



REGION
'DIFFERENT'
 Few hundred gather for Fourth of July parade in Blountville » **B1**

SPORTS
SAFETY FIRST
 Brad Bussey is athletic trainer for Abingdon, Holston, and challenges are many » **C1**



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In troubled times: Independence Day in a land of confusion

BY TED ANTHONY
 AP National Writer

It was the worst of times. It was the weirdest of times. It was a season of sickness and shouting, of defiance and tension, of industrial-strength falsehood and spin. It was a moment of ugliness and deep injustice — and perhaps, too, a moment when the chance for justice felt nearer than ever before.

On Independence Day, we Americans — if there is in fact a “we” in American life — celebrate the anniversary of a time when a lot of people, feeling really angry and scared, decided to do something about it that changed the world forever. This year, we mark that event in a year when a lot of people are feeling really angry and scared. Some of them are trying to do something about it, hoping it will change the world forever.

COVID-19 resurgent in 40 of 50 states. The death of George Floyd, the fight for racial justice, and the reactions against it. The fractious politics of masks. A national conversation — loud, enraged and anguished — about the place that a history blemished by ugliness should hold in the present. An uneven president embraced by millions and despised by millions. And superimposed over it all: a sure-to-be-chaotic election season that has only just begun.

See **LAND**, Page A6



Travon Brown, 17, who had a cross burned in his Marion, Virginia, yard, speaks to the crowd before the BLM march in Marion on Friday.

Cross burning victim led Marion protest

BY TIM DODSON
 BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

MARION, Va. — Nearly three weeks after authorities responded to a cross burning outside his home in Marion, Virginia, 17-year-old Travon Brown led over 200 people in a peaceful march through his small

Southwest Virginia town on Friday.

“When someone burnt that cross in my yard, that motivated me to go harder, that motivated me to go stronger for people of color, for African Americans,”

See **PROTEST**, Page A10



ONLINE
 See video from the march at **Herald-Courier.com**.

BLACKJEWEL



DAVID CRIGGER/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

A large pile of coal sits at the Flatrock Creek Processing Plant on Beehive Hollow Road outside of Honaker, Virginia, following the Blackjewel LLC bankruptcy last summer. Blackjewel filed for bankruptcy on July 1, 2019. The company was the country's sixth-largest coal producer in 2018, according to federal data.

IN LIMBO

One year after declaring bankruptcy, employees await deal and company faces questions about reclamation

BY TIM DODSON | BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

One year ago, Bobby Allen returned home from his job at a Wise County, Virginia, coal mine with bad news: His employer, Blackjewel, had declared bankruptcy, and the miners didn't know if they still had jobs. ♦ As the country's sixth-largest coal producer filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy on July 1, 2019, most of the company's 1,700 employees were told not to return to work until further notice.

Then a precarious situation turned catastrophic when Blackjewel's checks to employees from the end of June bounced. Some families saw the bad checks clawed back from bank accounts and many fell behind on bills.

Allen, 45, was one of about 480 people Blackjewel employed at sites across Southwest Virginia. He worked at the company's Osaka mine, near the town of Appalachia.

He and his fiancé, Leanna

Parsons, lived in Pennington Gap with two young children and a baby on the way.

“As weeks went on, it just started turning into months, and we both looked at each other around August, and we were like, ‘Something is going to have to give,’” Parsons, 33, said last month.

Allen knew someone who found a coal job in Alabama, and he moved to join the coal industry there in early September. The rest of the family

followed him the next month.

A year later, the family is settled into their home in Tuscaloosa County. Allen has a steady coal job, the couple welcomed a baby boy into the family earlier this year and the family has access to resources in the community for their 3-year-old-son, who has autism, Parsons said.

“As far as the year, looking back where we are now, we're very blessed,” she said.

See **BLACKJEWEL**, Page A7



At a Glance

- » Blackjewel employed 484 workers in Virginia
- » Operations included facilities in Buchanan, Russell and Wise counties
- » Declared Chapter 11 bankruptcy on July 1, 2019
- » Employed 1,700 people in Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia and Wyoming

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

LOCATION	#CASES	#DEATHS
Worldwide	11,100,000+	528,900+
United States	2,800,000+	129,600+
Virginia	65,109	1,849
Tennessee	50,140	637

SOURCES: Johns Hopkins, Virginia and Tennessee Departments of Health, AP

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Blackjewel

From Page A1

Still, many of Blackjewel's laid-off workers endured a variety of personal hardships and some decided to leave the coal industry, which is already under pressure from challenging market conditions.

In the months after Blackjewel's bankruptcy filing, workers in Virginia shared stories of struggling to pay for basics like diapers and utilities, selling prized possessions and navigating the unemployment system. Some transitioned to new trades or found jobs in fields like welding and plastics manufacturing.

After failing to pay its employees for work completed in the final weeks of June, Blackjewel finally issued paychecks last fall as part of an agreement with federal officials.

In the past year of proceedings in U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Southern District of West Virginia, most of the company's assets — in Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia and Wyoming — have been auctioned off to new owners. Knoxville, Tennessee-based Kopper Glo Mining and Lexington, Kentucky-based Rhino Energy are two of the main buyers of Blackjewel's Virginia assets.

But as the bankruptcy case proceeds, there are still some unresolved issues relevant to Southwest Virginia.

Compensating former employees

During the bankruptcy proceedings, Blackjewel faced a class-action lawsuit that accused the company of violating the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) Act, a federal law that requires employers to provide a 60-day notice before a mass layoff.

A settlement was reached earlier this year, according to Ned Pillersdorf, a Kentucky attorney who represents the company's former workers, including those in Virginia.

But that settlement remains under seal and it's unclear what workers may ultimately receive.

Citing the ongoing proceedings, Pillersdorf said in a recent interview that "it's going to be a while until this [the settlement] is finally consummated."

In general, he said wage earners do not fare well in bankruptcy proceedings because their claims often carry less priority than other creditors.

