

Biden administration blocks drilling in Arctic Refuge

by **Sasha Ryu**
Editor-in-Chief

The Trump administration's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) auctioned off the drilling rights to Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) on Jan. 6, making it the first such government-facilitated sale in American history. A handful of Alaskan oil and gas corporations bought 550,000 acres of the available land for a net total of 14.4 million dollars. Due to a general lack of competitive bids, 11 tracts sold for approximately 25 dollars an acre.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower first protected the ANWR during the 1960s; not long after he established these measures, Republican members of Congress began advocating to lift protections on the reserve in order to access the estimated 7.7 billion barrels of recoverable oil within



POLAR PLUNGE: A polar bear tests the durability of the ice in its melting home.

the coastal plain. In 2017, Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) negotiated to revise the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) to allow for drilling in the ANWR. In December of that year, the TCJA and Murkowski's suggested passage passed in the Senate 51-48; three weeks later, President Trump signed the bill into law. The discreet mention of dissolving sanctions surrounding the reserve went largely unnoticed for years; however, as the auction date grew closer, the issue began capturing the attention of millions worldwide.

This winter, an online petition demanding the cancellation of the auction surpassed 1.4 million signatures, in large part thanks to people promoting it on social media platforms like TikTok. Despite the public outcry, U.S. District Judge Sharon Gleason struck down the request for a preliminary injunction the night before the sale.

Aside from the environmental threat that the drilling poses, new research also indicates there might not be as much oil in the reserve as the 7.7 billion barrels U.S. officials estimated in the 1980s. After the passage of the 2017 TCJA, the BLM made new arrangements to gauge the amount of oil under the refuge; so far, the results have not been promising.

The ANWR provides habitat for 270 different species, many of which are endangered. The refuge also contains 18 major rivers and is considered sacred by the indigenous Gwich'in tribe. The Gwich'in Steering Committee became one of several organizations suing the Trump administration and the BLM over the auction. A coalition of 15 states also filed a lawsuit demanding to reverse the purchases.



MISTY MOUNTAINS: An Alaskan forest borders a snowy mountain range.

California was one of the states which belonged to the coalition; throughout the four years of Trump's presidency, California has sued the administration over 100 times — often related to environmental issues — with about a 90 percent success rate. If any of the lawsuits prevailed, the BLM's leases would have become void. However, with the six to three conservative majority in the Supreme Court, legal experts like Vermont Law Professor Pat Parentau speculated that it would have been more difficult to pursue the conservation efforts in the justice system. During his first day in office, President Biden signed an executive order, putting an end to the drilling in the refuge. (Sources: Washington Post, SF Gate, Alaska Public Media, NPR)

Scientists discover several new strains of COVID

by **Sidney Bricker**
Media Production Editor

In the last month, experts have identified new strains of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, in places around the world. 20B/501Y.V1, also known as VOC 202012/01 or lineage B.1.1.7., is a mutation of SARS-CoV-2, first discovered in Britain during December of 2020. The strain gets its name from one of its more concerning mutations, N501Y. The V1 stands for version one, and the 20B refers to the clade, or group, it belongs



NEGATIVE VIBES: In a lab, a scientist conducts several COVID-19 tests.

to. 501Y.V1 is more transmissible than other COVID-19 strains because of a mutation that affects the spikes on the virus's surface. The spiked surface allows SARS-CoV-2 to attach to the host. According to the UK's New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG), the rate of transmission for 501Y.V1 is 71 percent higher than that of other variants. Experts suggest that the greatly increased transmission risk means that 501Y.V1 will overtake other strains of the virus in the coming months.

Scientists recently discovered the SARS-CoV-2 variant COH.20G/501Y in Columbus, OH. According to researchers at Ohio State University, while it seems likely that COH.20G/501Y originated in the US, its mutations are the same ones present in the version of 501Y.V1 discovered in the UK.

A similar strain discovered in South Africa is known as 501Y.V2. This variant shares one important mutation with 501Y.V1 from Britain, mutation N501Y, a mutation that concerns researchers. According to Dr. Filip Fratev, who works at The University of Texas at El Paso, mutation N501Y changes protein interactions with the human-derived antibody. Though many researchers say that in all likelihood the Pfizer Vaccine will still work, a change in antibody reactions could mean the Pfizer Vaccine is less effective against this strain.

On Jan. 2, Japan's National Institute of Infectious Diseases discovered another new strain in travelers from Brazil. Researchers have begun to study this strain to determine its effects and the effective-

ness of existing vaccines against it. The strain appears to be more transmissible than the current most dominant strain, D614G, but less transmissible than the strains discovered in South Africa, Ohio, and Britain.

The COVID-19 that the majority of patients have today is not the same one that was spreading in the early months of the pandemic in February and March of 2020. The D614G variant is different from the older strains S and L that were more common in the early months of the pandemic. D614G, which became the most dominant variation in June 2020, is increasingly infectious and transmissible as compared to the original.

