



An UN-clear trip

Ted Turner-led group visits to highlight climate change perils, but does it affect the debate?

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

If anyone knows how to attract an audience it's Ted Turner, but when everybody is shouting about global calamity at once his voice becomes just another lost in the crowd.

The founder of CNN visited Svalbard last

week as part of a fact-finding trip by 12 members of the United Nations Foundation. They saw receding glaciers and heard how ocean waters have heated up at least one degree Celsius during the past decade.

They then shared their experiences to the media via teleconference, as many other political leaders and other noteworthy figures have done numerous time. But the overall response was a collective shrug, although a few skeptics took the expected potshots at their websites.

See **IMPACT**, page 3



STUART RAMSON / UN FOUNDATION

Norwegian Polar Institute Director Kim Holmén, center, points our glaciers to United Nations Foundation executives Ted Turner and Tim Wirth on Thursday in Tempelfjorden.

Buoys of summer



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Leif Eggenfellner, Erik Hoem Olsen and Erik Eggenfellner, all 9, take a brief swim during a beach bonfire and barbecue party Saturday at the Svalbard Sailing Club. Erik Eggenfellner, shivering in the strong wind afterward, estimated the water temperature at minus 10 degrees Celsius. His father, taking a reading from a boat earlier in the day, got a result of three degrees.

Still want low biz tax? Move here

New rules seek to keep firms based mostly on mainland from using Svalbard as a tax haven

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

A 16 percent tax rate instead of 28 percent. Pretty good reason to claim your business is based in Svalbard even if it's not.

New rules eliminating that tax haven scheme beginning in 2011 were announced today by the Norwegian Ministry of Finance. If approved, the higher rate will apply to all profits above 10 million kroner.

"The main purpose of the proposed amendment is to prevent use of the favorable

See **SHELTER**, page 4

Still pristine, now on global scale

Four protected sites in Svalbard added to Ramsar wetlands list



ARLID LYSSAND / SYSSELMANNEN

Bjørnøya is one of four areas newly designated as Ramsar Convention sites.

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

Four protected sites in Svalbard are receiving, if not exactly *more* protection, what might be considered a global stamp of approval.

The sites – Nordenskiöldkysten, Sørkapp, Bjørnøya and Hopen – are being added to five Svalbard locations already classified as Wetlands of International Importance by The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

A statement Friday from the Svalbard governor's office notes the new areas are already

See **WETLANDS**, page 4

Inside

Early election voting begins Friday
Page 2

Headlines from *Svalbardposten*
- Bydrift faces 210M-kroner maintenance bill
- AF Gruppen to provide Store Norske support
- Girl, 12, can return to Svalbard a resident
Page 3

Weather forecast
Page 3

Events calendar
Page 4

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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When we screw up you'll know about it – on the front page. One of the big complaints about newspapers is they tend to bury corrections and clarifications deep inside where few people who read the original article see them. If we need to fix something, an alert box on the front page will state what story is in error and where the full correction is printed.

Submitting material

Letters, columns, photos and other material are welcome, but we can't offer pay for published items since nobody here is getting paid at the moment. Submissions in electronic form (text, Word documents, JPEGs, etc.) are highly preferred, although typing and/or scanning of items will be considered on a per-case basis. We reserve the right to edit submissions for length, clarity, accuracy, libel and other reasons, but we will also make every reasonable effort to contact the author about any changes prior to publication.

Broils of summer



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Eivind Tronsen, above right, grills hamburgers and hot dogs while Kristian Jacobsen serves them during a beach bonfire party Saturday at the Svalbard Sailing Club. At left, members of Longyearbyen's Thai community grill coconut chicken and other street food from their homeland in the Svalbardbutikken parking lot Friday. They are operating the grill periodically this summer.

Briefly

Early voting in municipal election begins Friday

Early voting for the Sept. 12 municipal elections, both for Longyearbyen's council and residents of other cities staying in Svalbard temporarily, begins Friday.

Early voters must contact the municipality for information about where and when ballots can be cast. In Longyearbyen, early voting is at Næringsbygget from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. until Aug. 12, and 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. from Aug. 15 to Sept. 7.

A photo ID must be provided. More information is available at www.valg.no.

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

The outside world's perception of Svalbard continues to be far stranger than anything that could actually happen here, the latest being a couple observations that couldn't be more polar opposite. A taunt of "Longyearbyen, Norway. It has LTE and you don't," was part of an article this week in the *International Business Times*, accompanied by a similarly snarky headline. Meanwhile, a visitor observing a handful of people typing away on laptops at Fruene exclaimed "There's internet – I can't believe it!" Um, yeah, we're slowly figuring out "wireless" isn't referring to that fascinating

telegraph thingy, but the new LTE/4G doohickey isn't something most of us get to use until next year ... Speaking of perceptions, our zombies infesting the Doomsday Vault (who stayed out of sight during Ted Turner's visit despite his colorizing their ancestors) may finally have some competition across the Arctic Circle as "Alaskan Monster Hunt," a Discovery Channel spin-off of "Deadliest Catch," will follow two brothers "as they search for clues to the mystery of Alaska's own version of the Loch Ness Monster. The brothers ... travel to sea after viewing footage of an unusually shaped eel-like creature dipping in and out of the water."