"I have told my clients from day one — bankruptcy court is like a



After Blackjewel abruptly laid off hundreds of employees, the Southwest Virginia Workforce Development Board convened local and state agencies for resource sessions aimed at helping miners search for jobs, navigate the unemployment system and apply for other benefits.

Blackjewel Timeline

- » **July 1, 2019:** Blackjewel filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy; employees told not to return until further notice
- » **July 29, 2019:** Laid-off Blackjewel employees blocked train in Harlan County, Kentucky, to protest unpaid wages
- » **August 2019:** Blackjewel auctions off assets in Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia and Wyoming
- » **September 2019:** Blockade of railroad tracks in Harlan County ends, but workers continue to seek pay
- » **October 2019:** Checks issued to former Blackjewel employees after company reached an agreement with federal officials
- » **March 2020:** Settlement for workers announced, but remains under seal
- » **May 2020:** Court approves a deadline of July 27 for Blackjewel to file a plan of reorganization

funeral home, nobody leaves happy," he said.

Still, Pillersdorf is cautiously optimistic miners will do well in court, "which is the exception to the rule," he said. He recalled the miners who blocked Blackjewel coal from being moved along train tracks in Harlan County, Kentucky, last year in protest of not receiving their owed pay. This activism, he said, was a factor that prompted the U.S. Department of Labor to become involved with helping workers get their paychecks.

Questions about permit transfers and environmental violations

Environmental and community groups in Kentucky, Virginia and West Virginia have documented a number of issues when it comes to Blackjewel's transfer of mining permits to new owners. The bankrupt company has also incurred a number of environmental violations,

according to a 15-page letter the Appalachian Citizens' Law Center submitted to the bankruptcy court on June 17.

Of the 71 permits Blackjewel held in Virginia, only 34 permits had been transferred, according to the letter, which relied on state data. The process had started for eight permits and no transfer applications had been submitted for 29 permits.

There's some confusion described in court filings about who owns about 20 of the Virginia permits, with a company called Eagle Specialty Materials saying the permits belong to Rhino Energy, which, in turn, has claimed that it does not control these permits.

The letter also said that the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy recorded 25 notices of violations for Blackjewel permits since December. All of these occurred on sites that either remain in estate — meaning they have not been sold to a new owner — or were in the group of permits whose ownership is under dispute.

The most frequently cited problems included 13 violations of failures to submit water monitoring reports and five notices for effluent limit violations.

A central concept of U.S. mining regulation is that the company that controls a permit is responsible for the site's environmental cleanup and that a permit holder posts reclamation bond to ensure that the cleanup occurs.

On paper, Blackjewel is supposed to be accountable for the permits it still hasn't transferred, but the lengthy bankruptcy proceedings and incomplete permit transfers pose challenges for ensuring reclamation work is actually completed.

"The biggest issue here is that this has taken so long that these permits are just sitting there with no one being responsible for them," said Erin Savage of Appalachian Voices,

a nonprofit environmental advocacy organization that has closely monitored the Blackjewel bankruptcy and provided analysis for the ACLC's letter.

Savage works as the Central Appalachian senior program manager at Appalachian Voices.

"Just because they're not providing coal doesn't mean that the situation on the ground isn't dynamic, isn't changing," she said about Blackjewel's sites. "These permits clearly need active management, and, ideally, active reclamation that they're just not getting right now and they basically haven't been getting for a year."

Attorneys for Blackjewel didn't return a request for comment about the issues raised in the letter environmental groups submitted to the court last month.

An industry under pressure

Blackjewel was one of several U.S. coal companies to file for bankruptcy last year, and it is only one chapter of coal's decline in Virginia.

Virginia mines produced more than 45.9 million tons of coal in 1990, and by 2019, that annual figure fell to 12.4 million, according to federal data. As production fell, so did employment in the state's mines, from about 10,662 workers to 2,576 over the same 30-year period.

For those who stayed in the industry after Blackjewel's demise, coal continues to provide higher earnings relative to other jobs in the region.

"In this area right here, if you want to make decent money, that's what you have — the coal mines," said Ronnie Lester, a 43-year-old who was laid

off from a Blackjewel plant in Honaker last year and now works at a coal operation near Caretta, West Virginia.

Lester, who lives in Grundy and also previously worked at Blackjewel's affiliate, Revelation Energy, said he experienced a three- to four-month layoff with that company as well.

Recalling the stress he's experienced with mining layoffs, Lester admits his faith in the industry has been tested. He said he hopes the region will continue to create new job opportunities like developing factories on former mine sites and building up the tourism economy.

For their part, economic development leaders across the region have been working to attract and grow sectors like manufacturing, informa-

tion technology, tourism and renewable energy. The federal government's Abandoned Mine Land Pilot Program, for example, has awarded millions of dollars in grants to community and economic development projects in Southwest Virginia.

But as the COVID-19 crisis threatens to accelerate coal's challenges, people who've experienced the ups and downs of the industry say creating new economic opportunities may be more important than ever.

"We have the same exact sceneries around here as you'd find in Pigeon Forge," Lester said about the mountains of Southwest Virginia. "Why can't we have that here?"

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I thought to myself, "Never Again!"

At first, I didn't think it would be too bad. . . . When the stay at home order began, I thought, "That's not a big deal. I don't go out too often anyhow." I thought of it as a snow storm threat and loaded the cupboards with soup and pasta thinking it wouldn't last more than a few weeks.

But as the days and weeks dragged on, I watched the news and started getting scared. The housekeeper who I have come once a week canceled. My doctor said I shouldn't go out because of my heart condition, and so the only person I saw each week was the grocery deliveryman, and that was only through the window.

Every day was the same. I watched the news, read my book, and did crossword puzzles. I felt the worry and loneliness slip in like a cold draft. I could hear the masked worry in my daughter's voice when she told me, "Everything will go back to normal soon." I started losing track of the days and began questioning if I had taken my medication or eaten lunch.

