VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. I'm David Byrd.

President Donald Trump spent part of Thursday trying to put a positive spin on his decision to ban travelers from Europe because of the coronavirus outbreak. But as AP's Sagar Meghani reports, some of what the president has been saying is not true.

He says it's another way to keep more virus cases out of the country.

"If an American is coming back or anybody is coming back, we're testing. We have a tremendous testing set up where people coming in have to be tested."

That's not true nor is his statement that those who return are being forced to self-isolate.

"It's going to be a pretty strong enforcement of quarantine."

Today has seen another big market drop plus more school and sports league cancellations as fears of the virus spread though for most people, it causes only mild or moderate symptoms and the vast majority recover.

Sagar Meghani, Washington.

For Wall Street, it was its worst day since the so-called Black Monday crash of 1987. We get details from AP's Tim McGuire.

The S&P 500 has lost more than a quarter of its value since last month, 9.5 percent, on Thursday alone.

Diane Swonk, chief economist at Grant Thornton in Chicago, says investors are dismayed that the federal government can't come up with a coherent plan to combat the virus and the financial crisis it's feeding.

"The markets are screaming to Congress and to elected officials, 'We need more. We need guidance. We need to know they, you know, you wake at the real."

Swonk says President Trump and other leaders have to realize they need to work together not only in this country, but with governments and leadership around the world to protect the global economy and ease the impact of the pandemic.

I'm Tim McGuire.

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The Pentagon on Thursday confirmed the United States had carried out strikes against five Iranian-backed militia weapons storage facilities in Iraq, one day after a deadly rocket attack killed two American and one British service member.

A Pentagon statement said the United States conducted what is called defensive precision strikes against Kataib Hezbollah facilities across Iraq.

The statement said "These weapons storage facilities included facilities that housed weapons used to target U.S. and coalition troops."

The statement continued the strikes were "defensive, proportional and in direct response to the threat posed by Iranian-backed Shia militia groups."

Earlier, Defense Secretary Mark Esper had said President Trump had authorized him to take action against those who carried out Wednesday night's attack.

Two candidates running to replace President Donald Trump, former Vice President Joe Biden and Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, have both criticized the president's response to the coronavirus outbreak in the United States.

Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden said that Trump's assertion Wednesday that it is a foreign virus is just plain wrong.

"Public fears are being compounded by a pervasive lack of trust in this president, fueled by the adversarial relationship with the truth that he continues to have."

Speaking in Vermont, Sanders said that the administration and Congress need to take the lead in fighting the outbreak.

"... we must immediately convene an emergency bipartisan authority of experts to support and direct the response that is comprehensive, compassionate and based first and foremost on science and facts."

A debate between Biden and Sanders scheduled for Sunday night in Arizona was moved to CNN's Washington studios with no audience because of concerns over the coronavirus.

The flame for the Tokyo Olympics was lit Thursday at the birthplace of the ancient games in a pared-down ceremony because of the coronavirus.

International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach noted the "difficult circumstances" created by the outbreak, but stressed the IOC's commitment to the success of the Tokyo Games.

"Nineteen weeks before the opening ceremony, we are strengthened in this commitment by the many authorities and sports organizations around the world who are taking so many significant measures to contain the spread of the coronavirus."

The IOC has stressed the July 24 to August 9 games will go ahead as planned and urged all athletes to continue to prepare for the Olympics.

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