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More than 150 National Guard in Washington for inauguration test positive for coronavirus



Inside C2

Southern DAILY

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Chicago teachers vote on job action, claim schools not ready to reopen



CHICAGO (Reuters) - Chicago teachers will vote on Saturday on a resolution to not return to classrooms next week, claiming the third largest school system in the United States lacks an adequate plan to safely reopen schools amid the pandemic.

FILE PHOTO: People wearing protective face masks walk, as the global outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues, along the shores of Lake Michigan in Chicago, Illinois, U.S., December 6, 2020. REUTERS/Shannon Stapleton/Files/File Photo
The results of the vote, expected on Sunday, could jeopardize Chicago Public Schools' phased reopening as the district plans to offer in-person instruction for 70,000 elementary and middle school students.

Some 10,000 educators are scheduled to report to work at their schools on Monday to prepare for those classes. On Friday, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) CEO Janice Jackson said if those educators do not show up for work, it would constitute an illegal strike by the Chicago Teachers Union.

"We are continuing to meet every day with CTU leadership — just as we

have more than 60 times in the past several months — and we are optimistic that an agreement is within reach," she said in a letter to parents Friday evening.

Jackson said public health officials agree schools can reopen safely with mitigation strategies in place. She added the district has invested \$100 million and "countless hours of planning" to ensure our school communities are safe.

The vast majority of the Chicago's teachers have been teaching the system's 355,000 students remotely since last spring when the spread of the virus forced the district to close schools.

Since then, the Chicago Teachers Union has insisted that the Chicago schools lack proper ventilation, cleaning supplies, personal protective equipment to re-open.

It has also claimed CPS does not have adequate safety protocols in place while urging the district to "move swiftly" to vaccinate teachers, who are expected to begin to get shots in mid-February.

"Our commitment remains the same: to protect lives as we work to land an enforceable agreement to safely return to

our school buildings," the union said in a statement on Friday.

Public school teachers across the nation have voiced similar concerns, urging their districts not to reopen until they have more thorough plans to protect them and students from the virus.

The possible work action in Chicago comes 15 months after the city's teachers went on strike for 11 days during a bitter labor dispute over overcrowded classrooms and support staff levels and pay.

"The rhetoric, the walkouts, the fighting. These are having a devastating effect on families across this city," a group of parents on the city's north side wrote in a letter to the district and union, according to the Chicago Tribune.

Earlier this month, CPS began implementing its re-opening plan, allowing for 6,500 pre-kindergarten and special education students to attend in-person class.

A third of the 3,800 teachers and paraprofessionals initially did not show up for work. As of Jan. 15,

87 of those educators remained locked out of their virtual classrooms for failing to report, according to the district.

The next step in the district's reopening plan comes on Feb. 1, when some 70,000 elementary and middle school students are scheduled back in classrooms after

they opted to take some of their classes in-person and the reminder online.

The district has yet to announce when high school students will have the option to return to school buildings.

Police clamp down on Russian protests against jailing of Kremlin foe Navalny

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Police detained over 2,500 people and used force to break up rallies across Russia on Saturday as tens of thousands of protesters ignored extreme cold and police warnings to demand the release of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny.

Navalny had called on his supporters to protest after being arrested last weekend as he returned to Russia from Germany for the first time since being poisoned with a nerve agent he says was slipped to him by state security agents in August.

The authorities had warned people to stay away from Saturday's protests, saying they risked catching COVID-19 as well as prosecution and possible jail time for attending an unauthorised event.

But protesters defied the ban and, in at least one case in temperatures below -50 Celsius (-58 Fahrenheit), turned out in force. Leonid Volkov, a Navalny ally, called on them to do the same next weekend to try to free Navalny from what he called "the clutches of his killers".

In central Moscow, where Reuters reporters estimated at least 40,000 people had gathered in one of the biggest unauthorised rallies for years, police were seen roughly detaining people, bundling them into nearby vans.

