



Let's dance

Owensboro Dance Theatre previews 39th season Region, Page B1

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER

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U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell speaks Thursday outside Owensboro Health Regional Hospital during a visit to thank health care workers for their response to COVID-19 and to share his thoughts on the economy and CARES Act.

## McConnell talks economy, masks during visit to OHRH

BY RENEE BEASLEY JONES  
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell visited Owensboro Health Regional Hospital on Thursday morning to applaud the health system's employees for their response to COVID-19.

McConnell also shared his thoughts about rebooting the economy, the CARES Act and requests for more federal assistance.

Near the beginning of his remarks, he compared health care workers battling the new coronavirus to first responders who ran into New York City's burning twin towers during the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Health care workers demonstrated the same type of bravery, he said, especially during the early days when little was known about the virus.

**"In a few weeks, I think we'll be able to begin to measure how much the opening up of the economy begins to restore our economic situation."**

— Sen. Mitch McConnell

"... It took actual physical courage for these folks, who are on the front lines here, to go deal with these patients, not knowing fully what we were dealing with yet," McConnell said.

Most of his press conference, however, dealt with other issues.

For example, he noted that Kentucky received about \$11 billion in funding from the CARES Act. Of that, \$1 billion went to health care.

OH received about \$17 million in

CARES Act funding, McConnell said.

Other Owensboro organizations received nearly \$4.6 million as a result of the CARES Act, including funding for the Owensboro-Daviess County Regional Airport, Owensboro Community & Technical College, Kentucky Wesleyan College, Brescia University, Audubon Area Community Care Clinic and the Housing Authority of Owensboro.

The CARES Act was written in haste and added about \$3 trillion to the nation's debt, McConnell said. It marks the first time since World War II the national debt has grown as large as the economy.

It's too soon to talk about another federal rescue package, he said. Instead, McConnell wants Congress

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## 14-day downward trend in virus cases noted

BY RENEE BEASLEY JONES  
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

Kentucky has "crushed the curve," Gov. Andy Beshear announced Thursday during his coronavirus update.

A panel of experts who track virus trends nationwide reports the state is one of the best positioned to reopen its economy, Beshear said.

The governor presented a series of charts that show Kentucky's COVID-19 journey since the first case was reported March 6.

During the first 30 to 35 days, the number of cases more than doubled each week. That was a pandemic curve, Beshear said.

If something didn't change, he said, state officials expected to see more than 16,000 cases per week by May 4.

But, in mid-April, the graphs show Kentucky hit a very abrupt plateau that continued for about 35 days.

What changed? About two weeks before, Beshear started the Healthy at Home initiative.

"We took drastic and significant steps," he said. "It worked."

Now, cases in Kentucky have been trending downward for 14 days, which is one of the Trump administration's recommendations for reopening the economy. Increased testing and contact tracing are among other guidelines.

In other news, Josh Benton, deputy secretary of the Education and Workforce Development Cabinet, reported 15,000 unemployment insurance claims from March and April were processed this week. The ones that remain are the most difficult because they require manual processing.

In addition, Benton announced a limited, internal data breach.

At 9:17 a.m. April 23, a claimant reported the ability to view other claimants' identity verification documents on the unemployment website. Department officials took immediate action, and by midnight, a software fix corrected the issue.

Benton said no evidence suggests the



Gov. Andy Beshear

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## Wethington postpones Adams death penalty trial

BY JAMES MAYSE  
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

The trial of Matthew A. Adams, the Utica man facing the death penalty for allegedly killing a woman in her home in 2018, has been postponed.

Adams, 28, was scheduled to go to trial in October on charges of murder and first-degree burglary in the death of Erica Owen, who was found dead in her home on Placid Place. Police believe Adams strangled Owen, with whom he has a previous relationship. Owen had a protective order against Adams.



Matthew Andrew Adams

Daviess Circuit Court Judge Jay Wethington agreed to postpone the trial after Adams' defense team argued Thursday they had been significantly hampered in preparing their defense because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We don't seek a lengthy delay," defense attorney Michael Bufkin

told Wethington in a hearing that was conducted over Skype.

Wethington said the defense was seeking a delay of "at least six months" according to their motion to postpone the October trial date.