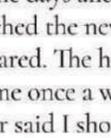
After 6 weeks, I'd had enough. I didn't survive the fight in Korea

and work 40 years to spend my retirement alone and scared. It was time to do something about it. I couldn't be isolated any longer. When I called Commonwealth Senior Living, they asked why I decided to call today. I joked that between the loneliness and toilet paper shortage, I decided it was time to make a move.

I moved in mid-May and have been patting myself on the back ever since. I no longer have to worry about anything! The food is great. The place is spotless, and the truth is they treat me like a king. They even put my picture up on the Wall of Valor with the rest of the retired military guys. It's good to be part of a community again.

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THE VOICE

Former VHS Bearcat and pro baseball player Kevin Barker found new career in radio » C1



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FUTURE OF COAL



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A coal miner takes a break while operating a continuous miner machine in a coal mine roughly 40 inches high. For more than a century, the coal seams that run through Appalachia have made the steel used to build U.S. cities and the electric power to light them. As technology has improved, though, it has taken fewer and fewer workers to mine that coal.

OUTLOOK DARKENS

Already under pressure, Virginia's coal industry sees furloughs and idled mines amid pandemic

BY TIM DODSON
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

As the coronavirus swept across the globe this spring, Southwest Virginia's coal industry felt the pandemic's impacts as companies furloughed employees and idled production at several sites amid safety concerns and reduced demand for electricity and steel.

COVID-19 is the latest challenges for an industry already under pressure from cheap natural gas, a rise in renewable energy sources and big bankruptcies, among other factors.

"Coal has been declining in Appalachia for the past 30 years," said Matt Hepler, an environmental scientist with Appalachian Voices, a nonprofit advocacy organization.

Virginia mines produced more than 45.9 million tons of coal in 1990, and by 2019, that annual figure fell to

See COAL, Page A4



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Coal production and jobs in Virginia are still on the decline.

"The coal industry was in a bad place to begin with going into the COVID crisis, and I definitely think it will exacerbate the situation."

— Matt Hepler, environmental scientist with Appalachian Voices

Trump comeback rally features empty seats, staff infections

BY KEVIN FREKING
and JONATHAN LEMIRE
The Associated Press

TULSA, Okla. — President Donald Trump launched his comeback rally Saturday by defining the upcoming election as a stark choice between national heritage and left-wing radicalism. But his intended show of political force amid a pandemic featured thousands of empty seats and new coronavirus cases on his own campaign staff.

Trump ignored health warnings to go through with his first rally in 110 days — one of the largest indoor gatherings in the world during a coronavirus outbreak that has killed more than 120,000 Americans, put 40 million out of work and upended Trump's reelection bid. The rally was meant to restart his reelection effort less than five months before the president faces voters again.

"The choice in 2020 is very simple," Trump said. "Do you want to bow before the left-wing mob, or do you want to stand up tall and proud as Americans?"

Trump unleashed months of pent-up grievances about the coronavirus, which he dubbed the "Kung flu," a racist term for COVID-19 that originated



AP Photo/Sue Ogrocki

President Donald Trump speaks during a campaign rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on Saturday, his first in 110 days.

from China. He also tried to defend his handling of the pandemic, even as cases continue to surge in many states, including Oklahoma.

He complained that robust coronavirus testing was making his record look bad — and suggested the testing effort should slow down.

"Here's the bad part. When you do testing to that extent, you're going to find more cases," he said. "So I said to my people, 'Slow the testing down.' They test and they test."

In the hours before the rally, crowds were significantly lighter than expected, and campaign officials scrapped plans for Trump to address an overflow space

See TRUMP, Page A6

Manhattan prosecutor leaves job after standoff with Barr

BY MICHAEL BALSAMO and LARRY NEUMEISTER
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — An extraordinary standoff between Attorney General William Barr and Manhattan's top federal prosecutor ended Saturday when the prosecutor agreed to leave his job with an assurance that investigations by the prosecutor's office into the president's allies would not be disturbed.

U.S. Attorney Geoffrey S. Berman announced he would leave his post, ending increasingly nasty exchanges between Barr and Berman. President Donald Trump, meanwhile, had distanced himself from the dispute, telling reporters the decision "was all up to the attorney general."

This episode has raised new questions about political interference in the Justice Department, particularly given that Berman was investigating Trump's personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani. It also deepened tensions between the department and congressional Democrats, who have accused Barr of politicizing the agency and acting more like Trump's personal lawyer than the country's chief law enforcement officer.

The whirlwind chain of events began Friday night, when Barr announced that Berman, the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York, had resigned. Hours later, the prosecutor issued a statement denying that he had resigned and saying that his office's



AP PHOTO/KEVIN HAGEN

Geoffrey S. Berman, United States attorney for the Southern District of New York, arrives to his office in New York on Saturday.

"investigations would move forward without delay or interruption."

On Saturday morning, he showed up to work, telling reporters, "I'm just here to do my job."

The administration's push to cast aside Berman set up an extraordinary political and constitutional clash between the Justice Department and one of the nation's top districts, which has tried major mob, financial crimes and terrorism cases over the years.

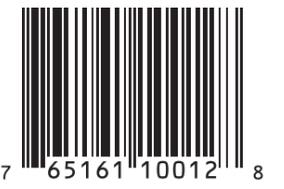
Only days ago, allegations surfaced from former Trump national security adviser John Bolton that the president sought to interfere in an investigation by Berman's office into the state-owned Turkish bank in an effort to cut deals with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

In a letter made public by the Justice

See PROSECUTOR, Page A5

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Weather » A10

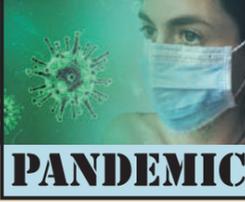


INSIDE



Hundreds gather in Bristol to celebrate Juneteenth » B1

COVID-19



LOCATION	#CASES	#DEATHS
Worldwide	8,700,000+	464,000+
United States	2,200,000+	120,000+
Virginia	57,443	1,607
Tennessee	34,446	524

SOURCES: Johns Hopkins, Virginia and Tennessee Departments of Health, AP

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Coal

From Page A1

12.4 million, according to federal data. As production fell, so did employment in the state's mines, from about 10,662 workers to 2,576 over the same 30-year period.

