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TRANSCENDING GYMNASTICS

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CHESAPEAKE AFTERMATH

New York Stock Exchange starts process to delist Chesapeake's stock after bankruptcy filing

THE OKLAHOMAN

Tuesday, June 30, 2020



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Questioning the cause

Family doesn't believe coronavirus claimed loved one

By Jordan Green
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Jack Dake was a loving father, husband, military veteran and lifelong blue-collar worker. That's how his family remembers him.

He died May 6, and he became a coronavirus statistic on May 14. His death certificate was finalized that day, and it listed the coronavirus as his cause of death.

But he had battled Alzheimer's disease for 13 years, his family said. It was Alzheimer's, not COVID-19, that killed their loved one.

"Alzheimer's was the cause

See CAUSE, A6

CORONAVIRUS IN OKLAHOMA

The number of positive COVID-19 tests in Oklahoma increased by 228 cases to 13,172 on Monday, while the number of deaths was unchanged to remain at a total of 385. Here is a look at the latest numbers in Oklahoma and across the nation:

OKLAHOMA	
Positive	13,172
Deaths	385
Total recovered	9,587
UNITED STATES	
Total	2,564,163
Deaths	125,928
Total recovered	685,164



Jack Dake died May 6, and became one of more than 300 Oklahomans who have died from COVID-19, but his family disputes that cause of death. [PHOTO PROVIDED]

PRIMARY ELECTION

Polls open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. today

State sees record number of absentee, mail-in votes

By Adam Kemp
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A repurposed trash can, locked down tight by opposing party members, carried the first votes of the upcoming primary election into the room.

After a record number of mail-in and absentee ballot requests in Oklahoma, more than 47,000 of the state's nearly 122,000 requests coming from Oklahoma County alone, this was the final leg of the journey for these ballots before becoming official votes on Tuesday.

The ballots were wheeled in to volunteers inside a large

See VOTES, A2

Oklahoma voters urged to wear masks

By Carmen Forman
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Oklahoma election officials strongly recommend voters wear a face mask when they head to the polls Tuesday.

Election workers, who have been supplied with personal protective equipment, will follow social distancing and safety protocols crafted by state health and election officials.

All polling locations have been supplied with hand sanitizer and disinfectant and masks and gloves for poll workers, according to the state Election Board.

Election officials also are asking voters to be patient at their polling place and follow signage asking them to keep their distance from election workers and other voters.

Unlike some states that have held elections during the COVID-19 pandemic, Oklahoma will not see the widespread consolidation

See MASKS, A2

Delegation seeks answers on reported Russian bounties

By Chris Casteel
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Oklahoma lawmakers on Monday expressed deep concern about reports that Russia placed bounties on U.S. service members and troops from other Western countries serving in Afghanistan.

"While there is a lot we don't know at this stage, these are serious allegations," said Rep. Tom Cole, R-Moore, whose district



Cole

includes Tinker Air Force Base and Fort Sill.

"If true that Russia reprehensively targeted our service members, it will certainly require a swift, strong and appropriate response from the United States."

Sen. Jim Inhofe, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said, "We've known for a long

time that (Russian President Vladimir) Putin is a thug and a murderer, and if these allegations are true, I will work with President Trump on a strong response.

"My number one priority is the safety of our troops. Right now, though, we need answers. I have asked the administration to share what it knows, and I expect to know more in the coming days."

The New York Times reported Friday that U.S. intelligence officials had

briefed President Donald Trump in March that Russia offered payments to the Taliban to kill U.S. troops. Trump denied in a tweet that he had been briefed about the intelligence.

White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany said Monday that the nation's top intelligence leaders and the White House chief of staff could confirm that Trump and Vice President Mike Pence were not briefed.

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TODAY
Windy
97° / 74°

WEDNESDAY
Mostly sunny
101° / 74°

THURSDAY
Mostly sunny
99° / 72°

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CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Florida site of GOP convention orders wearing of masks

By **Tamara Lush and Emily Schmall**

The Associated Press

Arizona’s Republican gov-ernor shut down bars, movie theaters, gyms and water parks Monday and lead-ers in several states ordered residents to wear masks in public in a dramatic course reversal amid an alarming resurgence of coronavirus cases nationwide.

Among those implementing the face-covering orders is the city of Jacksonville, Florida, where mask-averse President Donald Trump plans to accept the Republican nomination in August. Trump has refused to wear a mask during visits to states and businesses that require them.

Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey’s order went into effect im-mediately and for at least 30 days. Ducey also ordered public schools to delay the start of classes until at least Aug. 17. Most Arizona bars and nightclubs opened after the governor’s stay-at-home and business closure orders were allowed to expire in mid-May.

Arizona health officials reported 3,858 more confirmed



Activists of the Communist Party of India Marxist display placards on face shields and shout slogans during a protest asking the state government to increase testing and free treatment for all COVID-19 patients, Monday, in Hyderabad, India. [MAHESH KUMAR A./THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

coronavirus cases Sunday, the most reported in a single day in the state so far and the sev-enth time in the past 10 days that daily cases surpassed the 3,000 mark. Since the pan-demic began, 74,500 cases and 1,588 deaths stemming from the virus have been reported in Arizona.

“Our expectation is that our numbers next week will be worse,” Ducey said Monday.

The state is not alone in its reversal. Places such as Texas, Florida and California are backtracking, closing beaches and bars in some cases amid a resurgence of the virus.

In New Jersey, Gov. Phil Murphy announced Monday that he’s postponing the restarting of indoor dining because people have not been wearing face masks or comply-ing with recommendations for

CAUSE

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of death, and COVID-19 was not even a contributing con-dition,” said Duke’s son, Jack Duke Jr. “Yet it’s recorded as the only cause of death.”

Fighting off the virus

Jack Duke is one of more than 300 Oklahomans whose deaths are attributed to COVID-19 since the pandemic began. He was a memory care patient at Village on the Park, an assisted living center in Oklahoma City, when he tested positive for the coronavirus April 17. Starting April 19, he had some mild symptoms for three or four days, his family said.

Even though his mental capacity had been diminished by Alzheimer’s, he still was physically strong — strong enough to fend off the coro-navirus, his son said.

“He was an amazingly physically healthy person otherwise,” Jack Duke Jr. said. “His vitals were prob-ably better than yours or mine at age 89.”

By the time Jack Duke was diagnosed with COVID-19, he already had progressed into one of the last stages of Alzheimer’s disease. He wasn’t eating, and he was dehydrated.

Paramedics took him to the Norman Regional Health System on April 20 after nurs-ing home staff said he had a “decreased appetite” and “generalized weakness.”

In a report written by hos-pital staff, doctors noted that Jack Duke tested positive for COVID-19. They said he had a fever and a cough. But he wasn’t short of breath, and his pulse oximetry hovered about 97% while breathing room air. He never used supplemental oxygen. He was in the hospi-tal for about an hour and 40 minutes.

Five days later, he fell and cut his hand. He was taken back to the hospital, and his vital signs were about the same as they were five days before.

But by that visit, his fever and cough were gone, hos-pital records show. Doctors wrote that he had no fever, no cough and no shortness of breath — “no other complaints or modifying factors,” they wrote.

“He was asymptomatic of flu, coronavirus or any-thing else,” his son said. “No coughs, no lung congestion, no fever, none of the other symp-toms of the coronavirus. Not one. He was completely over all of that.”

Jack Duke was never given another test for the corona-virus to determine whether he was still positive for it. April 24, the day before his second

hospital visit, his family put him in hospice care because he still wasn’t eating or drinking.

Hospice workers prepared a list of emergency contacts for Jack Duke. And on that list, his terminal diagnosis was writ-ten down as COVID-19. From that point on, his death was recognized as a coronavirus casualty.

But his family didn’t see that list until the day their father died.

‘Why would anybody do this?’

Jack Duke Jr. remembers when he and his family heard the news from a nursing home staffer.

“On the day he died, one of the people at the care facility said that his was a COVID-19 death, to which we immediately objected,” he said. “COVID-19 had noth-ing whatsoever to do with his death, nor was it an under-lying cause. In fact, since he had already been through the symptoms, he was probably negative for the coronavirus and now had antibodies.”

Jack Duke Jr. said nurs-ing home staff told his family on April 30 that their father was a recovered COVID-19 case according to state health guidelines. Jack Duke hadn’t experienced symptoms for several days, his son said.

But it was too late. The cause of death was certified as COVID-19. The family was left to wonder: Would their father’s death ever be recorded accurately?

Jack Duke Jr. feels that his father’s death is one of many incorrectly reported deaths.

