



Issues/Program List for Withers Broadcasting Paducah, Kentucky, Studios

**WREZ-FM (Metropolis, Illinois)
WZZL-FM (Reidland, Kentucky)
WGKY-FM (Wickcliffe, Kentucky)
WRJJ-FM (LaCenter, Kentucky)**

The following programs are weekly broadcasts provided as timely and pertinent information or the community needs of Paducah, Kentucky, and the surrounding region in western Kentucky and southern Illinois.

Sundays at 5:00 am, the stations air InfoTrak.

Sundays at 5:30 am, the stations are Kentucky News Connection

Weekly program information can be found on the proceeding pages.



Weekly Public Affairs Program

QUARTERLY ISSUES REPORT, APRIL-JUNE, 2020

Show # 2020-14

Date aired: Sunday, April 5, 2020 Time Aired: 5:00 AM

Gregory A. Poland, MD, Mary Lowell Leary Professor of Medicine at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN, Director of the Mayo Clinic's Vaccine Research Group, Editor-in-Chief of the medical journal Vaccine

Dr. Poland discussed the status of the coronavirus pandemic and what must happen before lockdowns and physical distancing can be eased. He offered recommendations on what to disinfect in homes, whether surgical masks are useful for the general public, what to do about summer vacation plans, and other steps to take to avoid the virus.

Issues covered:

Coronavirus

Personal Health

Government Regulations

Length: 8:59

Dan Stockdale, Licensed Healthcare Executive in seven states, Certified Nursing Home Administrator, Certified Assisted Living Administrator

Nursing homes and retirement communities have been an intense focal point for the coronavirus pandemic. Mr. Stockdale outlined the steps that nursing homes across the country have taken to protect their residents and staff. He explained what families and others can do to help during this time of social isolation.

Issues covered:

Coronavirus

Senior Citizens

Length: 8:13

Show # 2020-15

Date aired: Sunday, April 12, 2020 Time Aired: 5:00 AM

Ken Johnson, PhD, Senior Demographer at the Carsey School of Public Policy and Professor of Sociology at the University of New Hampshire

As the coronavirus pandemic spreads across the country, those living in rural areas, are increasingly threatened. Prof. Johnson said that people in rural areas are often more reliant on their neighbors than those who live in urban areas, via through such things as volunteer fire departments and shared educational resources. He said hospitals and doctors are almost always further away in rural areas. He also discussed the potential impact to agriculture and other areas of the rural economy.

Issues covered:

Coronavirus

Rural Concerns

Agriculture

Length: 8:59

Ellie Hollander, President and Chief Executive Officer of Meals on Wheels America

Ms. Hollander talked about the effect the coronavirus pandemic on Meals on Wheels and the elderly citizens they serve. She said for many elderly clients, Meals on Wheels volunteers are the only people a senior may see in a given day, so families often depend on them to monitor their loved one's day to day welfare. She explained how someone can volunteer or make a cash donation to help.

Issues covered:

Coronavirus
Senior Citizens
Volunteerism

Length: 8:13

Show # 2020-16

Date aired: Sunday, April 19, 2020 Time Aired: 5:00 AM

David Spiegel, MD, Willson Professor and Associate Chair of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University, Director of the Stanford Center on Stress and Health.

A recent poll found that half of Americans are now suffering mental health issues as a result of the economic shutdown and coronavirus pandemic. Dr. Spiegel outlined the multiple challenges faced by every American during the crisis. He said he expects the mental health effects to be a long-term issue, including increased rates of suicide. He offered tips for coping.

Issues covered:

Mental Health
Suicide
Coronavirus

Length: 10:14

Maureen Mahoney, Policy Analyst, Consumer Reports

From fake cures for coronavirus to phishing emails and phony websites, scammers are taking advantage of consumers' fear as the virus spreads. Ms. Mahoney talked about the way authorities have handled a recent wave of robocalls. She explained how consumers can recognize the signs of a spoofed phone number, or a text or social media message sent by a scammer.

Issues covered:

Crime
Consumer Matters
Coronavirus

Length: 7:00

Show # 2020-17

Date aired: Sunday, April 26, 2020 Time Aired: 5:00 AM

Amy David, PhD, Clinical Assistant Professor of Supply Chain and Operations Management at Purdue University

As store shelves emptied and consumers became frustrated at being unable to get basic supplies during the coronavirus pandemic, many blamed hoarders. Dr. David explained the real reasons behind the shortages, and how the supply chain for food and most other products is much more complex and brittle than most people realize. She talked about ways to build flexibility and redundancies into a supply chain.

