

VIRUS OUTBREAK

Unemployment claims bounce back above 1m

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of laid-off workers seeking U.S. unemployment benefits rose to 1.1 million last week after two weeks of declines, evidence that many employers are still slashing jobs as the coronavirus bedevils the U.S. economy.

The latest figures, released Thursday by the Labor Department, suggest that more than five months after the viral outbreak erupted the economy is still weak, despite recent gains as some businesses reopen and some sectors like housing and manufacturing have rebounded. Jobless claims had fallen last week below 1 million for the first time since March, to 971,000. A rising number of people who have lost jobs say they consider their loss to be permanent.

The total number of people receiving unemployment aid declined last week from 15.5 million to 14.8 million, the government said Thursday. Those recipients are now receiving far less aid because a \$600-a-week federal benefit has expired, which means the unemployed must now get by solely on much smaller aid from their states. The loss of the federal benefit has deepened the struggles for many, including a higher risk of eviction from their homes.

President Donald Trump has signed an executive order to provide \$300 a week in federal unemployment aid, with money drawn from a disaster relief fund. Twenty-five states have said they will apply for the federal money, though they would need to rework their computer systems to do so. Other states are still considering whether to take that step; two have said they won't.

Some states may be hesitating to overhaul their unemployment systems because they expect

Congress to eventually pass a new rescue package with an enhanced jobless benefit that might not require any changes.

In states that decide to pay out the \$300, the government estimates it would take three weeks, on average, for the states to send the money to the unemployed. And initially, only enough money is being allotted to cover three weeks of payments. Even with subsequent grants, analysts estimate that there would be enough money to last only five or six weeks.

The continuing stream of layoffs comes against the backdrop of a modest recovery from a deep recession and a virus that is still paralyzing much of the economy. Home construction and sales have bounced back. So have auto purchases. But spending on travel, entertainment and many other services remains weak. Small businesses are struggling. And unemployment, at 10.2%, remains elevated.

More Americans are eating at restaurants, but the level of seated dining is still 54% below pre-pandemic levels, according to OpenTable. And though some employers are hiring, economists suspect that the pace is weakening.

Thursday's jobless claims report showed that in addition to people who applied last week for state benefits, roughly 540,000 others sought aid under a new program that has made self-employed and gig workers eligible for the first time. That figure isn't adjusted for seasonal variations, so it's reported separately from the state figures.

Including the self-employed and gig workers already receiving benefits, 28 million people are receiving some form of jobless aid, though that figure may include double-counting in some states. That figure is little changed from a week earlier.



SARAH GOLDBLUM/U.S. Air Force

An Air Force Academy cadet bumps elbows with a member of faculty at the academy's first-ever convocation ceremony on Aug. 2 to mark the beginning of the academic year.

Air Force Academy, hotel housing cadets see small number of cases

By KARIN ZEITVOGEL
Stars and Stripes

Several Air Force Academy cadets and a handful of employees at a hotel housing some academy students have tested positive for the coronavirus, officials said as the new school year got underway.

"Considerably less than 1% of our Air Force Academy Cadets and Preparatory School Cadet Candidates" are infected with the virus, academy spokesman Mike Slater said in an email.

A message sent to parents by academy leadership said the number of cases was "less than 1/2 of 1% of our population of students." There are roughly 4,400 cadets and prep school students at the academy, data on the academy's website show.

The academy declined to disclose an exact number of cases, citing Defense Department guidelines.

Also this week, three employees of the Great Wolf Lodge in Colorado Springs, Colo., tested positive for the virus. The lodge is one of several hotels where 400 cadets are being housed this semester to free up on-campus rooms for quarantine and isolation.

"These individuals have very little to no direct interaction with

resort guests," Jason Lasecki, a spokesman for the resort chain, said in a statement.

None of the cadets who tested positive this week were housed at the hotel, Slater said.

The academy reported few cases of the virus this spring when it dismissed the lower classes and kept seniors on campus to allow them to graduate. A number of cases have been reported and strict preventive measures have been taken since cadets and faculty began returning in waves starting in early June.

The last group of cadets returned to campus at the end of July and had completed an initial 14-day quarantine period, which included multiple tests for the virus, by the time classes began last week, Slater said. Some classes are held outdoors, there are plexiglass shields in indoor classrooms, masks have to be worn and social distancing is enforced on campus.

But once they've completed the first quarantine, upperclass cadets are allowed to leave campus to pick up a meal, attend religious services or visit their sponsor families, Slater said.

"Contact tracing will hopefully determine where the recent group of positive tests originated,

but positive tests are something we are expecting and planning for," he said.

The academy conducts around 750 random tests each week on cadets, faculty and staff, and anyone who "feels they have what could be a symptom of COVID is advised to go to the clinic," Slater said.

Cadets who test positive are placed in isolation in specially allocated dorm rooms, while anyone found through contact tracing to have been in close contact with an infected person or who self-reports symptoms is placed in quarantine.

One parent whose cadet went to the clinic after developing a symptom of the virus said few cadets are self-reporting because of the conditions they face in quarantine, including bland meals and 14 days with little contact with anyone else.

"If cadets don't go in for the little symptoms, then when they turn real ... all the folks they could get traced to means a whole lot of cadets will get pulled into quarantine," said the parent, who asked not to be identified to protect the cadet from potential reprisals.

zeitvogel.karin@starsandstripes.com
Twitter: @StripesZeit

US military cases fall across Japan as Tokyo sees spike

Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — New coronavirus cases in Japan's capital city jumped Thursday to 339, just shy of twice the previous day's count, according to public broadcaster NHK, citing city authorities.

Meanwhile, new infections among the U.S. military in Japan continued to fall. The Marines on Okinawa reported four new cases, all at Camp Courtney and all of them are contacts of another infected individual, according to a Facebook post by

Marine Corps Installations Pacific.

Tokyo cases had dipped from a previous daily high of 385 on Saturday to 186 on Wednesday, according to data on the Tokyo Metropolitan Government website.

The city government had warned its residents to refrain from travel beyond city borders, especially vacations far from home, and to avoid dining out at night and other activities in close, crowded conditions.

A second coronavirus surge began in late June in the city of 13 million, according to metro government data. Tokyo has 18,268

active cases with 1,614 hospitalized.

On top of the coronavirus, Tokyo has backed through a heat wave that killed 131 people so far this month, many of them over age 70, according to NHK, which cited the metro public health department.

The city center is off-limits to most U.S. military personnel, civilian employees and families.

Okinawa prefecture, home to about 30,000 U.S. troops, reported 45 new coronavirus cases on Thursday, a prefectural official told Stars and Stripes by phone.

The local community has more than 850 active cases and a total of 1,662 since July. Fifteen people have died since the pandemic began, the most recent on Wednesday evening, the official said.

Medical teams from the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force went to work in local hospitals, the Ministry of Defense Joint Staff tweeted Thursday. The ministry offered the teams Monday and Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki accepted the next day.

news@starsandstripes.com