Bufkin said a six-month delay wouldn't be excessive, given the complex nature of death penalty cases and given the issues brought on by the pandemic.

The defense work so far has found indications of mental health and other issues with Adams that need to be explored, but have been hampered by the pandemic, Bufkin said.

"The investigation has uncovered evidence of cognitive difficulties from an early age," Bufkin said.

Witnesses can't be interviewed due to social distancing restrictions mandated by the governor's office and the Department of

SEE ADAMS/PAGE A2

### OH HOTLINE

Owensboro Health has created a 24/7 coronavirus hotline: 877-888-6647.

#### WHO SHOULD CALL THAT NUMBER?

- Regional residents who recently traveled or have been exposed to the virus and now have COVID-19 symptoms, which are fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, or new loss of taste or smell.
- Anyone with those symptoms should call the hotline, especially if they suffer from lung or heart disease, or immunosuppression.
- Call the hotline before going to an urgent care clinic or hospital emergency department.
- Triage nurses answer hotline calls and ask callers questions to determine appropriate steps.
- OH has sites for COVID-19 testing. Everyone cannot be tested at this time. OH is following federal guidelines for determining who will be tested.
- Expect test results to take up to three days, depending on lab capabilities.

## Mayors say layoffs, service cuts will occur if feds don't help cities

BY JAMES MAYSE  
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

The mayors of Louisville and Greenville used a Thursday afternoon press call to urge Congress to pass financial support for city governments struggling because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer and Greenville Mayor Janice Yonts told reporters if cities don't

receive federal support, city workers will lose jobs and essential services will have to be reduced, causing additional damage.

Fischer said Louisville has gone from having a \$19 million budget surplus to a \$27 million deficit over the past three months due to the pandemic. Tourism has

SEE CUTS/PAGE A2

### Clarification

In reference to an article on Page A1 Thursday about circuit clerk's offices reopening for written tests, Daviess Circuit Clerk Jennifer Hardesty Besecker requested to clarify a statement she made so that residents of Ohio, McLean and Hancock counties know they should contact their local clerks for details concerning testing.



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# Trump escalates war on Twitter

## Social media protections challenged

BY ZEKE MILLER  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump escalated his war on Twitter and other social media companies Thursday, signing an executive order challenging the lawsuit protections that have served as a bedrock for unfettered speech on the internet.

Announced with fanfare, the president's action yet appeared to be more about politics than substance. He aims to rally supporters after he lashed out at Twitter for applying fact checks to two of his tweets.

Trump said the fact checks were "editorial decisions" by Twitter amounting to political activism and that such actions should cost social media companies their liability protection for what is posted on their platforms.

Trump, who personally relies heavily on Twitter to verbally flog his foes, has long accused the tech giants in liberal-leaning Silicon Valley of targeting conservatives by fact-checking them or removing their posts.

"We're fed up with it," Trump said, claiming his order would uphold freedom of speech.

Technology industry groups disagreed, saying



President Donald Trump gestures to people in the audience after an event on protecting seniors with diabetes Tuesday in the Rose Garden at the White House in Washington.

it would stifle innovation and speech on the internet. And the U.S. Chamber of Commerce objected, "Regardless of the circumstances that led up to this, this is not how public policy is made in the United States."

The executive order directs executive branch agencies to ask independent rule-making agencies including the Federal Communications Commission and the Federal Trade Commission to study whether they can place new regulations on the companies — though experts express doubts much can be done without an act of Congress.

FCC Chairman Ajit Pai said in a statement, "This debate is an important one. The Federal Communications Commission will carefully review any

petition for rulemaking filed by the Department of Commerce."

Companies like Twitter and Facebook are granted liability protection under Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act because they are treated as "platforms," rather than "publishers," which can face lawsuits over content.

A similar executive order was previously considered by the administration but shelved over concerns it couldn't pass legal muster and that it violated conservative principles on deregulation and free speech.

"They've had unchecked power to censor, restrict, edit, shape, hide, alter virtually any form of communication between private citizens or large public audienc-

es," Trump said of social media companies as he prepared to sign the order. "There is no precedent in American history for so small a number of corporations to control so large a sphere of human interaction."