The authorities said just some 4,000 people had shown up, while the foreign ministry ques-

tioned Reuters' crowd estimate.

"Why not just immediately say 4 million?," it suggested sarcastically on its official Telegram messenger channel.

Ivan Zhdanov, a Navalny ally, put turnout in the capital at 50,000, the Proekt media outlet reported.

Some protesters chanted "Putin is a thief", and "Disgrace" and "Freedom to Navalny!"

Navalny's wife Yulia was briefly detained at the rally before being released. Some of Navalny's political allies were detained in the days before the protest; others on the day itself.

At one point, protesters surrounded a sleek black car with a flashing light used by senior officials, throwing snowballs at it and kicking it. A group of policemen were also pelted with snowballs by a much bigger crowd.

The OVD-Info protest monitor group said that at least 2,509 people, including 952 in Moscow and 374 in St Petersburg, had been detained at rallies in around 100 towns and cities.

Navalny, a 44-year-old lawyer, is in a Moscow prison pending the outcome of four legal matters he describes as trumped up. He accuses President Vladimir Putin of ordering his attempted murder. Putin has dismissed that, alleging Navalny is part of a U.S.-backed dirty tricks campaign to discredit him.

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More than 150 National Guard in Washington for inauguration test positive for coronavirus

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Between 150 and 200 National Guard deployed to Washington, D.C., to provide security for President Joe Biden's inauguration have tested positive for the coronavirus, a U.S. official said on Friday.

The U.S. government imposed unprecedented security measures in the city following the deadly Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol by supporters of former President Donald Trump, including fences topped with razor wire and checkpoints manned by National Guard.

The official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the number of National Guard troops who tested positive could rise but was still a small fraction of the more than 25,000 troops deployed in city over the past few days.

The United States reported more than 4,000 daily deaths from COVID-19 for a second consecutive day on Thursday, according to a Reuters analysis of

public health data, bringing the cumulative number of U.S. lives lost to almost 410,000.

The National Guard said in a statement that it would not discuss coronavirus cases, but personnel were following Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines, including temperature checks when they left their home state and arrived in the city, along with a screening questionnaire. The military has said arrangements are being made for thousands of troops to return home, and that about 15,000 are expected to leave Washington within the next five to 10 days. Some 7,000 National Guard personnel are expected to stay at least through the end of the month, officials have said.

About 5,000 troops are expected to stay through mid-March, but that number and time period could change.



Taiwan reports large incursion by Chinese air force

TAIPEI (Reuters) - Eight Chinese bomber planes and four fighter jets entered the southwestern corner of Taiwan's air defence identification zone on Saturday, and Taiwan's air force deployed missiles to "monitor" the incursion, the island's Defence Ministry said. China, which claims Taiwan as its own territory, has conducted almost daily flights over the waters between the southern part of Taiwan and the Taiwan-controlled Pratas Islands in the South China Sea in recent months.

However they have generally consist-

ed of just one or two reconnaissance aircraft. The presence of so many Chinese combat aircraft on this mission - Taiwan said it was made up of eight nuclear-capable H-6K bombers and four J-16 fighter jets - is unusual. A map provided by Taiwan's Defence Ministry showed that the Chinese aircraft, which also included a Y-8 anti-submarine aircraft, flew over the same waters where the most recent Chinese missions have been taking place near the Pratas Islands, though still well away from mainland Taiwan.

Taiwan's air force warned away the

Chinese aircraft and deployed missiles to monitor them, the ministry added, using standard wording for how it responds to such activities.

"Airborne alert sorties had been tasked, radio warnings issued and air defence missile systems deployed to monitor the activity," it said in a brief statement.

There was no immediate comment from China. In the past China has said it has been carrying out exercises to defend the country's sovereignty and security. Beijing has watched with growing

concern increasing U.S. support for democratic Taiwan, especially during Donald Trump's administration which left office on Wednesday.

