

Far-right U.S. politicians label lockdowns anti-constitutional

By **NICHOLAS K. GERANIOS**
Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. — In deeply conservative Eastern Washington, a prominent state lawmaker kicked out of his Republican Party caucus labels the coronavirus as a foreign bio-weapon, accuses Marxists of using the pandemic to advance totalitarianism and rails against lockdown restrictions imposed by the Democratic governor.

A California teleconference last week to consider sport fishing limits in rural areas unprepared to handle influxes of anglers descended into chaos — with callers branding state officials as “fascists” and declaring it was time to “make fishing great again.”

Across the U.S., elected officials from Pennsylvania to Oklahoma suspicious of big government and outraged with orders to close churches, gun stores and other businesses deemed nonessential insist that the public health response is being used as an excuse to trample constitutional rights.

The shutdowns reinforce long-held beliefs by some that governments would eventually use a national emergency to limit civil liberties and the vitriol is particularly strong across



Washington state Rep. Matt Shea, R-Spokane Valley, gestures as he gives a speech in front of the liberty state flag at the Capitol in Olympia, Wash., during a rally held by people advocating splitting Washington into two separate states and questioning the legality of Washington's I-1639 gun-control measure.

the pine forests of Eastern Washington — where conservative Rep. Matt Shea is a co-founder of the Coalition of Western States, a loose federation of politicians suspicious of big government, plus militia supporters.

Its goal is to “stop unconstitutional actions against United States citizens,” according to a December report into Shea’s activities

paid for by the Washington state House issued just before his own caucus exiled him.

After Washington Gov. Jay Inslee issued the earliest U.S. mandatory closing of schools and businesses, Shea questioned whether Inslee would use the state’s National Guard to enforce his orders and if he would force inoculation of resi-

dents after a coronavirus vaccine becomes available.

“Quarantine is only supposed to be for sick people not mandatory for healthy law abiding people,” Shea wrote on Facebook. “Otherwise constitutionally and legally that starts creeping into martial law territory.”

Joining Shea in the vast expanse of Eastern Washington, hundreds of miles

and political light years away from ultra-liberal Seattle, was Republican gubernatorial candidate Loren Culp, who wants to deny Inslee a third term. Culp is the police chief of the town of Republic and author of the book “American Cop: Upholding the Constitution and Defending Your Right to Bear Arms,” praised by rocker Ted Nugent.

“If I choose to peacefully assemble, go to Church, go to a gun shop, take my family fishing, open my business, enjoy the outdoors, or exercise any of my constitutional rights, I should not be restricted from doing so by a would-be dictator,” Culp told supporters during a recent conference call.

Shea’s efforts were lambasted by the Southern Poverty Law Center, which said in a statement that he was promoting fear mongering and providing “legitimacy for a network of extremists” in western U.S. states “at a time when hundreds of Washingtonians, and thousands more Americans, are dying from coronavirus.”

The lockdown order criticism isn’t limited to states led by Democrats. From Northern Idaho, where suspicion of government also runs deep, Bonner County Sheriff Daryl Wheeler demanded in a letter that

Republican Gov. Brad Little reconsider his statewide stay-home decree.

Wheeler’s letter questioned the reliability of World Health Organization coronavirus information and said “now it is time to reinstate our Constitution.”

“You can request those that are sick to stay home, but, at the same time, you must release the rest of us to go on with our normal business,” Wheeler wrote.

