

BRIEFLY

As fewer people fly, rate of guns found by TSA jumps

WASHINGTON — With far fewer people flying because of travel restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic, airport security screeners are naturally finding fewer guns in carry-on baggage.

But the ratio of guns to passengers seeking to board airplanes has jumped sharply.

The Transportation Security Administration said Monday that it found 58 guns at checkpoints from March 22 to April 22, compared with 346 guns over the same stretch last year.

Adjusting for the 95% drop in travelers, that means TSA screeners found one gun for every 80,000 people screened — or 2.7 times the rate of a year ago, when they found one gun for every 216,200 people.

TSA declined to offer an explanation or theory about why the rate of finding guns has gone up this spring.

Barr to prosecutors: Look for virus rules that violate rights

WASHINGTON — Attorney General William Barr on Monday ordered federal prosecutors across the U.S. to identify coronavirus-related restrictions from state and local governments “that could be violating the constitutional rights and civil liberties of individual citizens.”

The memo to U.S. attorneys directs the head of the Justice Department’s civil rights division and the U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan to coordinate the department’s efforts to monitor state and local policies and take action if needed.

“If a state or local ordinance crosses the line from an appropriate exercise of authority to stop the spread of COVID-19 into an overbearing infringement of constitutional and statutory protections, the Department of Justice may have an obligation to address that overreach in federal court.”

Barr’s memo comes about two weeks after the Justice Department filed a statement of interest in a civil case in Mississippi, siding with a Christian church where local officials had tried to stop Holy Week services broadcast to congregants sitting in their cars in the parking lot.

Small business loan program restarts, has snags

NEW YORK — The second round of loan applications for the government’s small business relief program has been slowed by computer issues at the Small Business Administration.

Lenders complained Monday that they couldn’t get their applications into the SBA system known as ETran that processes and approves loans. The agency said it notified lenders Sunday that it was limiting the number of applications any lender could submit at once.

The SBA began accepting applications at 10:30 a.m. Eastern time for \$310 billion in funding. The program’s initial \$349 billion was exhausted in less than two weeks after more than 1.7 million loans were approved. That first round was also slowed by computer issues at the SBA.

Banks had thousands of applications ready to go Monday. Richard Hunt, president of the trade group Consumer Bankers Association, said the SBA’s change was too last-minute — bankers had already sent large batches of applications to the agency, not knowing that a new procedure was being planned.

— Associated Press

Virus is expected to reduce meat selection, raise prices

By DAVID PITT
Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa — Meat isn’t going to disappear from supermarkets because of outbreaks of the coronavirus among workers at U.S. slaughterhouses. But as the meat plants struggle to remain open, consumers could face less selection and slightly higher prices.

Industry leaders acknowledge that the U.S. food chain has rarely been so stressed and that no one is sure about the future, even as they try to dispel concerns about shortages.

On Sunday, the meat processing giant Tyson Foods ran a full-page advertise-

ment in the New York Times and other newspapers outlining the difficulty of producing meat while keeping more than 100,000 workers safe and shutting some plants.

“This means one thing — the food supply chain is vulnerable,” the statement said. “As pork, beef and chicken plants are being forced to close, even for short periods of time, millions of pounds of meat will disappear from the supply chain.”

Company spokesman Gary Mickelson said the Tyson family thought it was important to explain their perspective.

“The letter encourages government leaders to unite

to address food supply chain challenges,” Mickelson said. “We are taking a proactive approach to balance safety and production by moving aggressively with testing and plant closures when necessary.”

A Tyson Fresh Meats beef processing plant in Eastern Washington announced it would close temporarily to test workers after health officials reported 91 coronavirus cases linked to the plant.

COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus, has infected hundreds of workers at meat-processing plants and forced some of the largest to close and others to slow production. While the output at beef and poultry

plants has diminished, pork plants in the Midwest have been hit especially hard.

The 15 largest pork-packing plants account for 60 percent of all pork processed, so when even one of those plants closes for days or weeks, the consequences ripple across the industry. That has become abundantly clear with two of the nation’s biggest plants now closed: Tyson suspended operations at its plant in Waterloo, Iowa. And Smithfield Foods halted production at its plant in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Each plant can butcher nearly 20,000 hogs a day. Some plants have reopened days after cleaning.

The result is that the nation’s pork processing capacity had declined by about 25% as of last week, said Steve Meyer, an industry economist with Kerns and Associates in Ames, Iowa.

Sarah Little, a spokeswoman for the North American Meat Institute, an industry trade group, said: “It’s down across the board right now, so the next couple of weeks we should see how the system works. It’s never been tested like this before.”

Nationally, although the reduced meat supply is expected to cause consumer prices to rise, expectations are that the increases will be slight.



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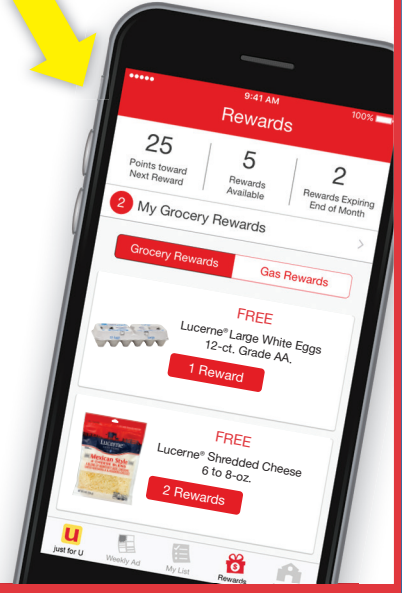
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