VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. Via remote, I'm Diane Roberts.

Whether the Trump administration can hurry a safe coronavirus vaccine into wide production has become a focal point of a 2020 election campaign, in which polls show Democratic nominee Joe Biden leading Republican and current President Donald Trump.

At a briefing, President Trump says federal agencies including the military will be ready to distribute the coronavirus vaccine when it's ready and he predicts sometime in October or November though many health officials disagree with that timeframe.

"We'll be all set so as soon as it's given the go-ahead - they're doing trials, as you know - so as soon as it's given the go-ahead, we will get it out, defeat the virus."

Joe Biden said Wednesday President Trump's refusal to take key steps to tackle the coronavirus pandemic, like instituting national guidelines on social distancing and testing, should disqualify him for the presidency.

The Democratic nominee also accused his election rival of politicizing the vaccine development process and said he does not trust the president's public statements.

At a news conference [wenday] Wednesday, Biden says trust scientists working on a vaccine but he does not trust the president.

"I trust vaccines, I trust scientists, but I don't trust Donald Trump."

The Federal Reserve pledged Wednesday to keep interest rates near zero until inflation is on track to overshoot the U.S. central bank's 2 percent target, a bold new promise aimed at bringing millions of out-of-work Americans back to the labor market.

Forecasts by central bankers showed that would not happen until at least 2024.

The new guidance marks the start of a vigorous monetary policy debate as the Fed shifts from a crisis-era focus on keeping markets afloat during the coronavirus pandemic to managing what it now sees as a recovery.

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South Africa will reopen its borders to most countries next month, the president said Wednesday, part of a wider easing of anti-coronavirus measures announced as figures continue to improve.

The continent's most industrialized economy closed its borders at the start of a strict nationwide lockdown March 27 to limit the spread of the virus.

President Cyril Ramaphosa said Wednesday most remaining rules will be rolled back September 20, and that international travel would "gradually and cautiously" resume October 1.

In his weekly general audience Wednesday at the Vatican, Pope Francis said the coronavirus pandemic has shown there is a link between people's health and the state of the environment.

In his comments to his largely masked and socially distanced crowd, Francis spoke about the interconnectedness of people and the planet. He said to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, quote, "We need to look after and care for each other. And we must support those who care for the weakest, the sick and the elderly." end quote

The pope said people must also extend this care to what he called, quote, "our common home - to the Earth and to every creature." end quote

The U.S. Justice Department has charged seven defendants in connection with cyber intrusions, involving a wide range of businesses, companies and people.

At a Justice Department news coherence, Deputy Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen says they are part of a cyber criminal scheme attacking more than 100 companies and institutions worldwide.

"... we have unsealed three indictments that, collectively, charge five Chinese nationals with computer hacking and charge two Malaysian nationals for helping some of those hackers target victims and sell the fruits of their hacking."

The alleged hacking effort from early 2014 until August 2020 targeted thousands of computers, including the networks of several companies in the $1 billion video gaming industry, resulting in millions of dollars in losses, law enforcement officials said.

A top State Department official will visit Taiwan for a memorial service for the late president, defying China by making the second high-ranking U.S. trip in as many months to the island.

The Undersecretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy and Environment is en route to Taipei for the Saturday's service, the State Department said.

The trip comes a little over a month after the U.S. Health and Human Services Minister visited highlighting Taiwan's widely praised efforts to stop the coronavirus.

And wildfires of unprecedented scope in the western part of the United States spread smoke across the nation and even into Europe Wednesday.

Dozens of fires have burned some 4.5 million acres in Oregon, California and Washington state since August. The fires have killed at least 34 people, ravaged several small towns and destroyed thousands of homes.

Via remote, I'm Diane Roberts, VOA news.