VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. Via remote, I'm Marissa Melton.

U.S. President Donald Trump said today Asian Americans should not be blamed for the spread of coronavirus. He made the statement in a news conference and also on a tweet.

It was a change of tone for the president. Mr. Trump himself has been criticized recent weeks for referring to COVID-19 or the coronavirus as the "Chinese virus."

The United States is considering all options to help citizens return home from countries that have suspended air travel or closed their borders to stem the spread of the coronavirus.

U.S. officials said Monday thousands of Americans are believed to be stranded abroad and are desperate to return to the United States amid the COVID-19 global pandemic.

U.S. citizens are encouraged to first use commercial flights to return home while they are still available, a senior official said. After that, military aircrafts and private charters through the congressional authorized special funds for unexpected emergencies will be used to help them return.

In another briefing, U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper said the U.S. military is always available for evacuating Americans trapped abroad but that the military is a less likely role than commercial options.

A fresh week on Wall Street got off to a bad start Monday after the Senate failed again to pass an economic stimulus package to help those hurt by the coronavirus outbreak.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped nearly 600 points, shedding 3 percent. The S&P 500 was also off 3 percent, while the NASDAQ was down a fraction.

All buying and selling was done electronically.

And the Associated Press is reporting people have found a new way to keep spirits up as the entire world copes with the pandemic - they're putting up outdoor Christmas lights to spread a little cheer from a safe distance.

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The U.S. Senate failed for a second time Monday to advance a massive $2 trillion economic aid package to send money to most Americans and many businesses that have been severely impacted by the deadly coronavirus.

Before the vote, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell chided Democrats for trying to add provisions not directly related to the coronavirus pandemic.

The aid package would send money to most Americans and many businesses that have been impacted by the outbreak.

Democrats say the legislation is weighted [too heavily] too heavily to favor businesses over workers, hospitals and health care professionals. [American] Republicans accused Democrats of obstructing the aid at a time Americans need it the most.

The USNS Mercy hospital ship has left its San Diego port for Los Angeles Monday to help support the city's response to an overwhelming number of coronavirus cases.

Defense Secretary Mark Esper told reporters at the Pentagon Monday that the Defense Department was working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency - that's FEMA - to set the conditions for the Mercy's arrival in Los Angeles later this week.

U.S. military hospital ships and field hospitals sent to overwhelmed cities are not meant to treat coronavirus, but instead to treat other patients, freeing up local hospital beds and doctors for coronavirus care.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo arrived Monday in Kabul on an urgent visit to try to move forward a U.S. peace deal signed last month with the Taliban. The trip comes despite the coronavirus pandemic, at a time when world leaders and statesmen are curtailing official travel.

Since the signing of the deal, the peace process has stalled amid political turmoil in Afghanistan. The country's leaders have been squabbling over who was the September presidential election, incumbent Ashraf Ghani or his challenger Abdullah Abdullah

The two men held dueling inauguration ceremonies earlier this month.

Ghani has been ruled the victor of the September election.

Japan's prime minister announced Monday his country will require a 14-day quarantine to all visitors from the United States amid an escalating number of coronavirus infections around the globe.

The quarantine requirement includes Japanese and American citizens. It'll go into effect on Thursday and last through the end of April.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who's been in quarantine since discovering she was exposed to the virus last week, has tested negative so far for coronavirus.

She is expected to undergo additional testing and she has been in self-quarantine.

Government sources said Monday that Merkel's cabinet has agreed to an economic package to support the German economy.

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