

PLANET NEWS

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NEWS IN BRIEF

UTAH

MAN DIES AFTER FALLING IN ZION

Authorities have identified a 43-year-old Utah man believed to have fallen from a towering rock formation in Zion National Park.

The body of Jason Hartwell, 43, of Draper, was found Friday at the base of Angels Landing and showed signs of injuries consistent with a high-level fall, park officials said.

Park visitors had reported Thursday night that someone had fallen off the rocky promontory, triggering a search operation.

The death was being examined by the park service in coordination with the Washington County Sheriff's Office, officials said.

A steep, winding trail that climbs up Angel's Landing and the surrounding area have seen numerous fatal accidents, including a 42-year-old Utah man whose body was found Feb. 19.

A 35-year-old man hiking there died after falling in 2019. A 13-year-old girl died on the trail in 2018, and a 45-year-old man died in 2017.

STATEHOUSE

DRUG COST BILL INTRODUCED

A bill introduced in Colorado would establish a panel of experts to investigate drug cost increases and then set parameters on prices for the most expensive prescriptions, state officials said.

The bill was introduced on Monday and is sponsored by four Democrats, including state Sens. Julie Gonzales and Sonya Jaquez Lewis and state Reps. Yadria Caraveo and Chris Kennedy, The Daily Sentinel reported.

Several states have or are considering creating their own Prescription Drug Affordability Boards as efforts at the federal level to negotiate for lower prices on prescription drugs continue to falter.

Many of the drugs sold in the U.S. cost hundreds of dollars, sometimes thousands, more than the same drugs in Canada and the European Union. That's the case in part because other countries negotiate with drug companies and put limits on what the companies can charge — something the U.S. does not do.

"It's just ridiculous what's going on with this," Democratic Gov. Jared Polis said when introducing the bill into the state Legislature. "These are the exact same prescription drugs, and yet they cost far more. American consumers are sick and tired of being ripped off."

He added: "For the vast majority of Americans, we don't take advantage of our buy-



In this Jan. 14, 2015, file photo, oil pump jacks are seen in McKenzie County, in western North Dakota. The Biden administration said Tuesday, March 9, 2021, that it will deliver an interim report on its suspension of oil and gas sales from federal lands and waters by summer, but officials declined to state how long the moratorium could remain in place. (AP Photo/Matthew Brown, File)

ENERGY

Report on oil and gas sale ban due by summer

By MATTHEW BROWN
Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — The Biden administration said Tuesday that it will deliver an interim report on its suspension of oil and gas sales from federal lands and waters by summer, but officials declined to state how long the moratorium could remain in place.

A long-term ban on lease sales from the nation's vast, publicly-owned oil and gas reserves to address climate change would fulfill a campaign pledge from Democratic President Joe Biden.

The prospect has rankled Republicans and petroleum industry representatives, who have said that Biden is putting tens of thousands of jobs at risk as the economy reels from the pandemic.

Oil and gas from federal reserves in western states and the

Gulf of Mexico make up about a quarter of U.S. production.

Lease sales to companies for drilling have been a frequent target of lawsuits from environmentalists who contend officials have ignored the oil and gas program's climate impact.

Biden announced a temporary suspension of new sales one week after he took office.

Tuesday's announcement offered the first details of a review of the Interior Department program that officials said will examine climate issues and whether taxpayers are getting a fair return on sales of energy leases to private companies.

Last month, the administration postponed lease sales in the Gulf and four states — Colorado, Montana, Utah and Wyoming.

"The federal oil and gas program is not serving the American public well," Interior Depart-

ment Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Laura Daniel-Davis said in a statement. "It's time to take a close look at how to best manage our nation's natural resources with current and future generations in mind."

The administration has pledged to spend billions to assist in the transition away from fossil fuels such as oil, gas and coal. Biden has said creating clean-energy jobs is a top priority.

There is no estimate on how long the review could take, agency spokeswoman Melissa Schwartz said.

Even a short-lived suspension on leasing will quickly affect companies, tying their hands as they seek to make drilling plans for coming years, said Erik Milito of the National Ocean Industries Association, which represents oil companies operating offshore.

