FRESNO SHELTER-IN-PLACE ORDER EXTENDED TO APRIL 12 »
NEWSOM SAYS 4 BANKS AGREE TO ALLOW MORTGAGE PAYMENT PAUSE »
3.3 MILLION SEEK US JOBLESS AID, NEARLY 5 TIMES EARLIER HIGH »
GV Wire invited two Fresno-area doctors with expertise in the control of infectious disease to Fresno Mayor Lee Brand announced the extension of the city’s shelter-in-place order through April 12 during a news conference Thursday morning at his northeast Fresno home. “All indications are we have yet to see the worst of this pandemic. I know how difficult this is for everyone,” Brand said. “My wife, Tricia, and I have changed our lifestyle because it’s the right thing to do. The better job that we do now and contain the spread of the coronavirus, the faster we can recover and the faster we can return to our normal lives.” Brand said he held the news conference at home because he wanted to lead by example for other seniors during the COVID-19 pandemic. Brand is 70 years old. The mayor did leave open the possibility that the order could be shortened. “If something changes nationally or locally, we can change too,” Brand said.

Shelter Order Working, Doesn’t Foresee Police Enforcement

The order was set to expire on March 31. Brand said extending the order was to “protect the lives of as many people as possible.” He said the order has worked thus far in “flattening the curve.” “I’m proud to say that everything I’ve seen and heard tells me that almost everyone in Fresno is taking this seriously and taking the necessary precautions to protect their own health, helped their family and friends and the health of our entire community,” Brand said. Brand doubted he would need law enforcement to implement shelter-in-place. “We don’t have the resources to enforce it at this point in time. But you can see by getting people to voluntarily do the stay at home, it won’t have to reach such drastic measures as some … in Europe right now, where they really have been locking people down. We don’t want to have that,” Brand said. “We want to have people comply. We want to have people live normal lives as soon as possible, have the least disruption as we can.”

Order Through Easter

The extended order ends at 11:59 p.m. on April 12, which is Easter Sunday. Brand talked about the potential impact on churchgoers. “(Church) communication is up, not sideways. They’ve taken technology to preach to their members and keep in touch. Most churches are doing voluntary community work and this is based on the best available knowledge we have now,” Brand said.

Federal Aid Coming

As Congress is voting on its $2.2 trillion aid package responding to the crisis, Brand expects some of the money to come to Fresno. While there is nothing specific, Brand said the money will go to cities with a population of 500,000, qualifying Fresno. “We’re not certain exactly how it’s going to come down. At least three or four times a week, we have evening phone conferences with the big city mayors in California. So I get to learn what best practices are in other cities and other cities are having basically the same experience we’re having,” Brand said. Brand is expecting a surge of...
FRESNO AREA OFFICIALS SET TO ACQUIRE HOTEL ROOMS FOR HOMELESS COVID-19 CASES

In a late afternoon news conference Wednesday, Fresno city and county officials stood shoulder to shoulder to announce a combined effort to provide service to homeless populations vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic. “We recognize the fact that our homeless are the most vulnerable population that we have here in Fresno County,” said Fresno County Supervisor Nathan Magsig. Despite the homeless still having to volunteer for testing, the city and county want to provide resources to those that agree to be tested and show symptoms of COVID-19.

Room Vouchers and Hand Washing Stations

The city and county are working together with newly acquired vouchers for hotel and motel rooms that can be used to house homeless that are identified as needing quarantine. Sonia de la Rosa, principal administrative analyst for Fresno County said, “The reason we’re using hotel rooms is because that will give us an opportunity to isolate those folks that are pending test results or have been identified as COVID positive but do not require hospitalization.” As far as protection for the hotel workers and staff, the county says there will be protections in place for them as well as janitorial services to ensure the facility stays clean.

“We’ve seen an enormous amount of hotel and motel owners across the city volunteer their facilities,” said Fresno City Councilman Miguel Arias. It has not yet been determined which facilities will be used. The city and county say the locations will be determined by proximity to services that may be needed to address the medical needs they encounter.

FRESNO OFFERS 0% LOANS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES AFFECTED BY COVID-19

March 25, 2020 | David Taub

The Fresno City Council voted to provide COVID-19 financial relief for small businesses at an emergency meeting Wednesday. Businesses with 25 or fewer employees will be eligible for 0% loans. If the business remains open for one year, the loan will be forgiven. In a separate vote, the council allocated $750,000 for the “Save Our Small Businesses Act.” Of that, $500,000 is funding previously allocated for a senior center; $250,000 is from the city attorney’s budget.

