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Colorado state Sen. Cleave Simpson, Rep. Marc Catlin, Sen. Perry Will and Rep. Matt Soper at a Club 20 event in Grand Junction last September. (Photo/Sen. Will's Facebook)

Four local legislators preview their bills for 2024

By DENNIS ANDERSON
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The 2024 legislative session is underway, which means a slew of bills will soon be heading to committees and perhaps beyond. While the Governor in his State of the State address listed his priorities as increased housing, public transportation and reducing income tax, four local legislatures discussed with the Montrose Daily Press and Delta County Independent their own priorities for 2024. Rep. Matt Soper, District 54, said he's working on a bill

that would require funeral home operators, morticians and crematorium operators to be licensed. This requirement ended in 1983, but the recent rash of funeral home issues, including Sunset Mesa Funeral Home, has prompted him to look at ways to regulate the industry more. "This stems directly from the Sunset Mesa atrocities, and Penrose, although in DORA's report there's about 20 examples

listed, so many of them didn't make the news," Soper explained. Soper is also working on a bill for individuals who are dyslexic or have learning disabilities who are currently accommodated with testing during their K-12 years and may use their individualized learning plan in college. The bill would also assist them with professional exams, such as those required in the fields of law

and medicine, or an appraiser exam or even a CDOT flagger exam. "What's happening is that the testing entity is asking for one more professional evaluation which at that point will cost between five to eight thousand dollars cash from the applicant. That's just not right. It's discrimination. It's at least economic discrimination," Soper said. Rep. Soper is also working on a bill concerning cell phone connectivity which would study where coverage gaps are across Colorado, as well as identifying the roadblocks to better connection.

"I hear complaints about our rural areas — and some of our urban colleagues have the same complaints — and yet cell phone companies will draw this map of Colorado saying 90% of the State is covered. That's just not true. We want to see what the barriers are. Is it attachment fees on poles, is it right of way, is it taxes? But to actually take a deep dive and see what we need to do as a state to get at least our major highway areas covered and population areas covered as well, especially rural areas where we have clusters."

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Posse seeks funding to keep pace with tech needs

Volunteers kicked in 5,000 hours of work in 2023

By KATHARHYNN HEIDELBERG
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A man aboard a paraglider that crashed in December of 2022 was so impressed with the way Montrose County Sheriff's Posse members responded that he later signed up — and that's just one feather in the all-volunteer search and rescue agency's cap. The crash victim was one of many to step forward and volunteer, the posse's public information officer Mark Rackay said Jan. 12, in sharing highlights from 2023. Seven new members were added last year.

"We've become kind of recognized as a very elite group. We have a waiting list for members. We've never had that before, but it's kind of nice to have," he said. The posse's members are not only unpaid, but also often use their own equipment and gear when conducting search and rescue activities, public event/parade security, traffic control, or assisting in fighting wildfires. The posse-owned equipment requires maintenance and updating. The elite group does not come with elite-level funding that's readymade: it depends

on the community and grants for contributions. The posse makes one formal funding pitch each January and on Monday, the annual solicitation letters began hitting local mailboxes. While in the past, the challenge might have been finding people willing to head into the backcountry in all conditions — and at a moment's notice — the more recent challenge is keeping up with rapidly changing technology. That, of course, comes with a cost.

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Montrose County Sheriff's Posse member Chris Stehl and a Delta-area detective search near Paonia for a Delta County missing woman. (Mark Rackay/Special to the MDP)

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“The reason I’m doing that is because I’m tired of ballot box policy. I’m tired of these initiatives and people that don’t have any skin in the game voting on things and wildlife introduc-



Colorado state senators Cleave Simpson and Perry Will. (Photo/Sen. Simpson's Facebook)

Another bill Simpson is working on concerns property tax lien sales and the equity that belongs to the property owner. Simpson's bill would make this applicable to mobile

Catlin is looking to give constituents the opportunity to speak at public meetings. He says often public testimony at the capitol is presented by professionals who are paid to be there. He believes that this bill would offer a better option

Catlin is also working toward a bill that would regulate sodium nitrite. Catlin stated that

Dennis Anderson is the publisher of the Montrose Daily Press

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The sheriff's posse is active on both the Montrose side of the county and on the West End; more than 40 volunteers contribute their efforts — saving local governments hundreds of thousands of dollars, as well as assisting other agencies. In 2023, the volunteers collectively donated more than 5,000 hours of work. Rackay estimates that the volunteer work saves

Rodriguez, who was slated to be the keynote speaker at the posse's Jan. 13 banquet, called the posse a multiplier of his law enforcement efforts. "Whenever they get involved, it's almost a guarantee that, despite how difficult the circumstances are, it's going to be mitigated. Most of them are on their second career; have another job, and do both," he said.

The 2022 search and rescue response to a downed paraglider brought the posse a volunteer, but more importantly, it brought him and the other person aboard the craft home safely that Christmas Eve. That best-case scenario was repeated in 2023, when an older man failed to return from an outing near Lee



Posse members Adam Skinner, Brian Yergler, Jerry Sieverson, Paul Gottlieb, Paul Martin, Genevieve Shope, and Mark Rackay, with other first responders, make a presentation to students about outdoor rescue in Cerise Park. (Courtesy photo)

Reservoir. On Nov. 23, the man parked near the reservoir, but while out, got turned around, Rackay said. The man's Garmin device alerted his wife and pinpointed his location — but when the posse arrived, volunteers discovered the man hadn't stayed put. They tracked his footprints for most of the night and, as the temperature dipped lower and lower,

To donate to the posse, a non-profit corporation, send back a contribution using the envelope that will

accompany the solicitation letter, or mail a contribution to Montrose County Sheriff's Posse, P.O. Box 717, Montrose, CO 81402. For information about the posse, email info@mcspi.org; call 970-765-7033, or visit www.mcspi.org.

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