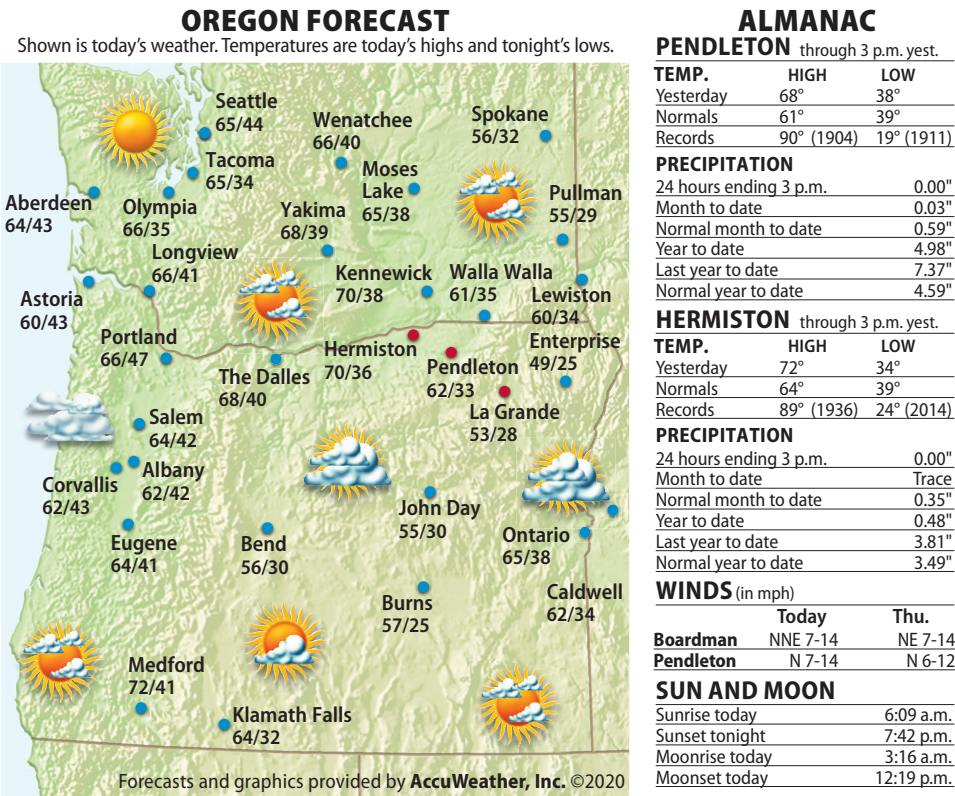
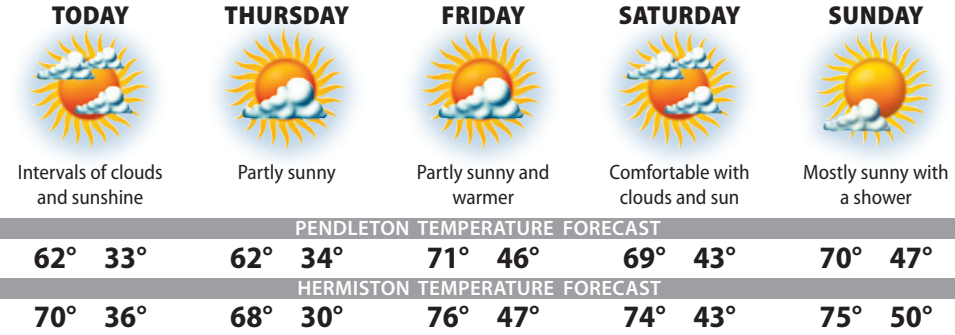
Little allowed restaurants to continue drive-thru services and deliveries, but that didn’t appease arch-conservative members of his party, like state Rep. Heather Scott, also from Northern Idaho.

She called the governmental response to the virus “a way to chip away at the foundations of our Constitution to push a global, socialistic agenda while in the midst of a national emergency.”

The criticism has stretched to Pennsylvania, where Republican state Rep. Daryl Metcalfe blasted Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf for his stay home order and business closures.

“You were not elected to be our master or dictator but a servant leader in the executive branch,” Metcalfe wrote. “You have no authority to imprison any citizen in their home.”