STUART RAMSON / UN FOUNDATION

Ted Turner, center, and Tim Wirth enter the Svalbard Global Seed Vault on Friday as part of a fact-finding trip about climate change by 12 members of the United Nations Foundation.

One trip can't unfreeze climate debate

IMPACT, from page 1

It's not that the polar regions aren't capturing the attention of the world's media. Plenty of stories got wide coverage ranging from warnings of "mass extinctions" in the Arctic at one extreme to a wayward Antarctic penguin nicknamed "Happy Feat" winning over New Zealanders' hearts as a doctor operated on it at the other, literally and figuratively speaking.

But as the UN Foundation delegation neared the end of its trip to Svalbard, following the organization's annual Board of Directors meeting in Oslo, many of the questions during the teleconference focused on practical aspects. How, for instance, can they counter the influence of skeptics or do something to move negotiations on global agreements forward?

"This is the most serious and complex problem humanity has ever faced, so it's easy to see how some people don't get it," said Turner, who is chairman of the foundation he formed in 1998 to support UN activities. "We have to do all we can to convince and persuade the public of what the scientists tell us."

Foundation President Tim Wirth, a Democratic member of the United States Congress

from 1975 to 1993, said "we still have a long way to go" in reaching an international climate agreement because the needs of individual countries varies widely. As for the skeptics, the longtime politician said it's time to hit back.

"We must mount an aggressive program to go after the deniers, countering their untruths," he said, adding they need to match the tough tactics being used by those "who are acting with total mistruth to the public."

But exchanges of increasingly heated accusations and facts – often distorted or simply made up – aren't swaying the debate now. Wirth in an interview Friday, acknowledged doing so will be a long and difficult process. But he said it was achieved with a similar fight about acid rain about 15 years ago, with pollutants from a river in his home state of Colorado providing the "smoking gun."

One area where progress has been made on climate change awareness, for instance, is getting many TV weather reporters to discuss long-term climate factors in addition to immediate forecasts, Wirth said.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM **SVALBARDPOSTEN** VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Bydrift facing 210M-kroner neglected maintenance bill

Repairing long-neglected maintenance at Bydrift's buildings will cost 210 million kroner and officials are uncertain where the money will come from. Longyearbyen's infrastructure agency received the estimate in a preliminary report from OEC Consulting, which conducted detailed examinations of the buildings. The report found some structures haven't received necessary maintenance since the 1970s, some windows and roofs should have been replaced 10 to 15 years ago, and some bathrooms haven't been renovated in decades. Housing has only been refurbished when people move out and the unit is empty for some time, said Marianne Aasen, Bydrift's managing director. She said a more detail report is expected after this summer and they have contacted the Norwegian Ministry of Justice in the hope of obtaining funding.

AF Gruppen to take over services for Store Norske

AF Gruppen has been selected to take over transportation, construction and maintenance services for Store Norske as of Sept. 1. Store Norske Administrative Director Bjørn Arnestad said AF Gruppen submitted "the best overall bid" of four companies bidding to replace services provided by LNS Spitsbergen, whose contract was terminated due to irregularities resulting in criminal charges. AF Gruppen, Norway's third-largest construction company with about 2,000 employees, earned 5.8 billion kroner and reported a pre-tax profit of 372 million kroner in 2010. The five-year contract, with an option for two additional years, is worth about 600 million kroner. LNS has stated they will offer its employees in Svalbard positions at other locations.

Girl, 12, can return a resident

Phonthipha Seesatsue, 12, has obtained an expedited permanent residence permit in Norway, ending a long struggle by her family. Seesatsue lived in Longyearbyen for several years, but her parents relocated her to Tromsø in 2009 and have been forced to commute between the cities since. A person typically must live three years on the mainland for a permit.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Partly cloudy. NW winds to 15 km/h. High 5C (3C wind chill), low 2C (-2C wind chill).	Cloudy. W winds to 7 km/h. High 5C (3C wind chill), low 4C (2C wind chill).	Rain. Variable winds at 4 km/h. High 2C (2C wind chill), low 2C (2C wind chill).	Cloudy. E winds to 11 km/h. High 1C (-2C wind chill), low 0C (-3C wind chill).
Sunrise/sunset: 24-hour light	Sunrise/sunset: 24-hour light	Sunrise/sunset: 24-hour light	Sunrise/sunset: 24-hour light
Extended forecast: Sunday, cloudy, 1C (-1C), 0C (-3C), light 24:00h; Monday, cloudy, 2C (0C), 1C (-1C), light 24:00h; Tuesday, cloudy, 2C (-0C), 1C (-1C), light 24:00h; Wednesday, p. cloudy, 3C (1C), 1C (-1C), light 24:00h.			
Data provided by yr.no			



SEADRILL LTD.

