

COLUMN ONE

Health law gives a boost to civil rights

By NOAM N. LEVEY
REPORTING FROM
WEST MEMPHIS, ARK.

Dr. Susan Ward-Jones observed something remarkable not long after the East Arkansas Family Health Center opened a new clinic in this small city by the Mississippi River. “People used to come in unkempt, sloppily dressed. They look better now,” said Ward-Jones, the clinic’s director. “I think people have a new pride in themselves. Maybe they see we’re doing better and they say, ‘I’ll try to do better, too.’”

With a two-story glass atrium and soaring brushed metal portico, the clinic — whose patients are mostly poor and African American — has nearly twice as many exam rooms as the health center’s old location in a cramped storefront down the road. Nine dental suites, a pharmacy and a state-of-the-art demonstration kitchen branch off the sun-dappled atrium. A shaded exercise track winds through a stand of tall oaks out back.

It opened in 2014, thanks to the Affordable Care Act, which also helped thousands of the clinic’s patients get health insurance.

A decade after President Obama signed what became known as Obamacare, health centers such as this one and the coverage that

[See **Obamacare**, A8]



CARLOS BECERRA Getty Images

IN CARACAS, Venezuela, life was already miserable before the pandemic. Scavenging is a necessity for many amid food shortages and inflation in the nation, long roiled by protests against the president.

Extreme poverty may be pandemic’s heaviest toll

Specter of hunger looms in wake of global economic devastation

By KATE LINTHICUM,
NABIH BULOS AND ANA IONOVA

RIO DE JANEIRO — It seemed like Silvanah Lima was finally getting ahead.

Born and raised in Brazil’s drought-ridden northeast, she moved with her partner to Rio de Janeiro in 2018, in search of work. He was hired as a janitor; she began selling meals on the street, and soon they were bringing in \$280 a month — enough to start saving to one day build a house back home.

The novel coronavirus pushed that dream out of reach. Lima, who has diabetes and heart problems, putting her at higher risk of dying if she contracts the virus, stopped working once the pandemic took hold in her sprawling slum, known as the City of God.

Now it seems that if the coronavirus doesn’t kill her, hunger may. “We have to pay the rent, and we don’t have the money,” said Lima, 48. “I haven’t even been able to buy beans.”

The economic devastation the pandemic wreaks on the ultra-poor could ultimately kill more people than

the virus itself.

The United Nations predicts that a global recession will reverse a three-decade trend in rising living standards and plunge as many as 420 million people into extreme poverty, defined as earning less than \$2 a day.

As for the 734 million people already there, the economic tsunami will make it harder for them to ever climb out.

“I feel like we’re watching a slow-motion train wreck as it moves through the world’s most fragile countries,” said Nancy Lindborg, president

[See **Poverty**, A4]

Bunk beds for farm laborers? Fruit prices may depend on issue

By RICHARD READ

YAKIMA, Wash. — The price and availability of apples in grocery stores this fall could come down to a critical question on the farm: whether migrant workers should sleep in bunk beds.

Each spring, as many as 30,000 farm laborers — most of them from Mexico — begin arriving in Washington state on guest worker visas and live in close quarters in housing that employers are required to provide. A typical room has two bunk beds.

The coronavirus crisis has thrown the system into

disarray, with public health officials and the union representing the workers warning that the sleeping arrangement could spread infections.

But farmers say banning employees from sleeping in top bunks — as the state has proposed — would force them to cut their workforces in half and drive many into bankruptcy, devastating the region’s economy and the nation’s fruit supply.

Washington produces 65% of the country’s \$2.4-billion fresh apple crop, as well as cherries, peaches, berries and other fruit.

[See **Farms**, A7]



WALLY SKALIJ Los Angeles Times

A BOY LEAPS into Lake Havasu on a recent hot day. The tourist town of Lake Havasu City has seen an influx of Californians during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ramped up about this lake

Stir-crazy Californians flocking to Arizona’s Havasu

By LAURA NEWBERRY

Every year, the seasons in Lake Havasu City, Ariz., are marked by the arrival and departure of tourists.