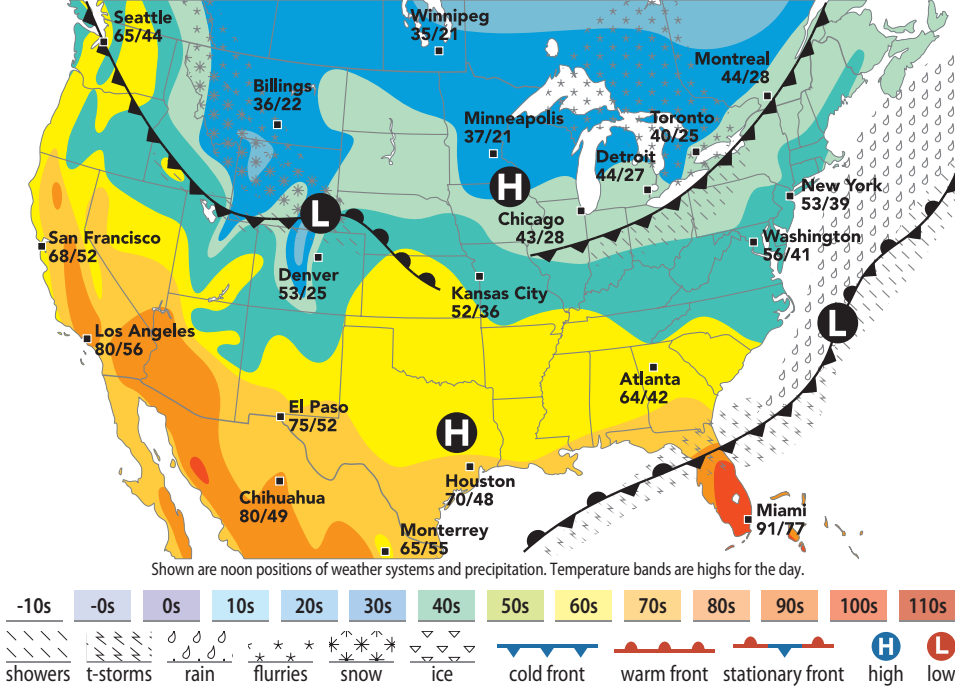
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NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Dozens sick with coronavirus from an outbreak linked to a beef plant

By **ANNETTE CARY**
Tri-City Herald

WALLULA, Wash. — At least 39 people may have COVID-19 as the result of a coronavirus outbreak at a meat packing plant south of Pasco, Washington.

Of those, 30 people connected to the Tyson Fresh Meats plant live in Benton and Franklin counties, says the Benton Franklin Health District.

At least 28 are employees and had positive lab tests for the new coronavirus. The other two cases in the Tri-Cities area are considered probable because they have symptoms and close contact with at least one of the lab-confirmed cases.

Walla Walla health officials have reported nine more COVID-19 cases related to the plant in Wallula.

They include six people in the Burbank and Wallula areas and three living in Walla Walla. As of Fri-

day, the cases related to the plant account for nearly half the 20 known cases in Walla Walla County.

The cases may include workers, family members and others.

About 1,400 people work at the beef slaughtering and processing plant.

The six in Burbank and Wallula are all recovering at home. People they were in close contact with when they may have been contagious before they knew they were sick are under home quarantine.

No additional information about those who live in the Tri-Cities area was released by the Benton Franklin Health Health District.

Walla Walla County health officials said they are working with the Benton Franklin County Health District and Tyson.

They said in a statement that they were confident that Tyson was “taking necessary precautions to pre-

vent, or mitigate, additional spread.”

Local Tyson Foods officials were not immediately available Monday, but elsewhere in the U.S. the company closed one plant and is taking safety precautions at other plants as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

The company said it is taking the temperatures of workers before they enter its plants in the United States and is moving to the use of infrared temperature scanners at some plants.

It was working last week to acquire more face coverings for production workers and is looking at ways to promote social distancing in plants.

It could mean putting up dividers between workstations or increasing space between workers on the production line.

Cleaning and sanitation has been increased, including in employee break rooms and locker rooms to protect workers.

BRIEFLY

Washington attorney general sues Facebook over campaign ads

SEATTLE — Washington state is suing Facebook — again — for selling political ads without disclosing all necessary information about who’s behind them.

Attorney General Bob Ferguson first sued Facebook over the issue in 2018, with the company agreeing to a \$238,00 settlement. After that, rather than comply with all of the disclosure requirements of Washington campaign finance law, Facebook said it would no longer sell political ads in Washington.

Despite that, the company has continued to do so. While it maintains digital copies of the ads — along with information about what political group paid

for them — in its ad library, the library does not contain all of the information required. Missing data include who the address of the ad’s sponsor, the cost and dates of payment, the name of the person paying, and the method of payment.

The attorney general’s complaint, filed Tuesday in King County Superior Court, said that since November 2018, Facebook sold hundreds of ads to at least 171 Washington state political committees for payments totaling at least \$525,000.

The state Public Disclosure Commission asked Ferguson to investigate after finding that Facebook had repeatedly violated campaign finance law.

The company did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment. Facebook has previously said it tries to filter out local political ads in Washington and remove them when it finds them.

— *Associated Press*

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