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Weekend Edition THE Durango HERALD

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In face of drought, La Plata County ranchers begin downsizing herds



Michael Semler helps out with his parents' cattle herd June 11, with artificially inseminating some of their cows to help build the genetics of the herd at their Bayfield-area ranch.

JERRY MCBRIDE/Durango Herald photos

BAYFIELD

Residents scramble to buy their park

Mini Mansions renters can't afford increase or purchase loan

BY JESSIE BOWMAN
 HERALD STAFF WRITER

Mini Mansions Mobile Home Park in Bayfield boasts some of the cheapest rent in La Plata County, averaging around \$600 a month. That's an unexpected disadvantage to residents scrambling to stop the property's imminent sale.

The longtime owner put the 35-lot property on the market in early March for \$4.2 million. The announcement of intent to sell sent residents searching for a way to prevent drastic rent increases that more often than not accompany a change in ownership.

Several entities have expressed interest in buying the park, but residents said they have a possible out.

Purchasing the property and forming a resident-owned community, or ROC, would allow residents to collectively own and manage the land beneath their homes. But residents only have until July 3 to submit an offer, and the drastically undermarket rent has made it seemingly impossible to secure the preliminary funding to make the purchase.

Windi Richardson, a mother of two teenagers, has lived at the park for 16 years. She originally chose it because it was one of the few affordable, stable and conveniently located housing options for her family. It is the only home her children have ever known.

She said lenders have told residents current rents are too low to provide assurance residents can absorb rent increases necessary to support a loan for

'IT'S A VICIOUS CYCLE'

BY JESSIE BOWMAN
 HERALD STAFF WRITER

La Plata County ranchers must contend with a host of economically undesirable circumstances this summer.

The Iran war has increased fuel and fertilizer prices, while severe drought across the Southwest has reduced forage and hay production – forcing ranchers to either spend more on feed and water or reduce herd sizes.

While strong cattle prices have helped prevent a financial crisis, producers say wide-



Evanne Caviness unlocks a gate to check on cattle June 4, 2024, at her and husband's ranch near Bayfield.

spread herd reductions could have lasting consequences for local agriculture.

Drought means less forage and less hay yield. So ranchers must provide supplemental hay – already more expensive than grazing – at a more expensive price than usual. On top of that, with the cost of fertilizer up, some farmers chose not to use

See **RANCHERS, 8A**

See **PARK, 8A**

U.S. House primary Dems answer questions in Durango

Both Alex Kelloff and Dwayne Romero are competing for Rep. Jeff Hurd's seat in Congress

BY CHRISTIAN BURNEY
 HERALD STAFF WRITER

Healthcare, state redistricting, the U.S. Supreme Court's structure and other issues familiar to Colorado and national voters were among the subjects raised

at an Indivisible Durango debate featuring Democratic challengers to Colorado Congressional District 3 U.S. Rep. Jeff Hurd last weekend.

Democratic challengers Alex Kelloff and Dwayne Romero answered lightning-round and

slightly longer-form questions during the debate at the Durango Public Library on Saturday.

Indivisible Durango was ready with a list of questions compiled with feedback from the Rocky Mountain Farmers Union, La Plata County Health Alliance, La Plata County commissioners, The Good Food Collective and water experts.

The candidates appeared to

have similar stances on many subjects, although disagreements surfaced from time to time.

Romero and Kelloff found themselves in similar positions when asked why they had each donated \$1,000 to at least one Republican's campaign over the last decade.

Romero said he donated to U.S. Sen. Dave McCormick (Pennsyl-

vania) in 2024 because McCormick was a classmate at U.S. Military Academy West Point and a fellow service member.

"We both became combat engineer officers together, we went to ranger school together, we fought in combat together," Romero said. "Dave McCormick is truly one of my deep

See **DEMS, 7A**

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 City, Region, State | **3A**
 Obituaries | **4A**

Opinion | **8B**
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