Pols vote on coal

Parliament narrowly OKs Green Party 'sustainability' resolution while voicing support for mining

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

The first verdict from Parliament: Pursing environmentally sustainable industries in Svalbard in the future is a worthy goal, but so is allowing Store Norske to continue its coal mining operations for now.

That message was expressed Tuesday as Parliament by a 51-47 vote approved a Green Party resolution declaring the government should emphasize development of sustainable industries in Svalbard. But a vast majority of the "yes" votes came from parties that are expressing support for Store Norske as it seeks a 450-million-kroner bailout loan the company says is necessary to continue operating beyond June.

The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries may announce if it will recommend the loan to lawmakers as soon as Friday, with a vote by Parliament possible before the end of April.

Debate about the company's future – and

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Kennel cough epidemic scratches 13 of 24 teams from Trappers Trail as dozens of dogs catch 'flu'

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Sebastien Barrault spent 10 days mushing his dogs from Ny-Ålesund to the starting line of the Trappers Trail race he initiated six years ago. But he and others from the settlement suffered a huge setback during their short stay in Longyearbyen as 11 of their 16 dogs were scratched from the race after being infected with the kennel cough virus that's become an epidemic in town during the past couple of weeks.

The first-ever known outbreak of the flu-like disease in Svalbard eliminated eight of 24 teams before the two-day race started Saturday and five more failed to finish as more than 20 dogs were diagnosed with the illness on the trail despite pre-race examinations.

Barrault said he didn't know about the outbreak until he arrived in Longyearbyen, but tried to protect his dogs by camping well away from others participating in the two-day race that started Saturday. But one of the three teams in his group planning to race added some dogs from a local kennel to their dog team, which likely resulted in the other dogs getting ill.

The group set out with two dog teams instead of three and Barrault was among those focused to drop off at the halfway point due to

See EPIDEMIC, page 3

Doggone shame

Weather summary
Above freezing temperatures with rain and snow this week; colder and clear beginning this weekend.

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Gunning for the top of the world
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Treasuring an old, beat-up mobile home
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New unmanned aircraft center in Ny-Ålesund
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Tombstone tourism
'Fortitude' luring cruisers to Svalbard

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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Yeah, it's probably adequate for polar bears

Russian soldiers participate in a training exercise on an ice floe near the North Pole on Thursday. The military base camp is a supplement to Russia's annual support camp for scientists and expeditions going to the North Pole. Full coverage of this week's North Pole events, including the annual marathon and a family representing the first Nigerians at Pole, is available at icepeople.net.

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

We thought a New York Times reporter was a bit off last year when he called Longyearbyen the ugliest town he's even seen, but that's fairly tame compared to an essay published last week by geologist Karsten Eig titled "A Visit To Mordor" (karsteneig.no/?p=1164). Clouds wrapping them into a world of black and white where fiery mountains and fearsome flesh-ripping creatures cast a pall over a place that's forgotten its summer. "Mordor without the volcanos, where black riders could emerge any minute?" he wrote about his visit last August. "Narnia when the evil witch ruled? At least it could have been a set for a James Bond movie intro. We are in Hornsund on the southwest part of Svalbard, a place so in the middle of fucking nowhere that even very few tourist trips go there." He then proceeds to challenge readers on the types of rocks he sees and, with answers like "carboniferous rift sediments, mainly continental," we find that a lot more haunting than the possibility Sauron might be secretly alive and raiding the kiebasa at the Polish research station ... Moving on to some true heroes in a truly chilling situation, anybody remember the Icelandic Coast Guard vessel Tjör that did fill-in duty in Svalbard last summer when delivery of the governor's new service vessel was delayed? The ship rescued 320 refugees from countries such as Palestine, Pakistan, Ghana and Libya when the wooden boat they were in began leaking off the coast of Sicily during Easter, according to ruv.is. At least 1,150 other refugees have been rescued by her Tjör in the Mediterranean since December, according to the news agency.

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Vaccinations for dog 'flu' coming

**EPIDEMIC**, from page 1

Dogs being diagnosed with the illness. But like most others he accepted the setbacks as unavoidable and tried to make the most of the weekend.

"We'll take it as a nice trip," he said.

Tommy Jordbrudal, who with Laura Vour -ma won the five-dog category with a time of four hours, 41 minutes and 54 seconds, said he treated the race similarly to the four he's participated in previously except for taking some extra precautions at the overnight checkpoint at Kapp Laila.