STATEHOUSE

Gun safe-storage bill passes

ASSOCIATED PRESS

DENVER (AP) — Colorado's Democrat-controlled House on Tuesday advanced legislation requiring firearms to be securely stored to prevent unauthorized youth and other persons from accessing them.

The 40-25 vote, virtually along party lines, came after 10 hours of debate on Monday in which Democrats repeatedly rejected efforts by Republican lawmakers to modify the measure.

Dejected Republicans questioned before the vote whether the bill would correct conduct by responsible gun owners or seek to criminalize them.

Under the measure, misdemeanor violations could carry fines of \$250 to \$1,000. The bill also requires licensed gun dealers to provide locking devices when selling or transferring firearms.

Noncompliance would be a misdemeanor with fines of up to \$500.

About 31 Colorado teens and young adults under 20 on average have been involved in firearm suicides annually, according to the bill's fiscal note.

Republicans insisted the bill could prevent responsible gun owners from quickly accessing their weapons during emergencies.

"I can't believe that none of the good ideas (presented by Republicans) weren't good enough," said House minority leader, Rep. Hugh McKean.

Only one amendment, by GOP Rep. Terri Carver, was adopted. It provides for education on safe storage of guns outside of homes.

Democratic Reps. Kyle Mullica and Monica Duran, the bill's House sponsors, argued the bill would help reduce suicides by youth and others and accidental

shootings.

A 2017 study analyzing data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Violent Death Reporting System found that across the U.S., approximately 19 children a day die or are medically treated for gunshot wounds.

Tuesday's vote sends the bill to the Democrat-controlled Colorado Senate.

Senators advanced a separate bill Tuesday that would require gun owners to report lost or stolen firearms or face \$25 fines.

Sponsored by Democratic Sens. Jessie Danielson and Sonya Jaquez Lewis, the bill states that subsequent violations would be considered misdemeanors punishable by fines of \$50 to \$750, and the possibility of six months in jail as a maximum penalty.

A final Senate vote would send that bill to the House.

MOUNTAIN VILLAGE

SOLAR POWER CO-OP LAUNCHED

SPECIAL TO THE PLANET

The Town of Mountain Village has announced a new solar energy co-op incentive for property owners in partnership with the nonprofit group Solar United Neighbors, which facilitates neighborhood solar co-ops across the country.

This new partnership invites Mountain Village property owners to join a solar co-op and the first 20 properties to sign up and see solar arrays installed will receive a \$2,500 incentive rebate. Any participating deed-restricted property will receive up to \$5,000 for going solar.

"The solar co-op framework is an innovative way to promote solar adoption throughout the community because it both creates momentum behind solar, as well as helps drive down costs for participants," said Mountain Village Green Team Vice-Chair and Town Council Member Marti Prohaska. "We are thankful to have the expertise of Solar United Neighbors to guide us through the process, as they have helped initiate solar success stories in many other communities."

The co-op is free to join upfront and open to Mountain Village homeowners or business owners who want to learn more about solar energy.

"We are excited to launch the first Mountain Village solar co-op, partnering with the Town of Mountain Village," said Bryce Carter, Colorado program director for SUN. "We've helped over 100 families and businesses go solar on the Western Slope and in our mountain communities, building economic resilience across the region. We look forward to growing this momentum and commend Mountain Village's leadership by helping expand the accessibility of the benefits of solar through their incentive rebate, especially for deed-restricted housing."

Under the guidance of Solar United Neighbors (SUN), the co-op will then be able to leverage its numbers to purchase individual solar energy systems at a competitive price. SUN facilitates a competitive bidding process out to contracts to select a single company to complete installations.

Joining the co-op does not obligate members to purchase solar, however, the first 20 to sign contracts for installation will be able to take advantage of the \$2,500 financial incentive.

The Telluride Mountain Village Owners Association has partnered with the town to fund this unique incentive program.

During the development of this new program, funds were set aside specifically to help deed-restricted homeowners take advantage of going solar.

"While going solar has long-term cost savings benefits, installation costs can be prohibitive for many households," Prohaska said. "The additional incentive for deed-restricted homes is designed to help families that may have a harder time swallowing the initial price tag of solar installation. Between the Mountain Village's contribution, current federal tax credits, and the SMPA incentive, it may be the perfect time to finally go solar."