"The coal industry was in a bad place to begin with going into the COVID crisis, and I definitely think it will exacerbate the situation," Hepler said.

At least 11 mining sites saw operations come to a halt at some point this spring, affecting over 900 workers, according to reports received by the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy.

Most significantly, production came to a halt at the state's leading underground coal mine in Buchanan County at the end of March. The facility employed 543 people and produced about 4.94 million tons of coal in 2019 — or about 40% of the state's overall annual tonnage, DMME figures show.

DMME spokeswoman Tarah Kesterson said the agency estimates that about 100 people are currently working at the site.

The Buchanan facility mines metallurgical coal used in steel-making.

While metallurgical coal doesn't face the same competitive pressures from natural gas and renewable energy as coal used to generate electricity, the U.S. Energy Information Administration observed in a report earlier this month that "metallurgical coal mines in Appalachia have slowed production based on reduced demand from global steel production and coking coal."

The EIA forecast a 35% drop in annual coal production in Appalachia for this year, from 193 million short tons in 2019 to 125.7 in 2020. The EIA's Appalachian coal region includes parts of Alabama, Kentucky, Maryland, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia.

Harry Childress, president of an industry group called the Virginia Coal and Energy Alliance, also noted the ties between the state's coal production and steel. Most of Virginia's coal is metallurgical.

"The steel market rises and falls on the worldwide economy," Childress said in a recent interview. "If everybody is building and producing a lot of steel, there's a lot of demand for it."

First-quarter production for Virginia's coal industry was about 3.13 million tons, a decrease from 3.18 million over the same period in 2019. Hepler said he expects the pandemic's impacts — including the effects of the Buchanan mine furloughs — to be reflected in next quarter's figures.

Coal comeback?

Despite coal-friendly rhetoric from the Trump administration, the federal government's own figures document coal's continued decline.

Last month, an EIA analysis described how U.S. coal-fired electricity generation fell in 2019 to a 42-year low of 966,000 gigawatt hours. The EIA analysis said increased output from natural gas-fired plants and wind turbines was the main force behind this trend.

"U.S. coal-fired capacity peaked at 318 gigawatts (GW) in 2011 and has been declining since then because many plants retired or switched to other fuels and few new coal-fired plants came online. By the end of 2019, U.S. coal-generating capacity totaled 229 GW," the EIA analysis states.

Nationwide, coal mining employment fell 42% from 92,000 in 2011 to 54,000 in 2018. The EIA noted a slight increase between 2016 and 2018 for Appalachia occurred at the same time as an increase in coal exports overseas.

But both steam and metallurgical coal exports from the U.S. fell last year, the former dropping 30% in 2019 from 2018 and the latter 12%, according to the EIA.

Childress, a former coal miner, said he tries to be frank when it



ANDRE TEAGUE/BHC FILE PHOTO

Coal from Virginia is used to produce energy at the Virginia City Hybrid Energy Center, which is one of the cleanest burning plants in the United States.

Coal industry furloughs in Southwest Virginia

Arcelor Mittal Extra Energy
 » Mine in Tazewell County remains idled
 » 51 workers furloughed with small maintenance crew on site

Coronado Global Resources
 » Owns the Buchanan No. 1 Mine in Buchanan County
 » Longwall mining section and another continuous mining section open
 » Employed 543 when pandemic started; about 100 people estimated to be working on site

Contura Energy
 » Deep Mine 44, 88 Strip and Long Branch Surface Mines in Dickenson County closed and resumed operations; 274 workers employed across these sites
 » The Four O contract mine remains idled; 12 people worked at that mine

INMET Mining
 » D-31, North Fork, Pigeon Creek and Osaka mines in Wise County remain idled
 » 96 workers were employed at these mines; small maintenance crews still working

Patriot Mining
 » Operations in Wise County were halted and then resumed
 » 40 total employees

Source: Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy

comes to questions about the future of his industry.

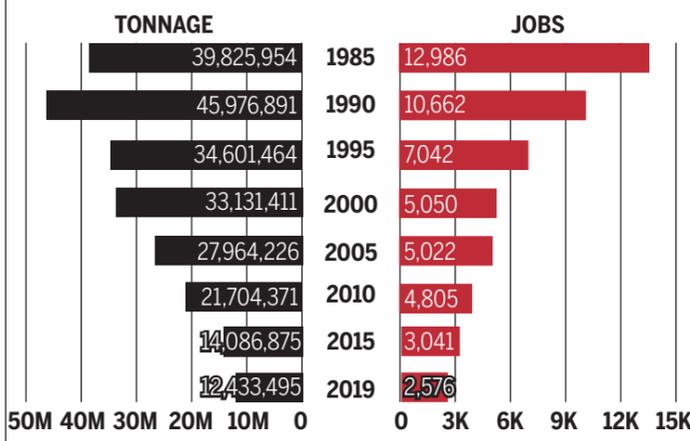
"Coal is never going to come back to what it was, especially in Virginia," he said. "There's no way we would ever get back to 40-plus million tons of production a year."

Yet Childress still sees opportunities for the industry — for example, infrastructure legislation could lead to higher demand for metallurgical coal used in steel for public projects. "We can still be there, especially on the metallurgical side," he said.

Diversifying the region's economy

As the once-dominant coal industry has receded, the region continues to look at ways to at-

Coal production and employment



SOURCE: OPEN SOURCE COAL/MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH ADMINISTRATION



BHC FILE PHOTO

One of two on-duty employees watches numerous monitors in the control center of the Virginia City Hybrid Energy Center. From here, they can watch and control most of the plant's operations throughout the day. Coal from Virginia is used to produce energy at the Virginia City Hybrid Energy Center, which is one of the cleanest burning plants in the United States.

tract industries like manufacturing, information technology and renewable energy.