"We tried to keep the dogs apart, but if they're going to get sick they're going to get sick," he said.

His wife, Janne, was leading the eight-dog division at the halfway point of the race, but had to drop out due to infected dogs.

Kapp Laila.

"We'll take it as a nice trip," he said.

"He always a part of the team," she said.

"He does great in cold."

Vaccines for the virus will be available from Svalbard Vet on May 7 and 11. Appointments can be scheduled by contacting 9052 7196 or svalbardvet@gmail.com.

*There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.*

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**Weather forecast for Longyearbyen**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Forecast</th>
<th>winds</th>
<th>Low</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wednesday</strong></td>
<td>Party cloudy. NW winds to 39 km/h. High 1C (-3C wind chill), low -1C (-6C wind chill).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Thursday</strong></td>
<td>Rain/snow. NW winds to 39 km/h. High 5C (0C wind chill), low -1C (-5C wind chill).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Friday</strong></td>
<td>Rain/snow. Variable winds to 52 km/h. High 1C (-4C wind chill), low -7C (-14C wind chill).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Saturday</strong></td>
<td>Cloudy. Variable winds to 39 km/h. High -3C (-9C wind chill), 17w -9C (-13C wind chill).</td>
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**Extended forecast:**

- **Sunday:** p. cloudy, -3C (-9C), -7C (-11C), light 24:00h; Monday, clear, -7C (-11C), -10C (-16C), light 24:00h; Tuesday, p. cloudy, -6C (-14C), -11C (-17C), light 24:00h; Wednesday, p. cloudy, -7C (-14C), -11C (-17C), light 24:00h
- **24-hour daylight**

Data provided by storm.no
**Droning on reaches new heights**

Top Norwegian political and science officials, above left, tour the new Arctic Center for Unmanned Aircraft in Ny-Ålesund during its official opening Tuesday. At top right, Stian Solbo, a researcher for the Northern Research Institute, accompanies an unmanned aircraft to Svalbard in March aboard the Bjørkhaug cruise ship as part of an effort to determine if the aircraft can be used to count seals. Full details about the new center, seen in an overhead view at bottom right, are at icepeople.net. Photos courtesy of the Northern Research Institute.

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**Bailout loan likely, but with limits?**

**CRISIS, from page 1**

Svalbard’s as an economic and strategic asset – began in the full Parliament with Tuesday’s Green Party resolution essentially requesting coal mining not be considered a part of a new strategic plan being hastily drafted for the archipelago. A revision of the “white paper” was announced in January shortly after Store Norske requested emergency loans of 400 million kroner to continue mining and 50 million kroner for restructuring to allow expansion into other industries such as infrastructure.

“Coal mining was the basis for this settlement,” the Green Party’s resolution states. “In recent times have other livelihoods have come such as tourism, environmental management and research. It is important to facilitate good management of the archipelago.”

The Green Party’s resolution “asks the government to present a case for the further development of the Svalbard community with emphasis on sustainability, environmental research, an energy base and new livelihoods.”

The resolution received a majority of its support from the 30 members of the Labor Party. But Kåre Simensen, who presented his party’s arguments, said pursuing sustainable industries doesn’t mean supporting the Green Party’s position that mining should end in Svalbard.

“For the Labor Party it is important to ensure and maintain the great expertise the Store Norske mining company possess regarding mining and industrial activities in the north,” he said. Furthermore, “imposing a ban on mining on Svalbard is a question that will also affect the Svalbard Treaty and which will trigger extensive work with an uncertain outcome.”

Also joining the lone Green Party member in favor of the resolution were the five members of the Left Party, which has already endorsed Store Norske’s loan request, along with six members of the Center Party, five members of the Christian Democratic Party and four members of the Socialist Left Party.

Opposing the resolution were the 28 members of the Conservative Party and 19 members of the Progress Party. Trond Helleland, presenting the Conservative Party’s overview, said he believes the revised white paper should be completed before lawmakers decide on the proper course for Svalbard’s future.

Longyearbyen Mayor Christin Kristoffersen, a Labor Party member who has led the local political effort to lobby for approval of the loans, said Tuesday “we have a surplus (of votes) in Parliament.” She said she expects the ministry to issue its decision about endorsing the loans “either this Friday or next Friday” and a vote by Parliament by the end of this month, but she still has concerns about whether terms limiting the company’s operational possibilities will be imposed.

There’s more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.