

## WORLD IN BRIEF

Associated Press

## Senate backs major public lands, conservation bill

WASHINGTON — The Senate on Tuesday approved a major public lands bill that revives a popular conservation program, adds 1.3 million acres of new wilderness, expands several national parks and creates five new national monuments.

The measure, the largest public lands bill considered by Congress in a decade, combines more than 100 separate bills that designate more than 350 miles of river as wild and scenic, add 2,600 miles of new federal trails and create nearly 700,000 acres of new recreation and conservation areas. The bill also withdraws 370,000 acres in Montana and Washington state from mineral development.

Lawmakers from both parties said the bill's most important provision was to permanently reauthorize the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, which supports conservation and outdoor recreation projects across the country. The program expired last fall after Congress could not agree on language to extend it.

In Oregon, the bill will create the Devil's Staircase Wilderness by designating roughly 30,000 acres of remote lands in the Oregon Coast Range; permanently protect the Chetco River from mining and mineral extraction; designate 250 miles of prime salmon- and steelhead-producing rivers and streams as part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, about 120 miles of Rogue River tributaries; and protect an additional 40 miles of Rogue River tributaries from mining and future dam installations.

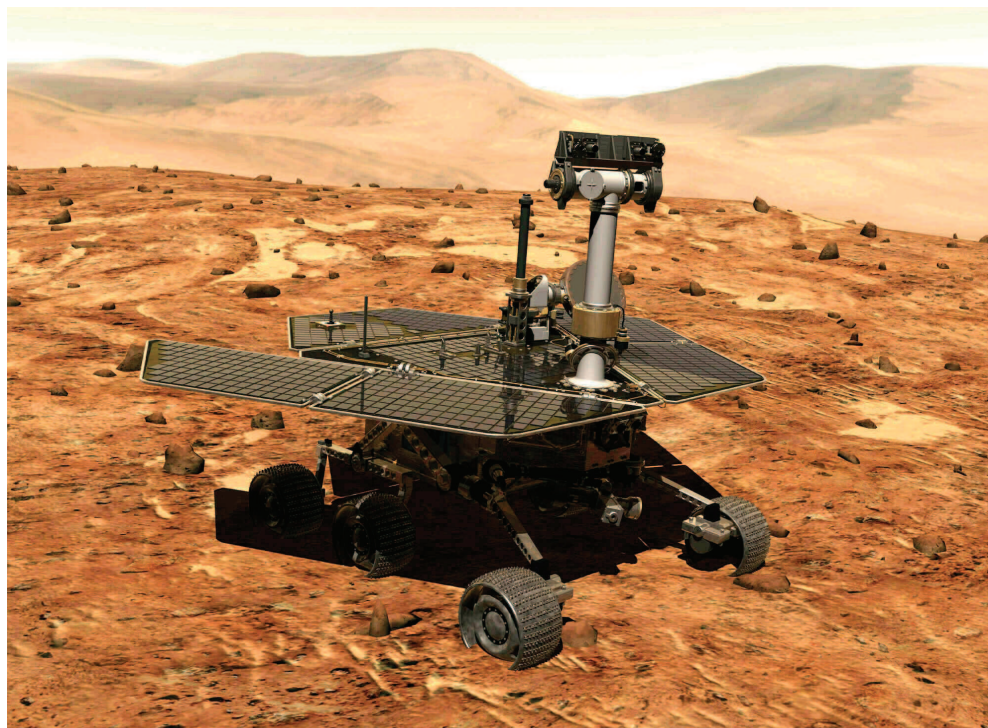
U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley of Oregon both praised the bill's passage.

"Managing our public lands is a matter of public safety, our local recreation economies and the health of the water we as Oregonians drink and air we breathe," Wyden said. ... The House should move quickly to ensure these protections are signed into law."

## US says ex-intelligence official defected to Iran, revealed secrets

WASHINGTON — A former Air Force counterintelligence specialist who defected to Iran has been charged with revealing classified information to the Tehran government, including the code name and secret mission of a Pentagon program.