The Abandoned Mine Land Pilot Program is one way that local and state leaders are trying to support these efforts.

This federal program provides grant funding to reclaim former coal sites and develop new uses. A total of \$20 million has previously been distributed to projects through the AML Pilot in recent years.

A group of 10 projects in Southwest Virginia are currently being vetted by the federal Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement for an additional round of \$10 million in funds, according to Kesterson with the DMME.

The projects are aimed at infrastructure and industrial improvements, as well as boosting the region's tourism economy.

The projects with the greatest

funding requests are two separate \$2 million proposals.

One would be for "Project Greenhouse" in the South Clinchfield area of Russell County, where the local Industrial Development Authority is proposing to construct a 35,000-square-foot commercial greenhouse with related infrastructure, according to the application provided to the Bristol Herald Courier.

The other is for "Project Thoroughbred" in Norton, where an abandoned coal loadout facility would be redeveloped into a grain processing, storage and distribution terminal.

"A Southwest Virginia grain terminal will be a catalyst for creating economic activity in two areas: the upstream agriculture base and the downstream craft beverage industry," states the application from the Lonesome Pine Regional Industrial Facilities Authority.



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

An unreclaimed strip mine in Virginia as seen in 2014 from the Kentucky side of Black Mountain in Lynch, Kentucky.

Once projects receive final approval, Gov. Ralph Northam and U.S. Rep. Morgan Griffith, R-Salem, will announce the awards, Kesterson said.

There may also be an influx of solar projects in Southwest Virginia in the coming years due to laws passed in this year's General Assembly session.

"Part of the problem has been to date that there have been significant policy barriers to renewable energy development in this region, so we've been working on tackling those," said Chelsea Barnes, the new economy program manager at Appalachian Voices.

Laws passed in the recent session will allow for the expansion of power purchase agreements — a financing mechanism used for solar projects — for customers of Appalachian Power and Old Dominion Power, Barnes said.

Net metering caps were also lifted for these utilities from 1% to 6%, which "gives clean energy developers a lot more long-term certainty for coming in and establishing businesses here," she said.

The Virginia Clean Economy Act requires Dominion Energy and Appalachian Power to be 100% carbon-free by 2045 and 2050, respectively.

As part of the transition to renewable energy, Dominion has to secure 16,100 megawatts of energy from solar and wind sources by the end of 2035. According to the law, at least 200 megawatts have to be on "previously developed project sites," which could include former mine lands.

While the VCEA doesn't guarantee that renewable energy projects will be built in Southwest Virginia, "it does open up the market" to the region, Barnes said.

The VCEA generated controversy in Southwest Virginia during the General Assembly session, when an early version of the law would have closed Dominion's Virginia City Hybrid Energy Center in Wise County by 2030. The final version allows the coal and biomass plant to stay open through 2045.

In response to an inquiry about the future of the plant, which opened in 2012, Dominion spokesman Rayhan Daudani wrote in an email that "VCEA plays a vital role in the region and to the reliability of the electric grid in Virginia and the dedicated employees of VCEA provide a critical service to our customers."

The Virginia City facility generates about \$6 million annually in property tax payments and has a \$25 million annual local economic impact, according to the utility's website.

Asked what he wants people to understand about the coal industry at this time — an era marked by unfavorable market conditions for coal, continued movement toward clean energy and uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic — Childress said, "We're still here."

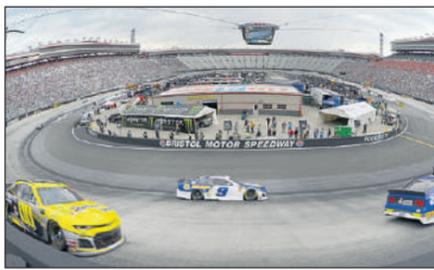
"We may not be the engine driving the train," he said, but "we think we're still one of the engines pushing the train."

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SPORTS

Patrick Henry football coach Mark Palmer leaving for job in Kentucky » B1



SPORTS

BMS to be quiet on what was supposed to be 'Race Week' » B1

BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

SATURDAY, April 4, 2020

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COVID-19

PANDEMIC

STAYING HOME?

» We want to hear from you. If you are having to stay home due to a closure related to the coronavirus, we want to hear your story. Send us your photos, videos and more about how you are coping in the face of a new reality to citydesk@bristolnews.com.

ONLINE

» How will your Easter be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic? Take our poll at HeraldCourier.com.

INSIDE

- » Believe in Bristol gives update on downtown businesses **A3**
- » Face coverings recommended; Trump says he won't wear one **A5**
- » Livestreaming church services helps worshippers stay close in season of social distancing **A6**
- » Opinion: Mask shortages are outrageous; federal government needs to do better **A8**
- » Tennessee coach ready to tap high school days to help team be ready for season **B1**
- » Contura to idle for 30 days due to pandemic **B5**
- » Bleak U.S. jobs report portends deeper losses **B5**

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- » U.S. death toll crosses 7,000.
- » 2,935 dead in New York state.
- » U.S. cuts 701,000 jobs in March; jobless rate jumps to 4.4%.
- » New York City morgues are running out of space.
- » CDC recommends people wear face coverings outside.
- » Anyone close to Trump will get rapid COVID-19 test.
- » Walmart to limit store access to no more than five customers for each 1,000 square feet.
- » Italy continues seeing signs that infections and deaths may be leveling off.

COVID-19

LOCATION	#CASES	#DEATHS
Worldwide	1,000,000+	58,000+
United States	250,000+	7,000+
Virginia	2,012	46
Tennessee	3,067	37

SOURCES: WHO, CDC, Virginia and Tennessee Departments of Health, AP

LOST STATE DISTILLING



DAVID CRIGGER/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Lost State Distilling's Nick Bianchi fills a half gallon container with hand sanitizer that is being made at the Bristol, Tennessee distillery.