The retirees with second homes fly down in the fall and leave in April, right around the time spring breakers descend upon Lake Havasu, the 19,300-acre turquoise oasis that straddles the California-Arizona border.

This spring, though, there were no college revelers shotgunning cans of beer on pontoon boats. The lake was relatively quiet in March as the usual visitors self-quarantined at home. The city’s economy, heavily reliant on tourism, suffered.

And then came the Californians.

“Every weekend has been like a holiday weekend on the lake,” said Robert Koerber, an air conditioning contractor in Lake Havasu City.

As much of California closed down its beaches in the face of the deadly COVID-19 pandemic, Golden Staters looking for freedom and respite from the heat have flocked to Lake Havasu.

Friday through Sunday, trucks hitched with boats have congested city streets, with as many as 70 boats waiting for a single ramp, locals said. Gas stations have sold out of fuel and beer. Ho-

[See **Havasu**, A10]



RICHARD READ Los Angeles Times

FARMERS in Washington state are debating how to house workers safely without bankrupting businesses.

GOP’s grip on Senate may be at risk

Republicans fear that Democrats are gaining ground — and donors — as the coronavirus reshapes campaigns.

By JANET HOOK

WASHINGTON — Republican control of the U.S. Senate could become another casualty of the coronavirus crisis.

The pandemic has upended 2020 politics — not just for President Trump — and his party increasingly worries that the turmoil has given Democrats fundraising and strategic advantages that put Republicans’ 53-47 Senate majority at risk.

Even as Republicans struggle to avoid being dragged down by Trump’s unsteady handling of the COVID-19 response, they’re facing an enthusiasm gap, at least among donors, that favors Democrats.

Fundraising reports show that Senate Democratic challengers far surpassed their Republican opponents in the first three months of 2020 — in large part because of superior online fundraising, much of it from small-dollar donors.

Online fundraising is a crucial tool for raking in donations while social distancing rules are in place, and Republicans, who were once confident of holding their Senate majority, concede that they’ve fallen behind.

“The Senate is absolutely at risk of going Democratic,” said Josh Holmes, a top GOP strategist and confidant of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.). “Democrats are still way ahead when it comes to digital fundraising. It will get worse. It will get a lot worse, because there is no easy way to play catch-up.”

The impact of the health emergency is visible across

[See **Republicans**, A7]

Outlook worsens within California

Concerns grow that virus cases and deaths could spiral. CALIFORNIA, B1

Mnuchin warns of economic damage

Treasury secretary says jobs picture will darken in short term. NATION, A6

Botched raid lifts Maduro in public eye

Amphibious assault on the Venezuelan coast becomes a rallying cry for leader. WORLD, A3

Weather
Clouds clearing.
L.A. Basin: 73/55. B8

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Californians are swarming Lake Havasu

[Havasu, from A1] tels have filled up.

While many locals are grateful for the tourism dollars amid a global downturn, some are worried that the crowds could cause a rise in coronavirus cases and overwhelm the city's only hospital, which has just 16 ICU beds for its 55,000 residents. "I think people are getting bored of the shutdown so they think it should just be over, and they're coming here to explore," said resident Cory Hall. "I really wish they would stay away right now."

Cal Sheehy, the city's mayor, on April 3 told visitors to do just that, three days after Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey issued statewide stay-at-home orders.

"Lake Havasu City has always been a special place for visitors, but we ask that you stay home to protect the safety of our citizens and you during the COVID-19 pandemic," Sheehy said in a statement.

That message has done little to deter tourists.

Sandbar Powersports manager Jason Melton said that the boat rental shop's phone has been ringing non-stop since it reopened May 4, when some businesses in Arizona were allowed to resume walk-up services.

The shop, which usually rents two or three boats a day in the spring, has more than doubled its business during the first week of May. Most renters are from California.

"A lot of our customers

are freaking out because they need to get out of the house," Melton said. "They can't take it anymore."

Lars Negrette, a 30-year-old machinist in San Bernardino, has planned a vacation with two other families at Lake Havasu for early June. He visits the lake a few times each summer with his young daughter and girlfriend, and he doesn't see why this year should be any different.