“On June 22, the state Department of Health records 369 COVID-19 deaths,” he said. “We know that number is false, mis-leading and not true. It’s less than that, maybe sig-nificantly less than that. Yet government officials at all levels, including at the Legislature, are making very poor decisions based on this information.

“One would naturally arrive at the question: ‘Why would anybody do this?’”

CDC guidelines

The Dakes don’t blame doctors or nursing staff for incorrectly reporting their father’s death. The family said they appreciate the medi-cal care their father received. Instead, they’re directing their frustration toward a set of guidelines issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In April, the National Vital Statistics System, a branch of the CDC that tracks births and deaths in the U.S., issued a report to medical providers on certifying deaths from the coronavirus.

The writers of the report said an accurate count of deaths due to COVID-19 is critical. However, officials also said it is permissible to list COVID-19 as the cause of death even if providers can’t test for it.

“In cases where a definitive diagnosis of COVID-19 cannot be made, but it is suspected or likely (e.g., the circumstances are compelling within a rea-sonable degree of certainty), it is acceptable to report COVID-19 on a death certificate as ‘probable’ or ‘presumed,’” officials said.

Officials also wrote that COVID-19 should be listed on a death certificate if it “played a role in the death.”

Duke’s family, of course, contests that COVID-19 didn’t have a hand in their father’s death. Jack Duke Jr. said he feels that doctors are forced to list COVID-19 as the cause of death even in cases where it may not be.

In part, it might be due to money, he said.

Under a provision in the CARES Act, the federal gov-ernment’s response to the coronavirus, hospitals receive a 20% reimbursement add-on for treating patients who have COVID-19, USA Today reported. This stipulation has caused some to question whether hospitals are diagnos-ing patients incorrectly in an attempt to drive up revenue.

Jack Duke Jr. feels that doc-tors were just following their orders.

“If a regulatory body requires us to do something, even if we disagree with it because we think it’s unsound or unreasonable, we still have to comply with it,” he said. “Doctors, hospice, care facilities and hospitals are no different.”

The Dakes are hopeful that they can get their father’s death certificate corrected for a number of reasons.

“First, it is the incorrect cause of death and currently has governmental and politi-cal consequences,” Jack Duke Jr. said. “Second, not listing Alzheimer’s as the sole cause of death is harmful to the Alzheimer’s cause, including research and fundraising, as it wrongly diminishes the toll this evil disease has on people. Third, in the future, it may be essential to know if your family genetic history had Alzheimer’s in order for you to protect your-self or to obtain preventative treatment.

“Imagine that you know your grandfather died of Alzheimer’s and not COVID-19, but you are excluded from receiving pre-ventative treatment because his death certificate says ‘COVID-19.’”

‘It’s complicated’

Under state law, the only person who can change a death certificate is the doctor who

social distancing. New Jersey has been slowly reopening, and on Monday indoor shop-ping malls were cleared to start business again.

Democratic governors in Oregon and Kansas said Monday that they would require people to wear masks. Oregon Gov. Kate Brown’s order will require people to wear face cov-erings in indoor public spaces starting Wednesday. Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly said she will issue an executive order man-dating the use of masks in stores and shops, restaurants, and in any situation where social distancing of 6 feet (2 meters) cannot be maintained, includ-ing outside. The order goes into effect Friday.

“The evidence could not be clearer: Wearing a mask is not only safe, but it is necessary to avoid another shutdown,” Kelly said.

Elsewhere around the world, Britain reimposed lockdown restrictions on the city of Leicester after a spike in cases, ordering the closing of schools along with stores that do not sell essential goods.

India set another record with a one-day total of 20,000 newly confirmed infections.

Several Indian states have reim-posed partial or full lockdowns after the total number of cases jumped by nearly 100,000 in one week to about 548,000.

In China, nearly 8.3 million out of about 21 million have undergone testing in recent weeks in Beijing after an out-break centered on a wholesale market. The country reported just 12 new cases Monday, including seven in Beijing.

South Korean authorities reported 47 new cases as they struggled to curb outbreaks that have spread from Seoul to other regions. Officials said they are preparing to impose stronger social-distancing measures — including ban-ning gatherings of more than 10 people, shutting schools and halting professional sports — if the daily increase in infections doubles more than twice in a week.