Spirited effort

Bristol distillery makes hand sanitizer amid shortage

BY TIM DODSON
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

BRISTOL, Tenn. — Amid widespread shortages of disinfectant supplies, a Bristol distillery is now bottling batches of hand sanitizer instead of spirits.

Lost State Distilling started to transition to making hand sanitizer only about two weeks ago, but its phone was already constantly ring-



ONLINE
Watch related video at HeraldCourier.com.

ing Friday as people called to place and pick up orders.

"It's been a strange pivot," said co-owner Nick Bianchi, whose

See **SANITIZER**, Page A10

Abingdon

Assisted living facility resident tests positive for COVID-19

Community transmission reported in Washington County, Virginia

BY ROBERT SORRELL
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

A resident at the English Meadows assisted living facility in Abingdon, Virginia, has tested positive for COVID-19 on the same day the Mount Rogers Health District reported that community transmission is now occurring in Washington County.

The Virginia Department of Health's Mount Rogers Health District and English Meadows Senior Living Community, an assisted living and memory care facility, are working together after a

resident tested positive, the district said Friday. The individual is hospitalized.

English Meadows CEO and founder Mike Williams said the facility was informed of the positive case Friday afternoon. The Abingdon facility has been working for months on COVID-19 preparations and has been meeting and exceeding all recommendations and orders coming from the Centers for Disease Control, Virginia Department

See **ASSISTED**, Page A5

Administration tries to narrow stockpile's role for states' needs

BY JONATHAN LEMIRE, AMANDA SEITZ and JILL COLVIN
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration on Friday abruptly changed its description of the Strategic National Stockpile and put forward a narrower vision of the role the federal government's repository of life-saving medicines and equipment should play in supplying states' needs.

The White House already is facing growing anger and worry from governors over federal assistance to fight the coronavirus outbreak. But it conforms with President Donald Trump's insistence that the stockpile is only a short-term backup for states, not a commitment to ensure supplies get quickly to those who need them most during

The change comes as See **STOCKPILE**, Page A5

Bristol buses see steep drop in passengers as virus spreads

BY SARAH WADE
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Buses are still running on both sides of the state line in Bristol. But officials from the Bristol Virginia and Bristol Tennessee public transit systems said both systems have made changes to protect their riders and drivers, as well as waived all fees.

And over the past two weeks, as the COVID-19 pandemic continued to spread, those officials said they've seen steep drops in passenger numbers.

"Our normal passenger count for this time last year was somewhere between 765 and 780 people a week," said Janice Hall, driver supervisor for Bristol Virginia Transit. But for the week of March 23-27, the total was 456, she said.

Hall said that the numbers were even lower this week, the first week Bristol, Virginia buses began picking people up by appointment only. As of Friday morning, she'd

See **BUSES**, Page A10



DAVID CRIGGER/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

The Bristol Tennessee transit buses have seen a drop in riders this past week.

Thank you, **Allen Jones**, for subscribing to the Bristol Herald Courier.

69/42
Weather » A10



INSIDE: BUSINESS B5 | CLASSIFIED B9-10 | COMICS B6 | DEATHS A4 | OPINION A8 | TELEVISION B7

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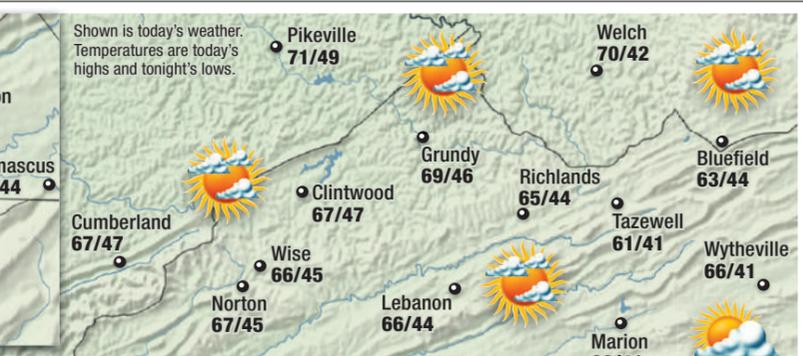
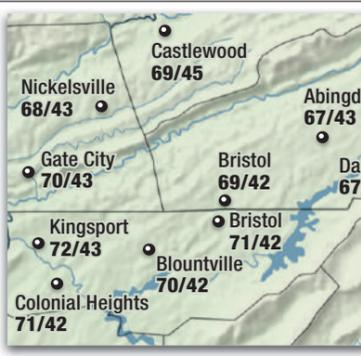


Forecast for Bristol

AccuWeather - DOWNLOAD THE FREE APP

LOCAL FORECAST
 Delightful today with times of sun and clouds. Winds north 4-8 mph. Expect 4-8 hours of sunshine with relative humidity 65% early, 35% in the afternoon. Mostly cloudy tonight. Winds east-northeast 4-8 mph. Average relative humidity 70%.
 POP: Probability of Precipitation

TODAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
69° 42°	71° 49°	70° 53°	70° 58°	73° 49°	72° 38°	62° 43°
Partly sunny and delightful	Some sun, a shower in the afternoon	Clouds and sun with a shower	Mostly cloudy with showers around	Couple of thunderstorms	Partly sunny	An afternoon shower possible
Wind: NNW 4-8 mph POP: 0%	Wind: WSW 4-8 mph POP: 50%	Wind: WSW 4-8 mph POP: 45%	Wind: WSW 6-12 mph POP: 60%	Wind: WSW 6-12 mph POP: 60%	Wind: W 7-14 mph POP: 25%	Wind: N 3-6 mph POP: 30%



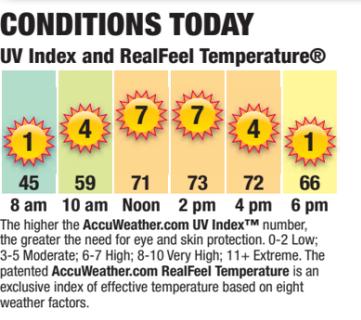
ALMANAC
 Tri-Cities Reg. Airport through 5 p.m. Fri.