Trump and his campaign reacted after Twitter added a warning phrase to two Trump tweets that called mail-in ballots "fraudulent" and predicted "mail boxes will be robbed." Under the tweets, there's now a link reading "Get the facts about mail-in ballots" that guides users to a page with fact checks and news stories about Trump's unsubstantiated claims.

Trump accused Twitter of interfering in the 2020 presidential election" and declared "as president, I will not allow this to

happen." His campaign manager, Brad Parscale, said Twitter's "clear political bias" had led the campaign to pull "all our advertising from Twitter months ago." In fact, Twitter has banned political advertising since last November.

Late Wednesday, Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey tweeted, "We'll continue to point out incorrect or disputed information about elections globally."

On the other hand, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg told Fox News his platform has "a different policy, I think, than Twitter on this."

"I just believe strongly that Facebook shouldn't be the arbiter of truth of everything that people say online," he said.

The president's critics, meanwhile, scolded the platforms for allowing him to put forth false or misleading information that could confuse voters.

Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden, a Democrat and advocate for internet freedoms said Trump was "desperately trying to steal for himself the power of the courts and Congress. ... All for the ability to spread unfiltered lies."

Trump's proposal has multiple, serious legal problems and is unlikely to survive a challenge, according to Matt Schruers, president of the Computer and Communications Industry Association, a Washington-based organization that represents computer and internet companies.

# ADAMS

FROM PAGE A1

Public Advocacy, and documents are unobtainable because offices are closed, Bufkin said.

"COVID-19 has truly changed the world, and has affected our investigation in an extremely negative way," Bufkin said. "... We have 45 additional witnesses that have to be interviewed, probably multiple times."

"The complexity of the case was not anticipated," he said. "The COVID-19 (pandemic) was not anticipated."

Wethington agreed to postpone the trial and said, "particularly I'm concerned about ... the complex mental condition of Mr. Adams."

Commonwealth's Attorney Bruce Kuegel said he agreed with the postponement but noted the defense has had experts working on the case since February of last year.

"COVID-19 has been alleged to be the culprit" behind the need to postpone the trial, Kuegel said. "... We didn't even know COVID-19 existed in February 2019."

Wethington said the pandemic "has thrown all of our schedules into disarray," and the pandemic has interfered with the defense's ability to investigate.

"I recognize the problems that have arisen," Kuegel said. "I agree with the motion to continue the trial."

Adams will have another hearing on June 25 to consider a defense motion to not allow jurors to consider the death penalty. A new trial date could be set then, Wethington said.

"I think it's too soon to set a trial date," Wethington said.

Postponing the trial is "a great inconvenience to the litigants," Wethington said. "But it is unavoidable."

James Mayse, 270-691-7303, jmayse@messenger-inquirer.com, Twitter: @JamesMayse



Jay A. Wethington  
circuit court judge



Bruce Kuegel

# VIRUS

FROM PAGE A1

system was entered from the outside, and it appears no data was used to harm any claimants.

Department officials notified major credit-reporting agencies and will send information to claimants who may have been involved in the breach.

"We take this very seriously," Benton said.

Initially, Beshear wasn't told about the incident. He learned

about it through interoffice correspondence late last week and requested the information be made public.

Some department officials disagreed, arguing it was not a data breach because it did not involve an outside infiltration, Beshear said. He felt differently and said it should be reported to the public.

It took far too long to let the public know, he said.

"I want to make sure we respond and respond quickly every time," Beshear said.

Beshear announced Thursday

he is reorganizing cabinets to ensure better results for residents dealing with unemployment insurance. That department will move under the jurisdiction of the Labor Cabinet, where it was in the past.

The governor reported 113 new confirmed cases of the coronavirus, bringing the state's total to 9,184.

Beshear announced nine deaths. To date, the virus has killed 409 Kentuckians.

Thursday, Green River District Health Department officials reported nine new con-

firmed COVID-19 cases — three in Daviess County, three in Henderson County, two in Ohio County and one in Webster County. The total of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the seven-county district now stands at 665.

Muhlenberg County Health Department officials reported one new case of the coronavirus, bringing that county's total to 494.

Renee Beasley Jones, 270-228-2835, rbeasleyjones@messenger-inquirer.com

# OHRH

FROM PAGE A1

to pause and assess actions already taken.

