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BRIEFING

Jobless claims fall to 364,000

The number of Americans applying for unemployment aid fell again last week to the lowest level since the pandemic struck last year, further evidence that the job market and the broader economy are rebounding rapidly from the coronavirus recession.

The Labor Department reported Thursday that jobless claims dropped by 51,000 to 364,000. Applications for unemployment benefits have fallen more or less steadily since the year began. The rollout of vaccines has sharply reduced new COVID-19 cases, giving consumers the confidence to shop, travel, eat out and attend public events as the economy recovers.

Last week's drop in jobless claims was steeper than economists had expected. Applications for unemployment benefits have now fallen in 10 of the past 12 weeks.

Construction spending falls 0.3% in May

U.S. construction spending fell 0.3% in May. Growth in housing, the economy's standout performer, slowed while activity in areas most directly impacted by the pandemic showed further weakness.

The Commerce Department reported Thursday that the May decline followed a slight 0.1% rise in April and left overall construction spending up 7.5% from a year ago.

Housing construction, which has been a driving force for the economy during the pandemic, posted a tiny 0.2% gain in May as single-family home construction rose 0.8% while apartments and other multifamily construction was flat. Over the past year, housing construction is up 28.7% with single-family construction up a sizzling 46.1%.

Nonresidential construction activity fell 1.1% in May with hotel and motel construction and the category that covers shopping centers, two areas heavily affected by the pandemic shut-downs, both falling. Over the past year, nonresidential construction is down 5.8% while the hotel and motel category is down 23.2%.

Spending on government projects dipped a slight 0.2% in May and is down 8.7% over the past year, reflecting the squeeze many levels of government have felt from falling tax revenues

Vancouver biotech firm files for IPO

Absci Corp., a Vancouver-based biotech firm, said Wednesday it's filed for an initial public offering.

The company, founded in Portland, aims to use computer technology to identify new protein-based drugs known as biologics, then synthesize them using specially engineered bacteria as factories. It moved to Vancouver in 2016 after Washington Gov. Jay Inslee invested \$200,000 from his office's strategic reserve fund. The company has to date attracted \$230 million in investment, including a \$125 million round earlier this year.

— Bulletin wire reports

TAX FRAUD CHARGES

Trump Organization, CFO indicted

BY MICHAEL R. SISAK AND TOM HAYS

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Donald Trump's company and its longtime finance chief were charged Thursday in what a prosecutor called a "sweeping and audacious" tax fraud scheme that saw the Trump executive allegedly receive more

than \$1.7 million in off-the-books compensation, including apartment rent, car payments and school tuition.

It is the first criminal case New York authorities' two-year investigation into the former president has yielded. According to the indictment filed Wednesday and unveiled Thursday, from 2005 through

this year, CFO Allen Weisselberg and the Trump Organization cheated the state and city out of taxes by conspiring to pay senior executives off the books.

Weisselberg and lawyers for the Trump Organization pleaded not guilty.

Prosecutor Carey Dunne described a 15-year scheme "or-

chestrated by the most senior executives."

Trump himself was not charged at this stage of the investigation, jointly pursued by Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. and New York Attorney General Letitia James, both Democrats.

Dunne asserted politics played no role in the decision

to bring charges.

"Politics has no role in the jury chamber, and I can assure you it had no role here," Dunne said.

The indictment says that Weisselberg, 73, concealed that he was a New York City resident to avoid city income tax.

See **Trump** / A8

COVID-19 | Restriction lifted

ASTORIA COLUMN REOPENS



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

The stairs and railing inside the Astoria Column were cleaned before the reopening.

BY ETHAN MYERS • The Astorian

Visitors can once again climb the narrow, 164-step spiral staircase to see the views atop the Astoria Column. The Column closed during the coronavirus pandemic due to the difficulty of regulating social distancing and sanitizing surfaces inside the monument. The Friends of the Astoria Column, a nonprofit that oversees the park on Coxcomb Hill for the city, worked closely with the Clatsop County Public Health Department to determine when it was safe to fully open, according to Willis Van Dusen, a former Astoria mayor and treasurer for the Friends group.

The Column reopened on Saturday. "We were excessively careful," Van Dusen said. "It just made sense."

Fred Pynes, the park host, said they were ready to reopen for some time and spent much of the closure cleaning the stairs and railings inside the Column in anticipation for the return of visitors.

"People can regulate themselves and wear a mask if they'd like," he said.

But due to the close quarters inside

"It's great to see the kids at the top throwing off airplanes again. You can hear the adults, too ... It feels great to be getting back to normal."

— Fred Pynes, the host of the park on Coxcomb Hill

the Column, Pynes said they withheld announcing the reopening widely in hopes of avoiding a "stampede" of visitors all at once. They plan to make an official announcement on Thursday.

Pynes said the sales of parking passes atop Coxcomb Hill, which cost \$5 for a calendar year, dropped significantly last year due to the closure of the Column. Some visitors complained they had to

pay to park but could not climb up to the viewing deck of the 125-foot high landmark.

"It was inconvenient and a little bit of an irritant having the monument closed," Van Dusen said.

But as most coronavirus restrictions in Oregon are lifted, Pynes and Van Dusen are thrilled visitors can return to witness a "360-degree view."

See **Astoria** / A8

What could be cooler? Heineken device trails along — with beer

BY DALVIN BROWN

The Washington Post

Cargo-carrying robots have yet to go mainstream, but they certainly make for appealing internet videos.

They tote groceries around the supermarket and hold your luggage at the airport. In one wild display, someone retrofitted a tank of beer, a nozzle and a camera onto a robotic dog, which then showed a unique "peeing" functionality.

See **Cooler** / A8



Heineken's cooler innovation, powered by robotics and artificial intelligence, is supposed to follow users around.

Heineken via The Washington Post

WASHINGTON STATE

Darigold to build \$450 million facility

BY MATTHEW WEAVER

Capital Press

PASCO, Wash. — Darigold announced Thursday that it plans to build a \$450 million dairy processing plant in Pasco, Washington.

The plant will produce a new specialized protein powder and butter at what the company and Port of Pasco officials are touting as "the most sophisticated large-scale milk protein facility in North America."

"It's great news for ag and all of Washington State, keeping a processing plant of this size and scope," Randy Hayden, executive director of the port, told the Capital Press.

"(It) will support not just the manufacturing jobs at the plant — all of the jobs at the farms and transportation industry. It's great to have these facilities here supporting our farmers."

See **Darigold** / A8