(Sources: CDC, WHO, ECDC, CNBC, The Lancet, The BMJ, Nextstrain, NY Times, Ohio State University, Reuters)



SAFETY FIRST: A woman wears a mask to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Newsom appoints Padilla

by **Revanth Rao**
Sports Editor

Following Senator Kamala Harris' election as Vice President, Governor Gavin Newsom began searching for a candidate to replace her in the US Senate. After mulling over the decision for over a month, Newsom decided on Dec. 21 to appoint California Secretary of State Alex Padilla as Harris' successor. Padilla is a historic nominee, as he is the first Latino to serve as a US Senator from California.



SPEAK UP: Padilla addresses the Democratic Convention.

Padilla, 47, grew up in the Los Angeles area as the son of two Mexican immigrants. After attending MIT, Padilla returned to California and worked as an engineer. However, after Proposition 187, which banned illegal immigrants from public services such as education and healthcare, passed, Padilla decided to pursue a career in politics in 1995 as a Democrat. After four years as a personal assistant and campaign manager, Padilla was elected to the LA City Council in 1999. In 2006, Padilla became a California State Senator, and in 2014, he was elected California Secretary of State.

Padilla is known as a moderate Democrat who supports abortion rights, universal healthcare, renewable energy, and gun control. During his time as Secretary of State, he is most well known for promoting the passage of Prop 67, which banned plastic bags in grocery stores. Padilla's tenure was not without controversy, however. In 2020, he paid

SKDKnickerbocker 34 million dollars to carry out a voter outreach program meant to inform voters about changes to the election process caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. While Padilla claimed that the program spread information in a non-partisan manner, many California Republicans objected to his hiring of the firm, which is known to work with Democrats.

While Governor Newsom knew soon after Election Day that he would need a replacement for Harris, he agonized over the decision. Newsom acknowledged the decision was tough because he felt it would be difficult to please all members of the Democratic Party with an appointee. Ultimately, he settled on Padilla, who endorsed his campaigns for both Lieutenant Governor and Governor of California. As expected, some Democrats disapproved of the nomination, as they felt that Harris should have been replaced by a more progressive politician like Karen Bass or Barbara Lee, both House Representatives. San Francisco Mayor London Breed was particularly critical, calling the appointment "an unfortunate situation."

Padilla's two-year term is set to begin in January following Inauguration Day on Jan. 20. To fill his open Secretary of State position, Newsom has appointed State Assemblywoman Shirley Weber. (Sources: SFGate, NY Times, Sacramento Bee)



SMILE!: Padilla attends the LWV Oakland City Luncheon.

Russia blamed for hacks

by **Caroline Wagner**
Graphics Designer

Late last year, FireEye Inc. discovered a breach in their network through SolarWinds software nine months after the initial cyber hack. Investigators quickly discovered the immensity of the security breach: up to 18,000 entities had downloaded the malicious code, which has potentially gone unnoticed since as early as March 2019.

The Texas-based company SolarWinds Corp provides software to help companies and government organizations manage their computer networks. In order to access email systems and log-in information, the hackers implanted a code into the software's update system. As companies updated their software, they were unaware of the virus running rampant in their server systems.



BREAK-IN: Hackers used a virus to hack SolarWinds.

U.S. officials believe that a Russian hacking group is behind what some are claiming to be the largest spying operation in U.S. history. In an interview on the Mark Levin Show, Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the hack was "pretty clearly" the work of Russians. Additional lawmakers briefed on the issue agreed that Russia is likely behind the attack, despite Trump deflecting blame away from Russia and accusing China of the cyber attack. "The Cyber Hack is far greater in the Fake News Media than in actuality," Trump tweeted. "Russia, Russia,



HIGH SECURITY: The Pentagon is vulnerable to a cyber hack.

Russia is the priority chant when anything happens because Lamestream is, for mostly financial reasons, petrified of discussing the possibility that it may be China (it may!)." However, security officials are pointing the finger at Cozy Bear, a Russian hacking group that was previously accused of targeting the State Department during Barack Obama's presidency.

Russian cybersecurity firm Kaspersky published evidence pointing out a similarity in the malware code between the SolarWinds hackers and Turla, a hacking group also known as Venomous Bear and Snake. The program known as Sunburst used by the SolarWinds hackers is remarkably similar to a five-year-old malware program called Kazuar, developed by Turla. It is unclear whether Turla is behind the SolarWinds hack or merely inspired it; however, Kaspersky says the similarities may indicate a Russian origin or a shared software developer between the two groups.

The U.S. State Department, Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and elements of the Department of Defense have all reported security breaches in their Treasury and Commerce departments. Additionally, the Justice Department stated that 3 percent of their Microsoft Office 365 accounts may have been compromised, and the Administrative Office of U.S. Courts' nationwide case management system also detected a breach. Russia has denied any involvement in the cyber attack. (Sources: ABC News, Wired, Fox News)