Issues covered:
Consumer Matters
Coronavirus

Length: 10:03

Brian Walsh, Certified Financial Planner at SoFi, a personal finance company

Mr. Walsh outlined prudent financial steps Americans should take to protect themselves during the COVID-19 economic tailspin. He discussed scenarios for those who are unemployed, those who are worried about their jobs and those who have received stimulus checks.

Issues covered:
Personal Finance
Government Stimulus
Consumer Matters
Coronavirus

Length: 7:17

Show # 2020-18

Date aired: Sunday, May 3, 2020 Time Aired: 5:00 AM

Rick Seaney, CEO of FareCompare.com

A recent poll found that nearly half of all Americans are ready to travel the moment the pandemic fears are over. Mr. Seaney discussed the current state of air travel. He said, although the current travel outlook is bleak with few flights in the air, there are numerous bargains for consumers who are willing to buy tickets for use later in the year.

Issues covered:
Consumer Matters
Transportation
Coronavirus

Length: 8:51

Amanda Kubista-Owen, social worker with Mayo Clinic Health System

Among the unintended consequences of government-ordered lockdowns, Ms. Kubista-Owen said cases of domestic violence and child abuse are becoming more frequent, more severe and more dangerous. She offered advice to those dealing with abusive relationships and said that resources are still available to help victims, despite the pandemic.

Issues covered:
Domestic Violence
Child Abuse
Coronavirus

Length: 8:15

Show # 2020-19

Date aired: Sunday, May 10, 2020 Time Aired: 5:00 AM

Benjamin Domb, MD, orthopedic surgeon, Founder and Medical Director of the American Hip Institute & Orthopedic Specialists in suburban Chicago

Dr. Domb said a secondary health care crisis is now brewing. He believes it threatens to be much larger than the crisis caused by COVID-19 itself, after the complete stoppage of all non-urgent procedures such as most surgeries, annual mammograms, routine blood tests and cancer screenings.

Issues covered:

**Public Health
Government
Coronavirus**

Length: 8:48

Eric Groves, Co-Founder and CEO of Alignable, a social network for local businesses

Mr. Groves shared the results of his organization's recent polling, which found that 34% of small businesses nationwide won't be able to pay their May rent in full, as a result of the government-mandated lockdowns. He said retailers, travel, restaurants and personal services businesses are suffering the most, as more than 44% of all small businesses have been shuttered. He also discussed government aid that is available to help small businesses.

Issues covered:

**Small Business/Economy
Government
Unemployment
Coronavirus**

Length: 8:25

Show # 2020-20

Date aired: Sunday, May 17, 2020 Time Aired: 5:00 AM

Lisa M. Brosseau, PhD, expert on respiratory protection and infectious diseases, Certified Industrial Hygienist, former Director of the Illinois Education and Research Center and the Director of the Center for Healthy Work, both at the University of Illinois Chicago School of Public Health

Prof. Brosseau spent decades studying the efficacy and fit of surgical masks and respirators, and the airborne transmission of infectious disease. She said there is no scientific basis for the general public to use cloth masks to prevent COVID-19. She explained why there is a great difference between the use of masks in medical settings vs going to the grocery store. She is concerned that authorities who are ordering the use of bandanas and the like are not taking the issue seriously, and that masks may cause the public to disregard physical distancing.

Issues covered:

**Public Health
Government
Coronavirus**

Length: 11:53

Prathit A. Kulkarni, MD, Infectious Diseases Section, Department of Medicine, Baylor College of Medicine

Dr. Kulkarni explained the basics of contact tracing and why experts believe it will be an effective weapon in the fight against COVID-19. He said the exact number of contact tracers hired by the government will depend on the population and severity of the outbreak in each geographic area.

Issues covered:

**Public Health
Government
Coronavirus**

Length: 5:57

Show # 2020-21

Date aired: Sunday, May 24, 2020 Time Aired: 5:00 AM

James J. Duane, Professor at Regent Law School in Virginia Beach, VA, author of "*You Have the Right to Remain Innocent*"

Prof. Duane explained the importance of the Fifth Amendment. He believes it is a constitutional right not clearly or widely understood by the average American. He explained why he advises everyone to never answer questions from law enforcement officers without legal representation. He believes when someone is wrongfully convicted of a crime they didn't commit, often it is because of information they voluntarily gave to investigators.

Issues covered:
Constitutional Rights
Legal Matters
Crime

Length: 9:03

Frank Lalli, investigative journalist, author of "*Your Best Health Care Now: Get Doctor Discounts, Save With Better Health Insurance, Find Affordable Prescriptions*"

Mr. Lalli shared his personal story: after he was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a treatable form of blood cancer, he put his reporter's instincts to work and got the wonder drug he needed at an affordable price—thousands of dollars less than he was told he would have to spend. He explained how to negotiate doctors' fees and how to search for assistance in paying for medications.