His family's lake routine will be the same as always. They'll stay at their usual motel. They'll stop at Subway, gas up the boat and get on the water early. They'll wakeboard and tube.

Negrette believes he had the virus in December. He's not worried about potential exposure at the lake. "I'm over this whole thing," he said of the pandemic.

Residents were most concerned by the influx of tourists in early April, when more than 4,200 people signed a Change.org petition to close Lake Havasu.

Khamranie Persaud, a doctor, helped organize the petition after it became clear that the visitors weren't just visiting the lake and going home. They were staying overnight, buying ice at crowded launch ramps and stocking up at grocery stores, taking their food and supplies back to larger cities.

Persaud didn't actually want the lake closed, she said. She knows that the lake, fed by the Colorado River, is a federal waterway.



Photographs by WALLY SKALN Los Angeles Times

BOATS pass through a channel on Lake Havasu. While many locals are grateful for tourism amid an economic downturn, some worry that visitors could cause a rise in COVID-19 cases and overwhelm the city's hospital.

The city can't restrict access to it. And it's easy enough for people to socially distance while recreating on the vast reservoir; many people made this point in an opposing petition to keep the lake and channel accessible.

"A lot of people don't want visitors here, but I don't think they should restrict movements of their fellow American citizens because they're afraid," said Koerber, who signed the petition.

Ultimately, Persaud wanted to raise awareness about the potential danger of congregating in areas near the lake.

"As a physician, I always err on the side of caution because at the end of the day, the worst-case outcome here is death," she said. "And you don't want to put a large



THE MAYOR of Lake Havasu City urged tourists to stay away, but his message went largely unheeded.

amount of people, especially our population, in a higher-risk situation than is necessary."

A third of Lake Havasu

City's population is older than 65, compared with 18% in all of Arizona, according to U.S. census data.

The conservative-lean-

Virus bedevils diabetes, kidney patients

Facing new hurdles amid pandemic, they have had to change their medical routines to avoid exposure.

By ARIT JOHN

After nearly six years waiting for a kidney transplant, Amar Abu-Samrah found out late last year that she was near the top of the list. In mid-March, the coronavirus outbreak forced the transplant center to postpone most procedures.

Since then, Abu-Samrah, 24, has been trying to limit her potential for exposure to the novel coronavirus as much as possible: She's doing more doctor appointments over the phone and avoiding hospital waiting rooms when she goes in for lab work. The Westminster resident, who lives with her parents, is even limiting contact with family members to mealtimes, knowing her kidney failure puts her at high risk if she contracts COVID-19.

"It makes me anxious," she said. "I'm like, OK, how much longer do I have to wait?"

The coronavirus outbreak has placed an additional emotional and safety burden on people with underlying health conditions like chronic kidney disease, diabetes and high blood pressure. The pandemic has pushed routine doctor visits to telemedicine and made outings for picking up medicine, getting blood drawn or dialysis treatment yet another risk for exposure.

Stay-at-home orders and social distancing guidelines have caused many surgeries and in-patient treatments to be postponed. The University Medical Center of Southern Nevada, where Abu-Samrah hopes to get a kidney transplant, stopped performing transplants for all but the hardest to match individuals in mid-March to protect the health of its immunocompromised patients. The center resumed transplants this week, according to a spokesman.

Early data suggest that people with underlying health conditions who contract the coronavirus are more likely to be hospitalized and suffer adverse outcomes. An April 22 report

published by the Journal of the American Medical Assn. found that, among COVID-19 patients admitted to 12 New York City metropolitan area hospitals from March 1 to April 4, 33.8% had diabetes and 56.6% had high blood pressure.

"People with diabetes are so aware of the risks that they face in daily life with different types of conditions or things like coronavirus," said Mila Clarke Buckley, who runs the Hangry Woman blog on living with diabetes. "While it's scary and we've never seen this before, we're all just trying to do the best we can in this really stressful situation, and that's all that we can do at this point."