Last year during visits by senior U.S. officials to Taipei Chinese aircraft briefly crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait, which normally serves as an unofficial buffer.

The flight by the Chinese bombers and fighters on Saturday came just days after Joe Biden assumed the U.S. presidency.

Emily Horne, spokeswoman for

Stay Home!

BUSINESS

Wear Mask!

U.S. Records 400,000 Lives Lost To The Coronavirus As Death Rate Accelerates



Mary Estime-Irvin, a councilwoman in North Miami, Fla., writes the name of a friend lost to COVID-19 on a symbolic tombstone that is part of a pandemic memorial at Griffing Park in North Miami in October. (Photo/Joe Raedle/Getty Images)

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

While millions wait for a lifesaving shot, the U.S. death toll from the coronavirus continues to soar upward with horrifying speed. On Tuesday, the last full day of Donald Trump's presidency, the official death count reached 400,000 — a once-unthinkable number. More than 100,000 Americans have perished in the pandemic in just the past five weeks. In the U.S., someone now dies from COVID-19 every 26 seconds. And the disease is now claiming more American lives each week than any other condition, ahead of heart disease and cancer, according to the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington. Given its relatively large population, the U.S. death rate from COVID-19 remains lower than that of many other countries. But the cumulative death toll of 400,000 now exceeds any other country's overall mortality — close to double what Brazil has recorded, and four times the death count in the United Kingdom. "It's very hard to wrap your mind around a number that is so large, particularly when we've had 10 months of large numbers assailing our senses and really, really horrific images coming out of our hospitals and our morgues," says Dr. Kirsten Bibbins-Domingo, chair of epidemiology at the

University of California, San Francisco.



Kristin Urquiza and her father, Mark, at a family celebration in Phoenix in 2016. After her father's death on June 30, Urquiza co-founded a group for grieving family members, Marked By COVID. (Photo/Christine Keeves)

"It's important to understand virology. It's important to understand epidemiology. But ultimately, what we've learned is that human behavior and psychology is a major force in this pandemic," she says. The U.S. is now averaging more than 3,300 deaths a day — well above the most devastating days of the early spring surge when the daily average deaths hovered around 2,000. "At this point, looking at the numbers, for me

the question is: Is there any way we can avoid half a million deaths before the end of February?" says Dr. Ashish Jha, dean of the Brown University School of Public Health. "I think of how much suffering as a nation we seem to be willing to accept that we have this number of people getting infected and dying every day."

How did the U.S. go from 300,000 deaths to 400,000?

The path to 400,000 deaths was painfully familiar, with patterns of sickness and death repeating themselves from earlier in the pandemic. A shocking number of people in nursing homes and assisted living facilities continue to die each week — more than 6,000 of those residents died just in the first week of January. Deaths linked to long-term care now account for more than a third of all COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. since the beginning of the pandemic. In a handful of states, long-term care contributed to half of the total deaths. Certain parts of the country have a disproportionately high death rate. Alabama and Arizona, in particular, have experienced some of the highest death rates, given their populations. The virus continues to kill Black and Indigenous Americans at much higher rates than white Americans.



Artist Suzanne Brennan Firstenberg walks among thousands of white flags planted in remembrance of Americans who have died of COVID-19, near Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium in Washington, October 27, 2020. (Photo/Patrick Semansky/AP File)

In rural America, the chance of dying from COVID-19 remains much higher than in the urban centers. People over 65 make up the overwhelming majority of deaths, but Jha says more young people are dying than earlier in the pandemic simply because the virus is so widespread. In this newest and grimmest chapter of the pandemic, the virus has preyed upon a public weary of restrictions and rules, and eager to mix socially with family and friends over the holiday season.

Like many health care workers, Dr. Panagis Galiatsatos at Johns Hopkins Hospital is now witnessing the tragic consequences in his daily rounds. Galiatsatos still recalls a grandmother who was transported six hours from her home to his hospital — because there were no beds anywhere closer. On the phone, he heard her family's shock at her sudden passing.