Issues covered:
Personal Health
Consumer Matters

Length: 8:11

Show # 2020-22

Date aired: Sunday, May 31, 2020 Time Aired: 5:00 AM

Paul A. Offit, MD, Director of the Vaccine Education Center and Professor of Pediatrics in the Division of Infectious Diseases at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, co-inventor of the rotavirus vaccine

Dr. Offit discussed the race for a COVID-19 vaccine. He talked about the various strategies that vaccine researchers are pursuing and what the biggest challenges are. He said the typical vaccine takes 20 years to develop. He believes the chances are low that a vaccine will be available by the end of 2020, even with unprecedented resources poured into the research. He expects that there will eventually be multiple vaccines using different approaches because of the great number of companies and government agencies engaged in research.

Issues covered:
Vaccines
Government
Coronavirus

Length: 9:15

Bob Bixby, Executive Director of the Concord Coalition, a nationwide, non-partisan, grassroots organization advocating generationally responsible fiscal policy

Mr. Bixby discussed the rapidly expanding national debt. He said although he is a deficit hawk, he believes that the US government has little choice than to pour trillions of dollars into the economy in response to the current economic tailspin. He believes the increased spending should be temporary and carefully targeted, and that taxes will almost certainly have to rise in future years. He talked about the path to recovery, once the COVID-19 crisis has passed.

Issues covered:

Economy
Government
Coronavirus

Length: 8:03

Show # 2020-23

Date aired: Sunday, June 7, 2020 Time Aired: 5:00 AM

Colleen Tressler, Senior Project Manager, Division of Consumer and Business Education, Federal Trade Commission

Health experts say that contact tracing helps to stop the spread of COVID-19. However, Ms. Tressler noted that scammers, pretending to be government contact tracers, are sending text messages that contain links to malware, to hijack an unsuspecting consumer's computer or phone. She explained how to recognize a scam and how to report one to the FTC.

Issues covered:

Consumer Matters
Crime
Coronavirus

Length: 8:42

George Zaidan, science communicator, television and web host, author *"Ingredients: The Strange Chemistry of What We Put in Us and on Us"*

Mr. Zaidan discussed the often-unsettled science surrounding food and health, and why the health aspects of processed food are so controversial. He explained how consumers can try to judge the credibility of media reports about nutrition and food. He also discussed the safety of chemicals that we use on our bodies, such as sunscreen.

Issues covered:

Nutrition
Media
Consumer Matters

Length: 8:16

Show # 2020-24

Date aired: Sunday, June 14, 2020 Time Aired: 5:00 AM

Mark Votruba, PhD, Associate Professor of Economics in the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University

Prof. Votruba was the co-author of a study that examined how layoffs and unemployment may affect crime rates. He found that workers who were let go through no fault of their own experienced a 60% jump in property crimes charges and an overall 20% increase in criminal-charge rates in the year after losing their job. He talked about the possible reasons behind this finding, and how it can be remedied.

Issues covered:

Unemployment
Crime

Length: 8:42

Allan J. Hamilton, MD, Harvard-trained brain surgeon, Regents' Professor of Neurosurgery at the University of Arizona Health Sciences Center, author of *"Younger Next Year"*: and *"Younger Next Year for Women"*

Dr. Hamilton discussed a wave of encouraging new research suggesting ways to prevent Alzheimer's disease and cognitive decline. He discussed the importance of exercise in generating the growth of

new brain cells, and said that it can even result in significant increases in IQ. He explained how women's brains age differently than men, and why preventative steps are even more important for women.

Issues covered:
Alzheimer's disease
Physical Fitness
Aging

Length: 8:16

Show # 2020-25

Date aired: Sunday, June 21, 2020 Time Aired: 5:30 AM

Philip Moeller, author of *"Get What's Yours for Medicare: Maximize Your Coverage, Minimize Your Costs"*

Health costs are the biggest unpredictable expense for older Americans, who are turning 65 at the rate of 10,000 a day. While Medicare guarantees them affordable health insurance, few Americans know what Medicare covers and what it doesn't, what it costs, and when to sign up. Mr. Moeller explained why Medicare has become so confusing, and how people approaching retirement can understand these complex and important choices.

Issues covered:
Medicare
Senior Citizens
Healthcare

Length: 9:13

Caitlin Shetterly, author of *"Modified: GMOs and the Threat to Our Food, Our Land, Our Future"*

GMO products are among the most consumed and the least understood substances in the United States today. Ms. Shetterly shared her personal story of how GMOs affect her family's health. She explained why consumers should learn more about GMOs and why organic foods can be a sensible choice.