The West Navigator is one of five oil-drilling units in the northern Norwegian sea operated by Seadrill Ltd., which has 60 units worldwide. The company has one employee in Svalbard, using that to justify paying a tax of 16 percent on its Norwegian operations instead of the 28 percent rate businesses based on the mainland must pay.

Tax reform for Svalbard sought

SHELTER, from page 1

tax level on Svalbard to save on income tax from investments made in the Svalbard Archipelago which are not conducive to activity and employment in Svalbard," the ministry wrote in a statement.

An example is Seadrill Ltd., which earned 719 million kroner from its Norwegian drilling rig operations in 2010 and paid 115 million kroner in taxes, according to NRK. The company has one employee living in Svalbard who sends billing invoices and handles other paperwork.

In comparison, Store Norske, which has 400 employees, earned 665 million kroner.

Seadrill, which "moved" to Svalbard in 2007, has not commented on the proposal, according to *Svalbardposten*. The main shareholder is John Fredriksen, who owns the

world's largest oil tanker fleet and was Norway's richest man until he abandoned his Norwegian citizenship and obtained a Cypriot passport, according to *The Sunday Times* of London, where he currently lives.

The ministry's proposal seeks to eliminate using Svalbard as a tax haven by applying the higher rate on profits above 10 million kroner if the amount exceeds 10 times the amount of tax withheld from salaries of employees in the archipelago or 0.15 times the taxable value of "plants, property and other other real capital" in the area.

The ministry is accepting comments on the proposal until Aug. 29, and hopes to submit it to Parliament this fall to be approved effective next Jan. 1.

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

Four new sites get Ramsar status

WETLANDS, from page 1

protected by the Svalbard Environmental Protection Act and "the Ramsar status will not result in any change in the protective provisions for them." But that doesn't make the designation meaningless, with countries like India recently coming under pressure for refusing requests to submit sites.

"A location on the Ramsar list is first and foremost an international recognition of conservation values and a 'quality stamp' of areas from an international body," the Svalbard governor's statement notes.

All 160 countries belonging to the Ramsar Convention, formed in 1971 and joined by Norway in 1974, must establish sites "to ensure that the areas' ecological function is not impaired by administering areas in line with

the best possible knowledge about their value and limits of tolerance," the commission states.

All of the new Svalbard sites "support nationally threatened bird species, most of them in high numbers." They're also important locations for Svalbard reindeer, Arctic foxes polar bears, harbor seals and walruses, and "contain several cultural heritage sites relating to Russian and Norwegian wintering."

Other Svalbard sites with Ramsar status include Dunøyane, Forlandsøyane, Gåsøyane, Isøyane and Kongsfjorden.

A total of 14 new sites were given Ramsar status in Norway, with 51 locations totaling 838,127 hectares now designated nationwide. There are 1,947 sites worldwide.

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

What's up

June 29

8 p.m.: Movie: "Midnight in Paris," British/Spanish/U.S. comedy/romance, age limit not specified. Kulturhuset.

June 30

Power meter reading for Q2.

July 3

8 p.m.: Movie: "Source Code," U.S. action/sci-fi, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

July 5

7 p.m.: Concert featuring Denmark's Our Savior Church Choir. Svalbard Church.

July 10

11 a.m.: Mass w/ substitute preist Ragnar Aase. Svalbard Church.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Transformers 3" (3D), U.S. action/sci-fi, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

July 12

7 p.m.: Fireplace gathering. Svalbard Church.

July 17

11 a.m.: Mass w/ substitute preist Ragnar Aase. Svalbard Church.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Elle S'appelait Sarah," French/British drama, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

July 19

7 p.m.: Fireplace gathering. Svalbard Church.

July 24

11 a.m.: Mass w/ substitute preist Ragnar Aase. Svalbard Church.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Submarine" (3D), British drama/comedy, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

July 26

7 p.m.: Fireplace gathering. Svalbard Church.

July 31

11 a.m.: Mass w/ substitute preist Ragnar Aase. Svalbard Church.

What's online

Icepeople.net provides daily updates of news about Svalbard and the world's polar regions, plus extras for articles from the print edition. Among the latest news:

- *Doubling Arctic shipments from Russia*
- *Greenland ice melts most in half-century*
- *Statoil strikes big at Krafla W. in N. Sea*
- *The only man who can touch polar bears*