"They said: 'But she was so healthy, she cooked us all Thanksgiving dinner and we had all the family over,'" he says. "They were saying it with sincerity, but that's probably where she got it."

Vaccine rollout has yet to catch up with an accelerating mortality rate

The enormous loss of life this winter has happened paradoxically at a time that many hope marks the start of the final chapter of the pandemic. A quarter of all COVID-19 deaths have happened during the five-week period since the Food and Drug Administration authorized the first vaccine on Dec. 14.



A health worker carries a special refrigerated box of Moderna's COVID-19 vaccines for use at the East Boston Neighborhood Health Center in Boston on December 24, 2020. (Photo/ by J. Prezioso/AFP via Getty Images)

"The trickle of vaccine is so tragically scant — what we need is more of a river of it," says Dr. Howard Markel, who directs the University of Michigan's Center for the History of Medicine. Markel, who has written about the 1918-19 flu pandemic, says it's estimated that killed upward of 700,000 Americans. Regarding the current coronavirus pandemic, Markel says, "I hope we're not talking ...600,000 or more." The first COVID-19 vaccine in the U.S. was given on Dec. 14. A disjointed and often frustrating rollout followed as states, counties and even individual hospitals struggled to store the first refrigerated shipments of vaccine and arrange for busy health care workers to get it. So far, about 3 in every 100 people have gotten at least one dose of the vaccine, placing America

ahead of many other countries, but behind the optimistic promises made in the early days of the rollout.

Given the current pace of vaccination, experts warn Americans cannot depend solely on the vaccine to prevent a crushing number of additional deaths in the coming months. Bibbins-Domingo of the University of California, San Francisco worries the relief of knowing that a vaccine will eventually be widely available — the so-called light at the end of the tunnel — may lull millions of more Americans into a false sense of safety.

"This tunnel is actually a very long tunnel, and the next few months, as the last few months have been, are going to be very dark times," she says.



The emergence of new, more contagious variants of SARS-CoV-2 only complicates the picture and makes it all the more imperative that Americans spend the coming months doubling down on the same tactics — face masks and physical distancing — that have kept many people safe from the virus so far. But Jha says the country now faces a different task compared with the fall when "big behavioral changes and large economic costs" were required to prevent deaths.

"Right now what is required is getting people vaccinated with vaccines we already have," he says. "The fact that's going super slow still is incredibly frustrating." It is this polarity — the advent of a lifesaving vaccine and hospitals filled with more dying patients than ever before — that makes this particular moment in the pandemic so confounding. "I can't help but feel this immense somberness," Urquiza says. "I know that a vaccine isn't going to make a difference for the people that are in the hospital right now, or who will be in the hospital next week, or even next month." (Courtesy npr.org)

Editor's Choice



Busts of civil rights leader Rosa Parks and President Abraham Lincoln decorate the Oval Office. REUTERS/Jonathan Ernst



A bust of President Harry Truman, a portrait of Benjamin Franklin and a lunar sample from the moon share space in the Oval Office. REUTERS/Jonathan Ernst



President Joe Biden rests his hands on the Resolute Desk before signing multiple executive orders. A portrait of former President Andrew Jackson, who espoused a populist political style that has sometimes been compared with that of Trump, is...MORE



A bust of former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt sits on a shelf with The Works of Theodore Roosevelt. REUTERS/Jonathan Ernst



A lunar sample from the Apollo 17 moon mission shares space with written works by George Washington and Nathaniel Hawthorne. REUTERS/Jonathan Ernst



A bust of Mexican American labor leader Cesar Chavez joins family photos. REUTERS/Jonathan Ernst



A picture of President Joe Biden greeting Pope Francis joins family photos. REUTERS/Jonathan Ernst



The presidential seal decorates a doorknob in the Oval Office. REUTERS/Jonathan Ernst