Temperature	
High/low	68°/34°
Normal high/low	65°/39°
Record high	82° in 2012
Record low	22° in 1992
Precipitation (in inches)	
24 hours ending 5 p.m.	0.00"
Month to date/normal	Trace/0.33"
Year to date/normal	19.50"/10.71"

SUN AND MOON

	Today	Sun.
Sunrise	7:10 a.m.	7:08 a.m.
Sunset	7:54 p.m.	7:55 p.m.
Moonrise	3:59 p.m.	5:12 p.m.
Moonset	5:16 a.m.	5:56 a.m.

Full Last New First
 Apr 7 Apr 14 Apr 22 Apr 30



REGIONAL FORECAST: Pleasant today with sun and some clouds. Cloudy most of the time tonight. Mostly cloudy tomorrow. A shower in spots; arriving in the afternoon in eastern Tennessee and to the east. Monday: times of sun and clouds with a shower in places; warm to the east and north.

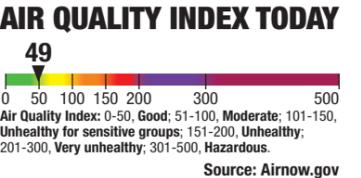
WEATHER HISTORY
 The U.S.S. Akron crashed on April 4, 1933, during a wind-whipped storm near Barnegat Light, N.J. Fog-induced collisions, icebergs and storms have sunk many ships.

TRAVEL FORECAST

City	Today Ho/Lo/W	Sun. Hi/Lo/W
NATIONAL CITIES		
Albuquerque	70/46/s	72/46/s
Anchorage	40/33/c	40/24/sf
Atlanta	76/56/pc	78/58/pc
Atlanta City	52/43/pc	54/48/c
Baltimore	61/46/pc	66/48/c
Baton Rouge	79/60/c	78/61/c
Billings	49/26/pc	56/33/c
Bismarck	45/21/pc	48/30/sh
Boise	57/40/c	59/42/c
Boston	43/36/c	51/42/c
Buffalo	53/41/pc	53/33/pc
Charlotte	76/49/s	76/53/pc
Cheyenne	52/31/s	61/36/pc
Chicago	51/35/sh	54/38/s
Cincinnati	70/49/pc	60/48/sh
Cleveland	60/41/pc	51/33/pc
Dallas	53/48/t	67/58/c
Denver	58/35/s	68/40/pc
Des Moines	48/32/pc	60/48/pc
Detroit	58/39/pc	56/35/pc
Fairbanks	39/29/sf	37/14/sn
Grand Rapids	50/30/c	54/34/pc
Helena	47/27/pc	55/32/c
Honolulu	82/69/sh	81/70/sh
Houston	67/60/r	77/65/pc
Indianapolis	58/40/c	58/45/pc
Jacksonville	83/59/s	78/58/pc
Kansas City	51/37/s	63/55/pc
Las Vegas	78/57/s	75/54/pc
Little Rock	66/53/t	72/57/c
Los Angeles	71/58/s	64/55/r
Louisville	73/52/pc	66/53/pc
Memphis	73/54/c	75/59/c
Miami	85/68/s	85/70/pc
Milwaukee	48/32/sh	48/35/s
Minneapolis	47/29/pc	56/42/pc
Nashville	75/52/pc	75/54/pc
New Orleans	81/63/c	77/65/c
New York City	56/45/pc	59/44/c
Oklahoma City	52/41/s	65/54/c
Omaha	50/30/s	60/51/pc

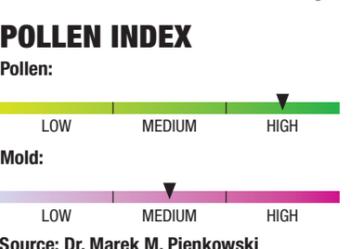
WORLD CITIES

City	Today Ho/Lo/W	Sun. Hi/Lo/W
Orlando	88/65/s	78/63/pc
Philadelphia	59/45/pc	65/47/c
Phoenix	84/59/s	84/58/s
Pittsburgh	63/46/pc	59/36/c
Portland, ME	48/37/pc	49/37/c
Providence	48/35/pc	53/41/c
Raleigh	67/46/s	72/54/pc
Reno	55/40/c	52/33/pc
Richmond	63/44/pc	69/50/sh
Sacramento	58/51/r	56/43/r
St. Louis	56/45/t	62/52/pc
Salt Lake City	63/45/pc	65/52/c
San Antonio	61/55/r	70/62/sh
San Diego	65/57/pc	66/58/r
San Francisco	60/51/r	57/46/r
Savannah	78/56/s	79/57/s
Seattle	53/42/c	55/40/c
Syracuse	55/39/pc	55/33/pc
Tampa	84/66/s	80/66/pc
Tucson	83/50/pc	83/51/s
Tulsa	54/44/s	67/58/c
Washington, DC	63/49/pc	67/51/c
Wichita	54/38/s	64/54/pc



NATIONAL FORECAST
 Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation. Temperature bands are highs for the day.

WEATHER TRIVIA™
 Q: During what three months of the year do most tornadoes occur?
 A: April, May and June



REGIONAL LAKES
 Levels in feet as of 7 a.m. Friday

Lake	Full Pool	Level	24-hr. Change
South Holston	1729	1726.28	-0.11
Watauga	1959	1957.66	-0.29
Boone	1382	1353.01	+0.66
Ft. Patrick Henry	1261	1261.94	-0.06
Cherokee	1071	1063.25	+0.07
Douglas	994	979.35	-0.11



Several bottles of hand sanitizer sit at Lost State Distilling on Friday.