Clarke Buckley, a 30-year-old Houston resident who was diagnosed four years ago, said her blood sugar levels have been trending higher than usual because of stress and a lack of sleep. Having to adapt her diet because of shortages at the grocery store hasn't helped, but she said she's focused on managing her levels to reduce the risk of complications that might require a hospital visit.

Her doctors' office is open and observing social distancing practices, and Texas has started a phased reopening, but she said she plans to stick to telemedicine appointments, even if it means missing or postponing her quarterly bloodwork.

"I know that that comes with the risk of not getting all of my labs done," she said. "But especially because Texas is so lax about it, I just don't feel safe going outside or being in a place where I know there might be a lot of people."

Many clinics, including the Joslin Diabetes Center in Boston, have transitioned to conducting routine visits, such as those to discuss lab results or refill prescriptions, over the phone or by videoconference. But the center is still prepared to see people in person when necessary. If, for example, a person with diabetes experiences changes in eyesight — such as floaters and blurry or obstructed vision — those could be caused by a burst blood vessel and must be treated immediately to prevent loss of vision, said Dr. Robert Gabbay, the chief medical officer and senior vice president of the center.

And although some questions can be answered in a phone call, teaching newly diagnosed patients how to inject insulin requires a personal touch that can't be replicated digitally.

"Although they can watch a video, it's not quite the same, because there's sort of an emotional component, where having that connection to somebody and trust to guide them on the process is important," Gabbay said.

Other crucial services have continued, with enhanced safety precautions. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that about 15% of American adults, or about 37 million people, have chronic kidney disease. About 500,000 with end-stage renal disease need to visit dialysis clinics three times a week for hemodialysis treatments that filter waste and extra fluids from their blood. A much smaller number of patients undergo nightly peritoneal dialysis treatments at home using a catheter in their abdomens.

Skipping some of those appointments could lead to complications like high potassium levels in the blood or heart failure that would require hospitalization, said Dr. Joseph Vassalotti, the National Kidney Foundation's chief medical officer.

"In this time, when people are trying to stay home most of the time and pay attention to social distancing, we do have to emphasize the importance of dialysis treatments as being part of maintaining health," he said.

At clinics run by DaVita, one of two major for-profit dialysis centers, patients are screened before entering the building, and people with confirmed or suspected coronavirus infections are treated in separate areas. Everyone in the clinic must wear a new mask and gloves, and patients are no longer allowed to have visitors during their sessions, which last about four hours.

Even with the new precautions, employees at DaVita and other clinics say there have been shortages of personal protective equipment and a lack of transparency about cases at clinics, said Steve Trossman, a spokesman for the SEIU-UHW, a union that represents healthcare workers.

The new process is "tedious, but it's necessary," said

Andrew Cunningham, a 69-year-old from Laguna Woods, who has been on hemodialysis since being diagnosed with kidney failure in 2018.

He said he recently joked to one of the nurses at the DaVita clinic he visits near his home that he felt like calling in sick to dialysis that morning. "I said, 'I forgot, I don't have any sick days,'" he said. "We have to go. If you miss two, three sessions, it could be deadly."

Cunningham is part of a kidney disease support group based out of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest that meets twice a month. The coronavirus outbreak has forced the group to move meetings to Zoom, and attendance has doubled at a recent session, said Helen Mills, who founded the group nine years ago with her husband, Bill.

The group includes people whose kidney failure was caused by autoimmune diseases, polycystic kidney disease and diabetes, as well as members like Bill Mills, 84, who are now living with transplants.

Several attendees said they rarely go out, except for doctor visits, and rely on their family and friends to run errands. People with kidney failure receiving dialysis and kidney transplant recipients have weakened immune systems and higher risks of infection, and many family members are keeping that in mind as they try to limit their own exposure to the virus.

"The spouses of all the transplant people that we know are staying as quarantined, almost as quarantined, as the patient themselves," Helen Mills, 71, said. "It doesn't do Bill any good to stay home if I'm going to go out without a mask and bring germs. So we're both exceptionally cautious."