Issues covered:
Food Safety
Personal Health
Consumer Matters

Length: 8:01

Show # 2020-26

Date aired: Sunday, June 28, 2020 Time Aired: 5:00 AM

Suze Orman, personal finance expert, author of *"The Ultimate Retirement Guide for 50+: Winning Strategies to Make Your Money Last a Lifetime,"* host of the "Women & Money" podcast

Ms. Orman discussed strategies to save for retirement, especially in the aftermath of the economic upheavals caused by the coronavirus lockdowns. She explained why she believes that Americans should plan to work until age 70. She also explained why those saving for retirement should be using Roth IRAs and 401ks to save for retirement, rather than traditional IRAs.

Issues covered:
Retirement Planning
Personal Finance
Consumer Matters

Length: 10:30

David Geary, PhD, Curators Distinguished Professor of Psychological Sciences in the College of Arts and Science at The University Of Missouri

Significantly fewer men than women are attending college or pursuing other forms of post-high school education. Prof. Geary led a study that found the primary cause is boys' poor reading skills in adolescence. He said the reading gap between boys and girls is detectable from the very beginning of schooling, even in preschool.

Issues covered:

Education

Literacy

Length: 6:37

4/5

Social Distancing Doesn't Have to Be Anti-Social

Nadia Ramlagan

By Fran Korten

Broadcast version by Nadia Ramlagan

Reporting for the YES! Media-Kentucky News Connection Collaboration

FRANKFORT, Ky. -- Over the past two weeks, a new term has erupted in everyday speech. Social Distancing. That's what we are all supposed to do. But that's exactly what we should NOT do.

What we should do is practice physical distancing. Yes, we should not shake hands, gather in crowds, hug, or go to work when sick. But socially, now is the time to be close. And with our technology, we can do it.

For the past two Sundays, my church has held its services on YouTube. I was skeptical but found it works amazingly well. Not only do we hear a sermon and readings, we sing together, individuals offer their joys and concerns on the chat feature, and others send their sympathies or congratulations. At the most recent service, we switched to Zoom for the "coffee hour" after the service for conversations. We are staying close as a community just when we need it most.

My kids live far away, but I'm practicing social closeness with them, too. I'm used to many phone calls with my younger daughter. Now we do them on Zoom-it's like sitting in the same room. My older daughter likes to text-including with photographs and videos. We stay close.

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, NextDoor, email, blogs. All these are ways to stay in contact and support one another. Even old-fashioned letters or cards strengthen the connection.

At this time of enormous stress, fear, and uncertainty, social isolation is dangerous to our well-being. Although we can't experience closeness through jostling each other at a game, applauding together at a play, lingering over an intimate meal at a restaurant, we can use every tool available to stay socially close. We need each other now more than ever while staying physically distant.

This story was produced with original reporting from Fran Korten for YES! Media. Read the full story here: www.yesmagazine.org/opinion/2020/03/17/coronavirus-social-distancing.

4/12

April 7, 2020

Available files: mp3 wav jpg

Uninsured Urged to Apply for Temporary Medicaid During Pandemic

Nadia Ramlagan

FRANKFORT, Ky. -- The state has overhauled its public assistance programs in response to the cascading effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

Emily Beauregard, executive director of Kentucky Voices for Health, said during the declared COVID-19 state of emergency, if you are younger than 65 and don't have health insurance, you can apply for temporary health benefits through Medicaid, regardless of income level.

She said the Cabinet for Health and Family Services has simplified the online application.

"The governor has been clear that he wants all Kentuckians to enroll in health care coverage," Beauregard said. "Enrolling in Medicaid coverage is the fastest, simplest way for Kentuckians to get access to health coverage now that will cover them if they need testing, if they need any sort of treatment related to COVID-19 or any other health care during this time."

The temporary Medicaid benefits application form can be found at kycovid19.ky.gov under the "services" tab.

Beauregard said the health coverage will last through June 30. She also noted individuals who already are enrolled in Medicaid will see an automatic three-month extension of benefits.

Senior Policy Analyst at the Kentucky Center for Economic Policy Dustin Pugel said Kentucky now is relying heavily on its unemployment insurance program to help more families stay afloat during the recession. He said he hopes the COVID-19 pandemic is a wake-up call for state lawmakers.

"For the last two years, there have been bills in the General Assembly that have gotten a lot of attention to actually cut unemployment insurance benefits," Pugel said. "And fortunately for the state, neither of those was successful. And I hope this is a good lesson as to why we don't need legislation like that."

He stressed that individuals who traditionally haven't been eligible for unemployment insurance can now apply, including the self-employed, independent contractors, freelance workers, substitute teachers and child-care providers.