"In a few weeks, I think we'll be able to begin to measure how much the opening up of the economy begins to restore our economic situation," McConnell said.

The nation's economy went through a cataclysmic event, he said. In February, it was enjoying one of the best runs in 50 years. Two months later, it fell to depths reminiscent

of the Great Depression.

"If there's another bill, it will not look anything like this \$3 trillion grab bag that the House passed a couple of weeks ago. They basically threw everything but the kitchen sink in there ... That, in my view, was not a serious effort to address where we are and where we may go," he said.

McConnell was critical of the \$600 weekly benefit added to unemployment benefits during the COVID-19 crisis, calling it a "bonus to stay home." The benefit expires in July.

In coming months, he

said, the nation needs to focus on children returning to their classrooms in the fall and saving jobs.

Regarding the virus, McConnell said testing, treatment and a vaccine are priorities.

McConnell and OH leaders walked out of the hospital Thursday wearing face masks. He and fellow senators have worn masks and observed physical distancing for the past three weeks.

At the press conference, speakers removed their face masks only when they stepped in front of the microphone. The

event was conducted outdoors.

McConnell encouraged everyone in the public to wear masks and called for everyone to end the stigma surrounding masks. "We are all in this together," he said.

Greg Strahan, OH president and CEO, was the first to speak. He thanked Daviess County Judge-Executive Al Mattingly and Owensboro Mayor Tom Watson for their support during the crisis.

"We are grateful — extremely grateful — for the leadership that Senator McConnell has given

us, and his response by authoring the CARES Act," Strahan said.

The federal financial assistance allowed the health system to avoid layoffs.

"I dare say if they had not issued this bill that he authored, there would be

many hospitals in the state of Kentucky and across the country that would not be here today, and that would be a travesty," Strahan said.

Renee Beasley Jones, 270-228-2835, rbeasleyjones@messenger-inquirer.com

# CUTS

FROM PAGE A1

also declined.

Between lost revenue from declining payroll taxes and funds the city has spent and will spend on coronavirus testing and contact tracing, it will face a \$250 million economic impact by the end of fiscal year 2022, Fischer said.

"In Louisville, 47% of our budget comes from payroll taxes," Fischer said. "... Without additional revenue, we'll have to cut (city) departments, including public safety."

"We are looking at potentially laying off 600 metro employees," which would be the equivalent of losing 24,000 hours of city services a week, Fischer said.

Yonts said Muhlenberg County as a whole is in financial crisis, with the county facing a \$2.3 million budget shortfall. The county's payment in lieu of taxes from Tennessee Valley Authority declined by \$2.3 million for the coming fiscal year, which starts in July.

In Greenville, "this definitely is going to impact us for quite some

time," Yonts said.

Small cities like Greenville were not included in previous federal stimulus packages, she said.

City first responders have recently dealt with two fatal fires, a string of burglaries and a number of drug overdoses. "Yet, because of the budget shortfalls, we are making difficult decisions on which services to cut," Yonts said.

"I'm worried about the prolonged economic fallout if we have to cut services," she said. "How can we reopen if we have to cut trash collection or clean water?"

David Shockley, who works for the Paducah Parks and Recreation Department, said "important city services are being cut to keep (other services) like trash pickup running."

"All city projects have also been stalled or postponed," Shockley said.

"We know Paducah citizens rely on these services ... and we know we can't recover from the pandemic or reopen the economy without these services in place," Shockley said. "If the economy continues down the path due to the shutdown, layoffs might not be far off."

Yonts said Greenville's city pool won't open this summer, which

means some lost jobs. The city police department often backs up the Muhlenberg County Sheriff's Department and the Kentucky State Police, and overtime funds for law enforcement might have to be cut, she said.

"Our police force is small, so we have to keep everyone employed there," Yonts said. If law enforcement overtime is cut, "we won't be readily available for the county and the state."

Fischer urged the Senate to pass a bill to assist cities. The House of Representatives previously passed the HEROES Act, which contained relief funds for city and state governments, but the Senate has not taken action on the bill or sponsored a bill of its own.

Fischer said he has spoken to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and was told that Congress will "probably" need to pass more pandemic assistance.

Fischer said officials on the call are urging the Senate "to come up with their own package" and negotiate on a bill with the House.

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