Jacquie Woolsey, 71, said she's been avoiding crowds during the flu season since 2019, when she spent five days in a hospital with pneumonia. Woolsey, a member of Mills' group who received a kidney transplant in 2016, said she and her husband have largely stayed home and are sanitizing the items they bring into the house. When her husband does run errands, he leaves his shoes outside and sprays them with alcohol.

It's unclear when people with underlying health con-

ditions will be able to return to their normal routines. Several states, including California, have started to loosen restrictions under their stay-at-home orders, but there are still gaps in testing and contact-tracing capacity. Without a vaccine, epidemiologists estimate that about 70% of a population would need to contract COVID-19 to develop herd immunity and protect everyone else, but it's unclear how long immunity would last, if it exists at all.

Given the uncertainty about the future of a vaccine, people who are most at risk of complications from the coronavirus will probably have to decide for themselves whether they feel safe in reopened states. Woolsey, who lives in Orange, said she wants the government to reopen the state and trust her to protect herself.

"I like to be treated like I've got a brain, that I'm not going to go out and do something stupid," she said. "I know I'm a senior. I know I have a lowered immunity system. I'm fully aware of that."

Sharon Abar, another member of the group, said she wouldn't feel "completely comfortable" until there is a vaccine or a better testing infrastructure. "At least there has to be some kind of base line of knowing who's infected and who's not, and we don't have that," said the 60-year-old Long Beach resident.

Abar, whose renal failure was caused by polycystic kidney disease, said she's concerned about the number of people not wearing masks. "The masks aren't so much for us; it's to protect other people," she said. "I guess they don't really care about protecting other people, and I feel bad about that."

Abu-Samrah said she's also hoping for a vaccine, and after seeing people in her area and nearby Huntington Beach push back against stay-at-home orders, she's not sure she'll feel at ease once the state reopens. And if she does get scheduled for a kidney transplant soon, she's worried the anti-rejection medication she'd need to take would weaken her immune system more than her nightly peritoneal dialysis treatments at home.

"You're going to have to pick and choose, I guess," she said.

'I think people are getting bored of the shutdown so they think it should just be over, and they're coming here to explore. I really wish they would stay away right now.'

— CORY HALL, a resident of Lake Havasu City

ing city hasn't seen a spike in cases so far. As of Sunday, 45 residents have tested positive for the virus and four have died of COVID-19 complications.

Few full-time residents go to the lake on busy weekends, so Persaud speculates that they are somewhat insulated from the crowds.

"Are these people on the lake going back to their home state and testing positive there?" Persaud asked. "We don't know."

One of the lake's most popular launch ramps is at Lake Havasu State Park, 2.5 miles of white-sand shoreline. The park is admitting 2,500 people for day use, half of its usual capacity. All visitors are given a handout reminding them of CDC guidelines: Limit groups to 10 people or fewer, socially distance, cover your face when sneezing and coughing.

"We still have to ask people to separate," said park manager Dan Roddy. "It's difficult because a lot of times they're family members, three cars full who've come together in the park and you gotta split them up."

Most are compliant, Roddy said. But 20 or so have refused to disperse and were asked to leave the park. The manager said he's surprised by the number of visitors who don't seem to understand why the rules are in place.

Sheehy, the mayor, said that although he could have done more to keep visitors away, such as shutting the city-owned launch ramp or closing certain roads that lead to the lake, doing so would be a "slippery slope."

"That's not a direction I think we should take," said Sheehy, who is also the general manager of a lakefront hotel. Sheehy closed the lake's public restrooms for a few weeks and reopened them last week.

Complicating the matter is that many of the visitors have second homes in Lake Havasu City.

One of those part-time residents is Lara Martin of Riverside. Lake Havasu is an escape for Martin, her husband and her 12-year-old daughter, particularly during the pandemic. Arizona is a bit more "laid back," the high school business teacher said.

For example, Riverside residents are required to wear masks when they go outside. But Martin has noticed that hardly anyone in Lake Havasu City covers their face.

Martin said she won't let fear keep her from enjoying the lake.

"It can happen to anyone, unfortunately," she said of contracting the virus. "Anyone can also be hit by a car or drunk driver. Life is not guaranteed at a certain age."