In the Philippines, a Southeast Asian coronavirus hot spot with more than 35,000 confirmed infections, local officials came under fire for allowing a street parade and dance during a weekend religious festival to honor St. John the Baptist despite prohibitions against public gatherings.

certified it. In the case of Jack Duke, that’s Dr. Alexander Frank.

Frank is the vice president of the Oklahoma Medical Directors Association. He works for Long Term Care Specialists, a group that provides medical direct-ing and direct patient care to nursing homes, skilled units, and other long-term care sites. Frank declined to com-ment about Jack Duke’s health or medical history, citing fed-eral and state laws protecting patients’ medical records and rights.

In listing a person’s cause of death as COVID-19, Frank said doctors are bound to follow guidelines from federal health officials. While doctors may not necessarily agree with all the regulations they’re told to follow, they must abide by them, he said. Frank said doc-tors have to list COVID-19 on a death certificate if the deceased person tested positive for it. If they had COVID-19 and were documented as a recovery, though, that would be an excep-tion, he said.

“It’s an expectation, I believe, that we have to report a death as COVID-related,” Frank said. “We have to err on the side of — that it is related. I had a patient, COVID positive. We never were able to get that second negative because she passed in hospice from an invasive head and neck cancer. The head and neck cancer killed her. She was never even really fed well. They said she was part of the asymp-tomatic group.

“Whether it’s fair or unfair, we’re following the guidelines we’re given.”

Frank said he will not, how-ever, list a person’s cause of death as COVID-19 if the virus is simply a probable cause.

“I have not done that,” he said. “Unless they’re positive tested, we don’t do that.”

Frank said he doesn’t fault medical providers for trying to do what they feel necessary to save lives. He also said that, even if a person didn’t appear to have been harmed by the coronavirus, COVID-19 can still take a negative toll on the body.

“If someone went to the hos-pital, they had to be sick enough to be sent to the hospital,” he said. “What they look like after stabilization does not mean they didn’t have significant ill-ness. And we don’t know since it’s a vascular thing. I could tell you that the majority of people I see die from COVID — we don’t get far enough in the diagnostic process to have the gory details, pathology. ... It’s complicated.”

Although hospitals do receive more money for treating COVID-19 patients, Frank said those higher payments are justi-fied. Hospitals have to use more personal protective equipment when treating those patients, and they have to allocate staff-ing resources toward them.

Nursing homes do not receive

a higher reimbursement for treating those with COVID-19. But they do receive higher reim-bursements when caring for patients who need treatments like physical therapy, wound care and injections. These are considered “skilled” needs.

In response to the pandemic, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services approved waivers designed to keep elderly patients from being exposed to the coronavirus in places like hospitals. Patients with skilled needs normally have to stay in a hospital for three nights before going to a nursing home. Under CMS’s 1135 waiver, though, patients can go directly to a nursing home, avoiding the trip to the hospital.

“There’s been a bunch of waivers,” he said. “There’s the 1135 wavier from CMS that allows us to ‘skill’ people with-out a hospitalization. They loosened that so that we could keep people out of the hospital and out of the COVID environ-ment. It was an excellent thing.”

In that case, nursing homes receive a higher Medicare Part A reimbursement, but they also have to provide a higher level of care to patients.

“I think it all evens out in the wash,” Frank said.

Hospices also do not make money for treating patients with COVID-19, as patients who enter hospice care already are battling a termi-nal illness.

“Hospices don’t make more money for COVID-19 diag-noses,” he said. “It’s just an approved diagnosis because people are going to die, and saving their life from COVID when they already are termi-nal is silly. ... It’s better to talk to the family, ‘What would you like?’ We don’t want Mom or Dad to suffer. They are the pri-mary decision maker on that. We are facilitators of health care.”

And facilitating health care goes beyond treat-ing patients, he said. It also includes helping families move on after a loved one dies. Medical providers have a duty to help patients’ fami-lies, Frank said.

Families previously have called him and asked him to add other diagnoses to death certificates, and he’s willing to listen to families who feel that a death certificate needs to be amended.

“I can speak for everyone in my group, Long Term Care Specialists, that if someone has a concern, we will talk about it, and we will find any way that we can to rectify something,” he said. “We’re not there to make families more stressed or hurt them. Sometimes, just dialoging about it helps. No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care, and the best therapeutic relationship is just that: It’s a relationship of trust.”