City



Pedestrians pass an electronic billboard displaying a message of support for key workers in London as the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues, London, Britain, March 28, 2020. REUTERS/Toby Melville



Rajesh Babu, a police officer, wearing a helmet depicting coronavirus, requests a commuter to stay at home during a 21-day nationwide lockdown to limit the spreading of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in Chennai, India, March 28, 2020. REUTERS//P. Ravikumar TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY



Workers clean the area around Martyrs’ Square after Lebanese security forces cleared away a protest camp and reopened roads blocked by demonstrators since protests against the governing elite started in October, in Beirut, Lebanon March 28, 2020. REUTERS/Mohamed Azakir



The showcase of a souvenir-shop displays a protective gear at the famous red-light district “Reeperbahn” during the outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Hamburg



An internally displaced Syrian girl wears a face mask as members of the Syrian Civil defence sanitize the Bab Al-Nour internally displaced persons camp, to prevent the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Azaz



A cyclist is seen riding in Pitlochry, Scotland, Britain, March 28, 2020. REUTERS/Russell Cheyne



Face shields and masks worn by healthcare workers treating coronavirus disease (COVID-19) patients at Mount Sinai Hospital are dropped in a bin to be sanitized for reuse because of a personal protective equipment shortage, in New York City, New York, U.S., March 28, 2020. Handout via REUTERS. NO RESALES. NO

We Need To Keep COVID-19 From ‘Circling Back Around The Globe’

UN Launches COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan



Photo taken on March, 25, 2020 at the United Nations headquarters in New York shows participants attending the launch of the COVID-19 global humanitarian response plan via video teleconference. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (upper left) on Wednesday launched a 2-billion U.S. dollar global humanitarian response plan to fight COVID-19 in some of the world's most vulnerable countries. (Photo/Xinhua/Xie E)

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

UNITED NATIONS, March 25 (Xinhua) -- UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on last Wednesday launched a 2-billion-U.S.-dollar global humanitarian response plan to fight COVID-19 in some of the world's most vulnerable countries. "COVID-19 is menacing the whole of humanity, and so the whole of humanity must fight back. Individual country responses are not going to be enough," said Guterres at the launch, a virtual event. "We must come to the aid of the ultra-vulnerable -- millions upon millions of people who are least able to protect themselves. This is a matter of basic human solidarity." The response plan will be imple-

mented by UN agencies, with international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and NGO consortia playing a direct role in the response, said Mark Lowcock, the UN undersecretary-general for humanitarian affairs. The plan will be coordinated by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which Lowcock heads.



The plan will deliver essential laboratory

equipment to test for the virus, and medical supplies to treat people; install handwashing stations in camps and settlements; launch public information campaigns on prevention; and establish airbridges and hubs across Africa, Asia and Latin America to move humanitarian workers and supplies to where they are needed most, said Lowcock. Guterres said the world faces an unprecedented threat as COVID-19 has rapidly covered the globe. "It has spread suffering, disrupted billions of lives and endangered the global economy." Wealthy countries with strong health systems are buckling under the pressure. Now, the virus is arriving in countries already in the midst of humanitarian crises caused by conflicts, natural disasters and climate change. These are places where people who have been forced to flee their homes because of bombs, violence or floods are living under plastic sheets in fields, or crammed into refugee camps or informal settlements. Those people do not have homes in which to socially distance or self-isolate. They lack clean water and soap with which to do that most basic act of self-protection against the virus -- washing their hands. And should they become critically ill, they have no way of accessing a health care system that can provide a hospital bed and a ventilator, said Guterres.



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres launches a COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan with Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock, WHO Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore. (Photo/ UN Photo/ Mark Garten)

Helping the vulnerable people is crucial for combating the virus, he said. "The

world is only as strong as our weakest health system. If we do not act decisively now, I fear the virus will establish a foothold in the most fragile countries, leaving the whole world vulnerable as it continues to circle the planet, paying no mind to borders." Properly funded, the plan will save many lives and arm humanitarian agencies and NGOs with laboratory supplies for testing, and with medical equipment to treat the sick while protecting health care workers. The plan also includes additional measures to support host communities that continue to generously open their homes and towns to refugees and displaced persons, said Guterres.



The response plan asks for 450 million dollars for the World Health Organization (WHO), 405 million dollars for the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), 350 million dollars for the World Food Programme, 255 million dollars for the UN Refugee Agency, 120 million dollars each for the UN Development Programme and the UN Population Fund, 110 million dollars for the Food and Agriculture Organization, and 100 million dollars for the International Organization for Migration. It asks for 100 million dollars for NGO response. Guterres appealed to governments for their full support to the humanitarian response plan, which, he said, is a necessity for global health security. The plan is a moral imperative and in everyone's interests. And it is a crucial

part of winning the fight against the virus, he added. WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore also joined Wednesday's launch via video teleconference. (Courtesy <https://news.un.org/>)



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