April 15, 2020

Available files: mp3 wav jpg

Pandemic Won't Deter KY Domestic Violence Shelters

Nadia Ramlagan

FRANKFORT, Ky. -- The state's 15 domestic-violence shelters say they have no plans to close their doors during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to losing work and child-care support, said Angela Yannelli, chief executive of the Kentucky Coalition Against Domestic Violence, survivors of domestic violence now may be trapped at home with an abusive partner for prolonged periods of time as social distancing continues. She listed a few of the risk factors that can exacerbate domestic violence.

"Economic stress, social isolation, depression, heavy alcohol and drug use," she said. "All of these things we know are happening in the homes, right now."

The local shelter hotlines are accessible 24 hours, every day of the week, and Yannelli said anyone who feels unsafe in their home can contact a shelter by email, text, or through Facebook or Instagram messaging.

Another option is the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE. The United Nations also has called for action to combat the global uptick in domestic violence.

In March, the FBI reported an increase in gun sales that coincided with the spread of the coronavirus. Yannelli said people with abusive partners who own guns are at much greater risk of death.

"We already know that if an abuser possesses a firearm," she said, "an abuse victim is six times more likely to be killed than if there were no firearm in the household."

Yannelli said more survivors may need emergency shelter or help getting protective orders to reduce the risk of harm to themselves and their children. She noted that some shelters have adapted to the COVID-19 crisis by moving survivors into hotels where they can quarantine and stay protected in their own room.

"We work with every survivor," she said, "and even if a survivor is diagnosed with COVID-19, we are there to support them, and we will find a place for them to go."

She also emphasized that local shelters are in need of masks, gloves and hand sanitizer. If communities have spaces to temporarily house individuals fleeing domestic violence, she said, those supports are needed.

More information is online at kcadv.org/programs, and the UN statement is at news.un.org.

KY Expands Testing; Models Predict How COVID-19 Will Persist Post-Pandemic

Nadia Ramlagan

FRANKFORT, Ky. -- Gov. Andy Beshear says new COVID-19 drive-through testing sites are slated to open this week in Madisonville, Paducah, Somerset and Pikeville. Expanded testing is one of several benchmarks the state needs to meet in order to reopen businesses.

Across the country, states are grappling with how to jumpstart their economies without triggering a spike in new infections. Scientists say striking that balance will be challenging.

Stephen Michael Kissler studies infectious disease at Harvard University's T.H. Chan School of Public Health and co-authored a recent modeling study aimed at understanding how COVID-19 will persist in communities after the pandemic wanes. He said quickly abandoning social distancing practices would likely stress the health-care system.

"Importantly, we found that one-time social distancing measures are likely to be insufficient to maintain the incidence of SARS-COV2 within the limits of critical-care capacity in the United States," Kissler said.

He said the research suggests social distancing may need to be implemented on-and-off until a vaccine is developed.

How the outbreak will behave over the course of the next few years will depend on how long people exposed to the coronavirus are protected from reinfection, Kissler said. The answer to that question remains unknown.

He also said the virus could taper off, only to resurge later on.

"It does seem likely that, under the wide range of parameter values, that SARS-COV2 will continue to circulate as a seasonal wintertime virus," he said.

Beshear's additional benchmarks for reopening the Commonwealth's economy include 14 days where cases are decreasing, the ability to perform contact tracing and protect at-risk populations, and the availability of personal protective equipment, among other criteria.

April 27, 2020

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KY Experts Warn Child Abuse Could Spike Amid Economic Uncertainty

Nadia Ramlagan

LEXINGTON, Ky. -- April is Child Abuse Prevention Month, and experts say home isolation, job loss and economic uncertainty all increase the likelihood of child maltreatment.

Researchers have seen the trend before, linking spikes in child abuse to regions with higher unemployment and home foreclosure rates during the Great Recession. Parenting and child development specialist at the University of Kentucky Dr. David Weisenhorn said it's important for parents and caregivers to check escalating tempers. He said it's okay to take a break or walk out of the room if you need to.

"Try to keep in mind that the people in our homes are not the cause of some of the things that we're feeling, even if they may be a part of the conflict that's happening in the home," Weisenhorn said.

According to federal data from 2018, more than 23,000 Kentucky children were victims of neglect, physical or sexual abuse. Tips on how to cope with chaos at home are available at faceitabuse.org/covid19.

To report suspected child abuse, call 877-KY-SAFE1.

As schools remain closed and social distancing measures continue, Keith Inman, president of Kosair Charities, said there are fewer adults in a child's day with eyes on them - from child care workers and teachers, to bus drivers and pediatricians.

Inman said early indicators hint the stress families are experiencing because of COVID-19 may contribute to an increase in child abuse.