The council also made changes to an emergency amendment covering a variety of issues approved last week. The most significant change allows bars to reopen and provide curbside or delivery service of alcohol, provided their permit allows for such action. Councilman Mike Karbassi created the act along with councilmembers Esmeralda Soria and Luis Chavez Karbassi is concerned about the fallout of city tax revenue in relation to businesses closing because of COVID-19. “We can help (small businesses) stay in operations and protect those jobs and...
NEWSOM SAYS 4 BANKS AGREE TO ALLOW MORTGAGE PAYMENT PAUSE

March 25, 2020 | AP News

SACRAMENTO — Four of the nation’s largest banks agreed to temporarily suspend residential mortgage payments for Californians affected by the coronavirus, Gov. Gavin Newsom said Wednesday.

The announcement comes as more than 1 million Californians have filed for unemployment benefits since March 13 because many businesses have had to shut down because of a statewide “stay at home” order to prevent the spread of the virus.

Most Banks Offer 90-Day Deferral

Wells Fargo, US Bank, Citi and JP Morgan Chase have all agreed to suspend mortgage payments by 90 days for people affected by the coronavirus. An additional 200 state charter banks and credit unions made similar commitments, he said. But Newsom noted Bank of America agreed to pause payments for one month. “I hope they will reconsider and join those other banks that are willing to do the right thing,” he said.

Newsom said everyone is eligible, regardless of how much money they make. He said homeowners must submit “some form of documentation,” but he did not give details.

Under traditional loan forbearance programs, monthly payments are temporarily suspended but the homeowner still must make up the deferred amounts at a later time. The news comes after Congress reached an agreement with the Trump administration on a $2 trillion economic stimulus package to keep the economy afloat during the crisis. The plan would increase weekly unemployment benefits by $600 more than what states are already providing.

Governor Urges Against Rush to Phones

Anticipating a surge of requests, Newsom urged homeowners to take their time to get their mortgage documents in order before contacting their lender.

“If every single person with a residential mortgage makes a phone call at the same time to their bank, those call centers will collapse,” Newsom said.
CABALLERO BACKS NEWSOM’S COVID-19 EFFORTS, SEeks LEGAL STATUS FOR FARMWORKERS

March 25, 2020 | David Taub

Like most of her legislative colleagues, state Sen. Anna Caballero (D-Salinas) is working at home instead of the State Capitol in Sacramento. Bills may have stalled, but dealing with the state’s response to the COVID-19 outbreak hasn’t. Her 12th Senate District covers parts of Fresno, Madera, Stanislaus, and Monterey counties, and all of Merced and San Benito counties.

Caballero supports Gov. Gavin Newsom’s actions to nearly shut down the entire state while sheltering in place. "I believe it is the right thing to do," Caballero said. "(Newsom) recognized the economic devastation of closing businesses and asking people not to be out and about. But if we are going to get a handle on this .. the experts say the only way is to slow it down." She added that the only way to slow down the spread of COVID-19 and "avoid the..."
WASHINGTON — 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 car makers 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 US economy will experience the largest economic contraction on record with the most severe surge in unemployment ever." The economic deterioration has been swift. As recently as February, the unemployment rate was at a 50-year low of 3.5%. And the economy was growing steadily if modestly. Yet by the April-June quarter of the year, some economists think the economy will shrink at its steepest annual pace ever — a contraction that could reach 30%. 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. Many people who have lost jobs in recent weeks, though, 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.

Significant Expansion of Unemployment Benefits Included in Economic Relief Bill

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.

March 26, 2020 | AP News

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...
WASHINGTON — Pressure was mounting on the Trump administration Wednesday to release people from immigration detention facilities where at least one detainee has tested positive for COVID-19 and advocates fear tight quarters and overall conditions could cause rapid spread of the virus.

The U.S. holds around 37,000 people in immigration detention. Detainees and advocates say many are vulnerable because of age and pre-existing medical conditions, and overall conditions could cause rapid spread of the virus.

The U.S. holds around 37,000 people in immigration detention. Detainees and advocates say many are vulnerable because of age and pre-existing medical conditions, and overall conditions could cause rapid spread of the virus.

