

**Swimming returns**

Missoula area teams set to host virtual meet **SPORTS, C1**

**Dining Downtown**

As restaurants get creative in a slow season, Missoula offers 'Dine Local' deals **MONTANA, B1**

**SPICY chicken thighs**

A terrifically tasty dish **MONTANA FOOD, PAGE D1**



**SNOW 33 • 22** FORECAST, C8 | **WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2021** | missoulian.com



**STOP BY MISSOULA FRESH MARKET THIS WEEK FOR FAMILY PACK CERTIFIED ANGUS BEEF 85% LEAN GROUND BEEF FOR JUST \$2.99/LB.**



**BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN**

Tank cars sit on the railroad tracks in Missoula on Tuesday afternoon. President Biden is set to discuss a moratorium on new leases for oil and gas on U.S. lands.

**Oil, gas production in MT has sputtered for years**

**Biden set to suspend leasing; GOP barks about 'war on energy'**

**TOM LUTEY**  
 tlutey@billingsgazette.com

President Joe Biden is expected to suspend oil and gas leasing on federal land Wednesday, a move that's not likely to crimp Montana oil production, despite the bluster from its Republican politicians.

Oil and gas production on federal lands in Montana has been sputtering for years, making the Treasure State a very poor cousin to neighboring North Dakota and Wyoming. Revenue from all oil and gas leases on federal land in Montana in 2019 was \$21.21 million, according to the U.S. Department of Interior. By comparison, revenue from federal lands

in Wyoming was \$647.52 million. In North Dakota revenues were \$276.9 million.

The dollars don't match the fury of Montana's Republican delegation, which has denounced Biden's moratorium as a "war on energy."

"You can't just turn a switch and expect our entire country to find an alternative way to heat their homes and put fuel in their vehicles," U.S. Rep Matt Rosendale said in a tweet Tuesday. "President Biden's war on American energy proves that he's already putting American interests last and caving to the far-left of his party."

U.S. Sen. Steve Daines said: "We should be prioritizing Made in America energy. Instead, @JoeBiden would rather have the U.S. dependent on the Middle East."

It's actually been years since the United States relied heavily

on foreign oil. The U.S. Energy Information Administration put the nation's daily oil consumption at 20.46 million barrels a day in 2019. The nation's daily net imports that year were a half million barrels and had plummeted without interruption every year since 2010 when U.S. oil production, driven by the fracking boom, surpassed net imports and never let up. U.S. production was a record 19.33 million barrels a day in 2019.

Now, with oil production high and prices driven to unsustainable lows, there's momentum on the left to stop issuing oil leases. David Jenkins, of Conservatives for Responsible Stewardship, said Tuesday that issuing leases now when oil prices are low results in a lower public return on federal land, particularly when there isn't competitive interest in federal lease sales.

In Montana, where the U.S. Bureau of Land Management has offered 442,000 acres for federal lease during the Trump presidency, only about 40% of the leases drew buyers. Annual drilling on federal land in Montana has been in the single digits.

The Montana Petroleum Association says activist judges are to blame for low oil production on federal lands in the state.

"Federal judges like Brian Morris say, 'Take it off. Take it off because of global warming. Take it off because of sage grouse. Take it off because my mother-in-law woke up with a headache this morning,'" said MPA's Allan Olson. "We get over \$29 million a year in Montana off of federal royalty payments and lease bonus payments. We got a million people in this state and \$29 million is a lot of money to the state budget."

**Bar told to enforce COVID-19 regulations**

Evvaro ordered to follow rules or face closure

**ASHLEY NERBOVIG**  
 ashley.nerbovig@missoulian.com

A Missoula judge Monday ordered the Evvaro Bar and Casino to comply with COVID-19 restrictions or face closure.

Missoula District Judge Leslie Halligan issued a temporary restraining order against the bar owners, requiring them to stop violating the COVID-19 restrictions set by the Missoula City-County Board of Health. The bar must be in compliance with the county's requirements by Wednesday.

The Evvaro Bar and Casino, 17025 Highway 93, is working with the Missoula City-County Board of Health to come into compliance, said Jeanna Miller, environmental health manager for the county's COVID-19 response team. The Evvaro Bar and Casino directed any questions about the temporary restraining order to their lawyer, Quentin Rhoades.

Rhoades is a Missoula attorney who is also representing several groups in a suit against the Missoula City-County Board of Health's overall COVID-19 mitigation regulations. That lawsuit was brought in part by Stand Up Montana, a Gallatin County-based nonprofit group that mimics other groups popping up across the country to oppose COVID-19 mitigation strategies. Rhoades did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

To be in compliance with COVID-19 restrictions, Missoula County bars and restaurants must enforce face coverings for employees as well as for

Please see **BAR**, Page A6

**Prosecutors oppose ending costs to convicts**

Bill seeks to get rid of public defender fees; agency makes no case

**SEABORN LARSON**  
 seaborn.larson@lee.net

Lawmakers on Tuesday pondered a bill that would eliminate fees people who are low-income convicted of crimes are required to pay public defenders.

Rep. Danny Tenenbaum, a Missoula Democrat and a public defender himself, sponsored House Bill 183, with support from another public defender. Both said the fees, which can range

Please see **HB 183**, Page A6

**House votes down trans bill**

Doctors would have been penalized for gender-affirming care

**HOLLY K. MICHELS**  
 holly.michels@lee.net

A controversial bill that would have penalized doctors who provided gender-affirming care to transgender minors or made referrals for that care died on the House floor Tuesday, after losing the support of four Republicans who voted for it the day prior.

House Bill 113, from Rep. John Fuller, a Whitefish Republican, passed an initial vote Monday 53-47, with all Democrats joining some Republicans in opposing the legislation.



**THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD**

The Montana House of Representatives holds a floor session in the State Capitol on Monday.

It went down on a 49-51 vote Tuesday, with five GOP representatives moving to vote against the bill. In total 18 Republicans

and all 33 Democrats, who are the minority party in the House, voted against the bill.

Two of the lawmakers were not immediately available for comment.

Rep. Denley Loge, R-St. Regis, was one of the legislators who changed his vote. He said Tuesday his initial yes vote was "very conflicted."

"I thought excluding medical treatment for pretty much anything is a little overreach," Loge said after Tuesday's vote. "To me, it didn't necessarily have to do with being transgender. Sometimes you need medical treatment for things."

After the floor session, Loge

Please see **TRANS BILL**, Page A6



Check out this week's circulars, interactives, photo galleries, videos and more when you activate your digital subscription online **AT MISSOULIAN.COM.**

CLASSIFIED	C5	OBITUARIES	B3	MARKETS	C8
COMICS	D4	ASTROLOGY	D3	SPORTS	C1
PUZZLES	D3	OPINION	A7	FOODS	D1