"We're also seeing an uptick nationally in children under four years old showing up in emergency rooms with head injuries," Inman said. "And that's a real, real concern."

Weisenhorn added caseworkers across the state are beginning to experiment with FaceTime and other video technologies to stay connected to families at risk. But, he said, it's uncharted territory.

"That is a really tough situation," Weisenhorn said. "And it's been hard for us to try and figure out how we do that now."

Analysis of hospital admission records also indicates that after natural disasters, many probable incidents of child abuse go unreported and slip through the cracks of child protective service agencies.

No Postal Service Could Leave Rural Communities High and Dry

Nadia Ramlagan

FRANKFORT, Ky. - Postal workers in Kentucky are among those calling for swift action by Congress to save the U.S. Postal Service.

President of Louisville Local 4 of the American Postal Workers Union Art Campos says postal workers have been crucial in serving the public during the COVID-19 crisis - delivering absentee ballots, medical supplies and other necessities to people sheltering in place.

However, he says mail volume is down 50%, which could have a major impact on revenues.

"The Postal Service, especially the American Postal Workers Union, we are workers that are behind the scenes," says Campos. "Everybody sees the mail carriers but we process all the mail coming in from all over the country and all over the world."

The APWU is calling on Congress to provide one-time funding of at least \$25 billion dollars to cover immediate revenue loss, as well as ongoing support for the duration of the crisis.

The Postal Service has been left out of federal COVID-19 financial relief, while private corporate and other business interests have received almost one trillion dollars in assistance.

By some estimates, the Postal Service could run out of money by the end of summer. Campos says should it collapse, rural customers would have to rely on private shipping companies that don't have as much infrastructure in smaller communities.

"Prescription drugs, stimulus checks have gone out, we're taking care of that," says Campos. "And if we didn't deliver door to door, some of these people would not be able to get out to get their mail. Because some are older and rely on the mail to deliver to their home."

President Donald Trump and some Republicans have questioned the sustainability of the Postal Service, and have at times called for it to be privatized.

The most recent census data estimated there are more than seven thousand U.S. Postal Service employees in Kentucky.

Amazon Workers Protest for Safer Workplace During COVID-19

Nadia Ramlagan

FRANKFORT, Ky. -- Amazon's firing of workers who speak out on working conditions amid the COVID-19 pandemic is galvanizing labor organizers.

Over the past few months, media outlets have profiled several workers who say they were fired for protesting lack of social distancing measures and personal protective equipment while working at Amazon's fulfillment centers.

And this month the vice president at Amazon Web Services quit the company over its treatment of warehouse workers.

Bill Londrigan, president of the Kentucky State AFL-CIO, says the pandemic is putting the spotlight on the e-commerce giant's unchecked power over its employees.

"Right now with COVID-19, I think we're seeing workers become more cognizant of the fact that unless they do organize, unless they have the right to collectively bargain, then they basically don't have any rights to their jobs at all," he states.

In a web statement, Amazon says it expects to spend more than \$800 million during the first half of the year on COVID-19 safety measures.

The company also has said its employees will receive up to two weeks of paid time off if they are diagnosed with COVID-19.

Amazon operates at least 10 fulfillment centers in Kentucky.

Since the pandemic started, coronavirus cases have swelled among warehouse workers, yet the e-commerce giant has refused to release the number of confirmed cases.

Londrigan says workers' lives are at risk.

"We've heard reports of folks not having access to personal protective equipment, mask, gloves, things that they would benefit from having in a warehouse situation," he states.

Earlier this week, a group of state attorneys general sent a letter to the company calling for the disclosure of how many of its warehouse workers and Whole Foods employees have been infected with or died from the coronavirus.

May 18, 2020

5/18/20

Available files: mp3 wav jpg

Providers Worry Hepatitis C Infections May Worsen Amid Pandemic

Nadia Ramlagan

LOUISA, Ky. -- As the coronavirus pandemic continues to strain the state's health care system, providers are concerned about another viral infectious disease spreading under the radar.

The hepatitis C virus damages the liver and can lead to liver cancer and death. It's transmitted through the blood, which is why it's prevalent among people who are intravenous drug users. Kentucky currently leads the nation in the number of hepatitis C infections, and ranks number two in the country for the number of infants exposed to the virus at birth.

Lynn Hill is a nurse practitioner in Lawrence County. She said COVID-19 is scaring patients away from getting treatment, so her hospital has adapted.

"So we adjusted things, we did telehealth; we were able to have the medication shipped to the patient's home," Hill said. "At our hospital, you can have bloodwork done from your car, so the patient doesn't have to go in and be worried about exposure."