The 54-year-old Battistotti was among about 100 detainees at the county jail near Cape Cod who signed a letter released by a local immigration lawyer detailing conditions inside. They asked to be released to await decisions on their immigration cases. “I don’t want to die in an ICE jail,” he said in a phone interview with The Associated Press. "Why can’t I..."
CAIRO — An international aid group said Wednesday that closures aimed at containing the coronavirus pandemic are preventing it from reaching 300,000 people in conflict zones across the Middle East, as the coronavirus arrived in war-torn Libya and three more cases were detected in Syria. The Norwegian Refugee Council said it was unable to reach people in Syria, Yemen and the Gaza Strip, where authorities have imposed strict measures to halt the spread of the virus. All have fragile health care systems that could be overwhelmed by an outbreak, and only Yemen has yet to report any cases. “While governments are taking tough and much-needed measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus, millions of refugees and displaced people still depend on humanitarian assistance,” said Jan Egeland, head of the aid group. In northwestern Syria, hundreds of thousands of people are crammed into unsanitary tent camps, sheltering from the government offensive on the war-torn country’s last rebel stronghold. On Wednesday, the U.S. urged the Syrian government to halt its campaign so those displaced can access humanitarian aid. Otherwise, it warned, the coronavirus would spread “to epic proportions.” On Wednesday, Syria’s tally of cases rose to four and testing began after weeks of obstacles in the rebel-held province. For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms that clear up in two weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness. The virus is highly contagious and can be spread by those are not even showing any symptoms.
NETANYAHU RIVAL BECOMES PARLIAMENT SPEAKER, SIGNALING DEAL

March 26, 2020 | AP News

JERUSALEM — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s chief rival was chosen on Thursday as the new speaker of parliament, an unexpected step that could pave the way to a power-sharing deal between the two men as the country grapples with a worsening coronavirus crisis.

The sudden turnabout by Benny Gantz, who has spent the past year trying to topple Netanyahu in three inconclusive elections, appeared to give the embattled prime minister a new lease on life as he prepares to go on trial for corruption charges. It also drew angry criticism from his political partners and looked likely to rip apart his Blue and White party, an alliance of thee-anti-Netanyahu factions. The vote passed 74-18, with many of Gantz’s former allies, including half of Blue and White, skipping the vote.

“Democracy has won,” Gantz declared in his first speech as speaker, saying he had taken the unpopular step to deal with the national emergency. “These are not regular days and they demand irregular decisions. Therefore as I said, I intend to examine and advance in every way the establishment of national emergency government,” he said. “We will not compromise on the principles that more than 1 million citizens voted for. Netantyahu knows that well.” But in a string of...

BRITAIN’S PRINCE CHARLES TESTS POSITIVE FOR CORONAVIRUS

March 25, 2020 | AP News

LONDON — Prince Charles, the heir to the British throne, has tested positive for the new coronavirus, royal officials confirmed Wednesday — touching off criticism whether his wealth and status gave him priority in receiving a test. The 71-year-old is showing mild symptoms of COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus, and is self-isolating at a royal estate in Scotland, the prince’s Clarence House office said. His wife, Camilla, 72, has tested negative.

“The Prince of Wales has tested positive for Coronavirus,” Clarence House said. It said he “otherwise remains in good health and has been working from home throughout the last few days as usual.” Britain’s Press Association, citing a source, said the prince and the duchess remained in good spirits, and that Charles was not bedridden. British government advice advises people over 70 to take social distancing measures especially seriously. For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as...

FACEBOOK BUG WRONGLY DELETED AUTHENTIC CORONAVIRUS NEWS

March 18, 2020 | AP News

The rapid spread of the coronavirus since it was first reported in China has dealt an unprecedented shock to the global economy. Here’s a look at developments from Tuesday as central banks, businesses and workers attempt to navigate a global outbreak that has brought economic activity to a standstill.

Global Economy

G7 officials plan to coordinate weekly on the implementation of various support efforts and they vow they are ready to take further action. They pledged Tuesday to do “whatever is necessary” to restore economic growth and protect jobs and the financial system in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak. Finance ministers and central bank governors from the Group of Seven major industrial countries — the United States, Japan, Germany France, Britain, Italy and Canada — said that they were committed to delivering government...

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