The Justice Department said today that Monica Elfriede Witt, 39, defected in 2013 after attending a conference in Iran aimed at "condemning American moral standards."



NASA  
An illustration of the rover Opportunity on the surface of Mars. The exploratory vehicle landed on Jan. 24, 2004, and logged more than 28 miles before falling silent during a global dust storm in June 2018.

## NASA about to pull plug on Mars rover, silent for 8 months

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — NASA is trying one last time to contact its record-setting Mars rover Opportunity, before calling it quits.

The rover has been silent for eight months, victim of one of the most intense dust storms in decades. Thick dust darkened the sky last summer and, for months, blocked sunlight from the spacecraft's solar panels.

NASA said Tuesday it will issue a final series of recovery commands, on top of more than 1,000 already sent. If there's no response by today — which NASA suspects will be the case — Opportunity will be declared dead, 15 years after arriving at the red planet.

Team members are already looking back at Opportunity's achievements, including confirmation water once flowed on Mars. Opportunity was, by far, the longest-lasting lander on Mars. Besides endurance, the six-wheeled rover set a roaming record of 28 miles.

Its identical twin, Spirit, was pronounced dead in 2011, a year after it got stuck in sand and communication ceased.

She is currently at large, along with four Iranian hackers who, prosecutors say, used the information she provided to target her former colleagues in the U.S. intelligence community.

The four Iranians were acting on behalf of the government-linked Iranian Revolutionary Guard, prosecutors said. They also remain at large; arrest warrants have been issued for them.

Witt left the Air Force in 2008 and later became a Defense Department contrac-

tor. The indictment suggested that Iran had reached out to her at least as far back as 2012.

## Democrats question pledges in \$26.5B T-Mobile-Sprint deal

WASHINGTON — Democratic lawmakers are challenging a pledge by T-Mobile and Sprint not to raise prices or hurt competition if their \$26.5 billion merger goes through.

Although T-Mobile says it won't raise

prices for three years, Rep. Frank Pallone, D-N.J., chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, said he isn't sure that Trump administration regulators are willing to hold T-Mobile to that promise.

"How can we be sure that consumers who can least afford to pay more are not harmed by the merger?" Pallone asked at a House subcommittee hearing today.

The deal would combine the nation's third- and fourth-largest wireless companies and create a behemoth roughly the size of industry giants Verizon and AT&T. Congress doesn't have authority to rule on the merger, but members are able to use the forum to ask pointed questions. Now that Democrats control the House, they have convened its first merger-review hearing in eight years.

T-Mobile US CEO John Legere and Marcelo Claure, Sprint Corp.'s executive chairman, defended the merger and said American consumers would get more and pay less.

Complicating their argument is the fact that urban consumers are paying 22 percent less for cellphone service following AT&T's failed bid to acquire T-Mobile in 2011, a combination rejected by federal regulators as anticompetitive. That data comes from the Bureau of Labor Statistics price index for wireless telephone service.

## National debt hits new milestone, tops \$22 trillion

WASHINGTON — The national debt has passed a new milestone, topping \$22 trillion for the first time.

The Treasury Department's daily statement showed Tuesday that total outstanding public debt stands at \$22.01 trillion. It stood at \$19.95 trillion when President Donald Trump took office on Jan. 20, 2017.

The debt figure has been accelerating since the passage of Trump's \$1.5 trillion tax cut in December 2017 and action by Congress last year to increase spending on domestic and military programs.

The national debt is the total of the annual budget deficits. The Congressional Budget Office projects that this year's deficit will be \$897 billion — a 15.1 percent increase over last year's imbalance of \$779 billion. In the coming years, the CBO forecasts that the deficit will keep rising, top \$1 trillion annually beginning in 2022 and never drop below \$1 trillion through 2029. Much of the increase will come from mounting costs to fund Social Security and Medicare as the vast generation of baby boomers continue to retire.

The Trump administration contends that its tax cuts will eventually pay for themselves by generating faster economic growth. That projection is disputed by many economists.

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