Hill added that medications treating hepatitis C are effective and in most cases can rid the body of the virus within a few months. According to the latest data, it's estimated there are at least 42,000 Kentuckians living with hepatitis C.

Director of the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable Lauren Canary said it's a misconception that hepatitis C is only transmitted among people who use drugs. She pointed out that prior to the 1990s, the virus was spread through blood transfusions and organ transplants.

"Baby boomers who were born between 1945 and 1965 have a particularly high prevalence of hepatitis C, and many of them don't actually have any risk factors," Canary said. "So the CDC actually recommends now that every adult over the age of 18 be screened for hepatitis C."

She worries infections will spike if prevention and treatment get left behind.

"If we stop our testing, our vaccination strategies, our treatment strategies, we're going to have continuous spread in the community," she said.

Hepatitis C is the most common blood-borne infectious disease in the U.S., affecting more than 3.5 million people.

5/31

May 28, 2020

Available files: mp3 wav jpg

Reviving a Depression-Era Program Could Employ Young Kentuckians

Nadia Ramlagan

FRANKFORT, Ky. -- The nation's youth unemployment rate is the highest it's been since the Great Depression, and some are calling for creating a new Civilian Conservation Corps to help rebuild the country's parks and public lands at a time of national crisis.

Unemployment in the Commonwealth has soared to 15.4% amid the coronavirus pandemic. And Ward Wilson, executive director of the Kentucky Waterways Alliance, says a new CCC could put young Kentuckians to work reviving the state's streams, which are an important habitat for wildlife and for the outdoor-recreation economy.

"We've damaged a lot of our streams," Wilson points out. "Some people say there aren't very many streams you can find in the eastern United States that haven't been changed in some way.

"We know how to go back and repair them, in terms of making them function better hydrologically, making the water quality better, but also bringing the wildlife back to it; make them alive again."

Historians estimate that by 1937, there were 44 CCC camps in Kentucky employing more than 12,000 young people. During its nine-year run ending in 1942, the federal Civilian Conservation Corps employed more than 3 million workers nationwide.

Wilson adds that in 2015 the state identified more than 300 species as having the greatest conservation needs and has a plan at the ready to help protect them. He says the state park system currently is saddled with an \$111 million backlog of maintenance and repairs.

"We've got a large national forest in eastern Kentucky, the Daniel Boone National Forest," he states. "It has all sorts of facilities. They're great facilities, but maintenance has been deferred for a long time. We've got the Mammoth Cave National Park. There are many things we could do there."

Collin O'Mara, president and CEO of the National Wildlife Federation, says a new CCC could offer Kentuckians jobs in outdoor recreation, agriculture, forestry and ranching to rural and Native American youths, and young people of color — all of whom are being hit hard with unemployment.

"It's one of those solutions that actually solves 15 different public policy priorities all at once -- and, I mean, I'd argue it's as close to an economic recovery silver bullet as is out there right now," he states.

O'Mara adds there's no shortage of work to be done - 80 million acres of national forests need rehabilitation, and a half-million abandoned coal and hard-rock mines need reclamation.

June 1, 2020

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Protests Highlight Frustration Over Lack of Accountability, Investigation

Nadia Ramlagan

LOUISVILLE, Ky. -- Protests in Louisville and Lexington over the weekend highlight growing public frustration with a system that offers little accountability to those in power.

The killings of unarmed black citizens across the country, including Breonna Taylor, who was asleep at her home in Louisville in mid-March when she was killed, have sparked public outrage over the inertia or complete lack of response by officials to investigate or charge officers involved in the incidents.

Rep. Charles Booker of Louisville said unless the tendency to protect law enforcement at all costs shifts, these tragedies will continue to happen.

"Our history shows us that these types of incidents happen, especially to people whose complexion looks like mine, but to so many people, and justice fails them. The processes fail them," Booker said. "The investigations either don't happen, or if they do, there's not the transparency that the community needs to heal."

Last Friday, Minneapolis authorities announced one of the officers involved in the death of George Floyd had been charged with third-degree murder. Two white men in Georgia - one a retired police officer - were arrested and charged only after a video showing the killing of Ahmaud Arbery went viral two months after the incident.

No one has been charged in the death of Breonna Taylor.

Booker said the current moment provides an opportunity for local officials and state lawmakers to address Kentuckians' concerns.

"There's a lot of trust that needs to be restored in the community," he said. "This is an opportunity for us to understand that protecting freedom and protecting liberty means that we need to have processes and accountability in place - even for the agencies that are there to protect us."

In a statement released on Twitter, Kentucky Attorney General Daniel Cameron said his office is in the process of determining what investigatory steps need to take place at the state level regarding Taylor's death, and said the FBI is conducting an independent investigation into the facts surrounding the incident.

