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Mitigation work begins on cliffs above Colorado Highway 3



JERRY MCBRIDE/Durango Herald photos

Rock out BELOW

BY SCOUT EDMONDSON
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Christmas came early for Colorado Department of Transportation geohazards geologist Regan French when she learned rocks careening off cliffs above Colorado Highway 3 had damaged a retaining fence designed to keep them from reaching the road.

Colorado Highway 3 – the old two-lane asphalt road that snakes alongside the Animas River on Durango’s south end – served as the city’s main entrance until the South Camino del Rio segment of U.S. High-

way 550/160 was completed in 1980.

Rockfall is common along the sandstone cliffs on the road’s east side and is a hazard the Colorado Department of Transportation must manage to keep motorists safe.

“It was like a day or two before Christmas, because the email that my boss was sent said ‘Santa brought Christmas a little early,’” French said with a laugh. “A bunch of rocks had fallen. I was able to get out here the following week, right before New Year’s, to take a look

See **MITIGATION, 8A**



TOP: Colorado Department of Transportation contractors perform rockfall mitigation work above Colorado Highway 3 in Durango on Wednesday. ABOVE: A contractor with Apex Rockfall Mitigation LLC repels on the cliff face above Colorado Highway 3 on Wednesday.

COLORADO HOUSE

Sexual abuse in jails bill advances

Alleged victims of strip-search videos testify at Capitol

BY ELIZABETH POND
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Three alleged victims in a sexual gratification case against former La Plata County Jail Cmdr. Edward Aber testified Wednesday at the Colorado State Capitol in support of a bill aimed at preventing sexual abuse in jails.

After more than four hours of testimony, the House Judiciary Committee advanced House Bill 26-1123, Prevent Sexual Abuse in Jails, to the House Appropriations Committee on a 7-4 vote with amendments.

The bill was introduced in mid-February by Colorado lawmakers, including Rep. Katie Stewart, D-Durango, who represents House District 59.

Stewart told *The Durango Herald* in February that Aber’s case “100 percent” informed her desire to pursue the bill, which aims to tighten and rework regulations surrounding strip searches and sexual abuse in Colorado jails.

Aber was accused in July of using his administrative access to evidence.com to watch strip-search videos – which depicted “close-up vantage points of the intimate parts of at least 117 female inmates” – more than 3,000 times between Feb. 14, 2019, and Jan. 14, 2024, according to an arrest affidavit, and was charged with 118 misdemeanors.

He pleaded not guilty earlier this month, turning down a plea deal that one attorney and some victims viewed as lenient. A trial date was set for August.

HB26-1123 would add new guardrails and limitations to

See **BILL, 8A**

‘No Secret Police’ group’s petition for anti-mask initiative passes

Durango City Council could adopt proposal or send it to voters

BY CHRISTIAN BURNEY
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Durango’s No Secret Police committee has gathered enough signatures to send a proposed ordinance banning law enforcement officers from wearing masks to City Council.

The committee had 30 days to gather 1,047 valid signatures – 15% of all votes cast in the last municipal election – from registered electors in Durango by March 6 to advance its proposal.

City spokesman Tom Sluis said the committee returned 84

petitions by the deadline, and the city clerk’s office stopped counting signatures after verifying the group surpassed its benchmark with 1,051 signatures from 50 petitions.

Mick Souder, a committee organizer, announced the group’s success in a written statement to *The Durango Herald*.

“The petition committee organizers extend their appreciation to all circulators and signers for breaking the silence barrier in our people-driven No Secret Police in Durango petition drive,” he said.

Sluis said City Council is tentatively scheduled to address the initiative at its April 7 meeting. Council has 30 days from that meeting to either adapt the proposed ordinance or submit it to

voters as a ballot measure in a special election.

“I think it’s a good thing,” Mayor Gilda Yazzie said of the committee’s success.

She said the petitioners put in the effort to gather the necessary signatures to bring up an issue important to them – representative democracy in action.

As for what comes next, she said Durango residents must decide whether the proposed ordinance should be passed. That means holding a special election. She said based on her experience, she anticipates the majority of City Council members will agree.

City Council discussed a draft statement that appeared to disfavor the ordinance at its March 2 meeting. But councilors could



JERRY MCBRIDE/Durango Herald file

Mick Souder, a No Secret Police organizer, explains a petition banning federal law enforcement from wearing masks in Durango as Billy Beyhan, a Durango resident, signs the petition on March 3.

not reach a consensus on the tone and overall message the statement.

The draft letter mentioned efforts the city has taken on the subject of immigration in re-

sponse to many residents’ dissatisfaction with federal immigration enforcement, including the formation of a task force to

See **‘NO SECRET POLICE’, 8A**

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