Sanitizer

From Page A1
 business opened last year on State Street and produces small batch gin, rum and Tennessee whiskey.
 Lost State has mostly been making hand sanitizer for organizations throughout the region, including the Bristol Tennessee Police Department, the city of Elizabethton and Dickenson County Public Schools.
 "Everybody has just been calling," said Debbie Bianchi, who is married to co-owner Joe Bianchi, Nick's father.
 Lost State Distilling isn't alone in making this transition — more than 20 distilleries across the Volunteer State are producing sanitizer, according to the Tennessee Distillers Guild, an industry group that includes the Bristol distillery.
 The family has been busy producing large batches of hand sanitizer in a big container called a tote. The sanitizer — made of ethanol, hydrogen peroxide and glycerin water — is later poured into plastic half-gallon jugs and larger five gallon containers for bulk orders.
 "It takes one day to mix all the ingredients, and then it has to sit 72 hours," Joe Bianchi said. "The hydrogen peroxide in it will kill any bacteria that could be existing in the water or the ethanol."
 The most recent batch came out to 221 gallons and they've been producing about two batches a week, Nick Bianchi said. Their sanitizer has an alco-

hol content of about 81 percent, which is consistent with guidance published in March by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.
 The sanitizer is a liquid that can also be put into a spray bottle, so it's not a gel product that most consumers are familiar with.
 Lost State sells the sanitizer for \$10 per gallon, but has also donated it to first-responders like ambulance services and fire and rescue groups.
 "We're mainly just trying to recover our costs," Joe Bianchi said.
 Local organizations and businesses have also donated alcohol that is distilled and used in the hand sanitizer.
 Bristol Station Brews & Taproom, for example, recently donated kegs of beer, and the Paramount Center for the Arts provided beer and hard cider for the sanitizer initiative.
 The Bianchi family said the business has faced a number of challenges from the coronavirus pandemic, including a sharp decline in liquor sales. Still, they have had some regular customers coming in to make purchases and support the distillery.
 Lost State Distilling is currently selling the batches to organizations and businesses, but Nick Bianchi said they hope to eventually start offering it to individuals.
 Groups interested in placing an order can get in touch with Lost State at 423-797-4432 or on social media.

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Buses

From Page A1
 scheduled rides for "just under 100" passengers for the whole week.
 Wes Ritchie, who manages public services for Bristol, Tennessee, gave a similar report. Ritchie said that Bristol Tennessee Transit buses typically carry about 150 passengers per day, which means an average of 750 per week. But during the week of March 23-27, he said the buses carried just 504 passengers. That's an average of about 100 people per day, 50 fewer than usual.
 From Monday through Thursday this week, Ritchie said, the buses carried a total of just 392 people, an average of 98 per day. On Tuesday, they had 62 passengers, one of the lowest counts Ritchie said he's ever seen.
 He added that in the context of a pandemic that's fueling a global public health crisis, that drop is "a good sign" that people are listening to the health experts and government officials telling them to stay home.
 "What you're hearing in terms of not coming out unless you need to do one of those essential things that's supposed to be done, getting food, going to a doctor appointment, I think that's happening somewhat with our ridership going down," Ritchie said.
 But Hall and Ritchie both said it was critical for the city's public buses to continue to run, since some residents rely on them to run essential errands. They said the transit systems are taking a variety of measures to protect riders as well as bus drivers.
 To start with, drivers in both transit systems must have their temperatures checked each day before they can start working.
 On the Bristol, Virginia side, Hall said that the buses switched from their usual fixed routes to an appointment-only system Monday. Buses also began carrying no more than three passengers at a time.
 "Our buses are so small that we can only hold two people and one person in a wheelchair" in compliance with the social distancing guidelines set by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Hall said.
 "We spray the buses with Lysol and wipe them down with Clorox wipes after each trip," she added.
 Ritchie said that Bristol Tennessee Transit buses are sticking to their



DAVID CRIGGER/BHC

Bristol transit officials say ridership has been down due to the pandemic, but they add it's critical for the public buses to run for some residents who rely on them for essential errands.

"We spray the buses with Lysol and wipe them down with Clorox wipes after each trip."
 — Janice Hall, driver supervisor for Bristol Virginia Transit

usual fixed routes, but aren't allowing more than 10 people on at a time, including drivers. Additionally, he said, city staff has posted signs setting a limit of one person per bench at bus stops downtown, and they've intensified their cleaning routines on buses and in the building downtown.
 "The CDC thinks you should disinfect your bus at the end of each day. We're doing it every hour," Ritchie said.
 He added that bus drivers also have protective masks and gear they can wear if they need to approach a passenger during an emergency.
 While the Bristol Virginia buses are much emptier than usual, Hall said her department has still gotten a lot of calls this week from people requesting rides.
 "Most of the folks we're helping this week are people who got a check the first of the month and need to go to Walmart" or people who need to get to work, she said. She expects things to get even quieter next week.
 "I'm happy people are staying home and doing what they're being told to do because I do worry about my drivers being out there," Hall said. "And yet at the same time, I'm glad we're providing something for the ones who really need it."
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Bristol Public Transit

Bristol public transit operations during pandemic:

BRISTOL VA. PUBLIC TRANSIT

- » Number: 276-645-7384
 - » Hours: 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday
 - » Free service
 - » Appointment-only system
 - » Appointments are limited to work, medical appointments and one trip to the grocery store per week
 - » Transit will serve the same locations as during fixed route services.
 - » Passengers with an appointment will need to be picked up from an existing transit stop.
 - » No more than three passengers can be on the bus at a time.
 - » All appointments must be made at least two hours in advance.
 - » When making an appointment, let staff know if you will need room for a wheelchair
 - » Van service available for people unable to use the regular bus services
- ### BRISTOL TENN. PUBLIC TRANSIT
- » 423-989-5685
 - » Hours: 6:15 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday
 - » Free service
 - » Still using fixed routes
 - » No more than nine passengers can be on the bus at a time.
 - » Van service available for people unable to use the regular bus services.