6/14

June 9, 2020

Available files: mp3 wav jpg

Public Outcry Grows Over Paul's Blocking of Anti-Lynching Bill

Nadia Ramlagan

FRANKFORT, Ky. -- Kentucky Republican Sen. Rand Paul is the sole holdout in Congress on legislation that would, for the first time, recognize lynching as a federal crime. His decision has sparked growing public outcry, both nationally and at home.

Democratic state Rep. Reginald Meeks of Louisville said his community is disappointed in Paul's decision, especially amid the massive protests and national rage over the police killing of Louisville resident Breonna Taylor.

"We here in Kentucky, people of color, people of conscience, are not at all unfamiliar with these tactics," Meeks said. "It's not uncommon for him to step out in front of the community and claim to be on one side, when his actions speak otherwise."

Called the Emmett Till Antilynching Act, the bill passed the U.S. House nearly unanimously, and has the backing of all senators except for Paul, who says he opposes the legislation because he believes it's written in a way that potentially could allow for excessive prison sentences for minor hate crimes.

Meeks said Kentucky voters will decide if Paul's stance on the bill is acceptable.

"Rather than proposing an alternative that is not 'sloppily written,' as he says, he would rather shoot the whole thing down," he said.

For now, the bill remains stalled in the Senate. More than 4,700 people across the country, mostly African-Americans, reportedly were lynched between 1882 and 1968. What is considered to be the last public execution by hanging in the U.S. occurred in Owensboro, Kentucky, in 1936.

June 19, 2020

6/21

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KY Continues to See Sky-High Unemployment Claims

Nadia Ramlagan

FRANKFORT, Ky. - More than 800,000 Kentuckians have filed for unemployment insurance since the start of the new coronavirus pandemic, and experts warn the economic downturn will likely have ripple effects that could last for years.

Ashley Spalding, research director with the Kentucky Center for Economic Policy says a major issue for many states is the lack of a rainy day fund, which is typically socked away during economic upturns in order to have a financial buffer in recessions. She says Kentucky didn't save enough.

"Currently we have just 3% of general fund expenditures in our rainy day fund," says Spalding. "And the goal for states is 15%, and the median is about 11%. So, we are not prepared."

Earlier this week, hundreds of residents who have not yet received unemployment benefits congregated at the state Capitol, all hoping to speak with unemployment insurance personnel face-to-face and resolve their claims.

Spalding adds more federal relief will be critical to ensure that fewer Kentuckians slip into poverty. But she points out that state lawmakers' decisions in the past few decades have contributed to the current level of financial desperation amid an unprecedented public health crisis.

"Our lawmakers have made choices to enact tax breaks for special-interest groups," says Spalding. "And so we've lost revenue in that way, that we could have been setting aside just for things like this."

Researchers at the Economic Policy Institute say nationwide, job losses remain at historic levels, with more than one in five workers either relying on unemployment benefits or still waiting for their claims to be processed.

June 23, 2020

6/25

Available files: mp3 wav jpg

Young Kentuckians Headed to Polls See Hope in Booker

Nadia Ramlagan

FRANKFORT, Ky. -- Many young Kentuckians headed to the polls today say they plan to vote for state Rep. Charles Booker as the Democratic challenger to Mitch McConnell's U.S. Senate seat.

The 35-year-old Louisville native has sparked a movement among folks in their 20s and 30s, much like the popular campaigns of Sen. Bernie Sanders for president and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in New York. Both are among the dozens of recent endorsements Booker has received.

Thirty-two-year-old Whitney Kuklinski lives in Bowling Green and said she thinks Booker's momentum signals a generational shift in Kentucky's political landscape.

"For me, the endorsements were a huge deal," Kuklinski said. "It meant that maybe outsiders were actually looking and listening at Kentuckians and what a majority of us want."

Commonwealth residents who want to vote in-person today can visit the Kentucky Secretary of State's website to find their county's designated polling location. In Fayette County, voters will cast their ballots at the University of Kentucky's football field; and in Jefferson County, at the Kentucky Expo Center.

Kuklinski said across the state, young voters are increasingly turning their attention to local elected officials.

"The average voter here in Warren County is 33 years old," she said. "I would say young voters are extremely interested - so much so that we're looking and researching city commissioners that represent our city, at every level."

And she said she believes many Kentuckians agree with the ideas at the heart of Booker's campaign, including healthcare for all, livable wages, and clean energy legislation aimed at creating new jobs.

"People think 'progressives' only look a certain way and talk a certain way, and I think that's really naive to think that," Kuklinski said. "A lot of Kentuckians, they have a lot of progressive ideas."

One poll released last week found Booker ahead of primary candidate Amy McGrath, 44% to 36%.