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Colorado rafting company sues federal government over minimum-pay rule for guides

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Jason Blevins
The Colorado Sun



A raft hits the rapids in the Colorado River inside Glenwood Canyon on July 7 near Glenwood Springs.

Hugh Carey/The Colorado Sun

DENVER — Colorado’s rafting industry, typically pretty sleepy this time of year, sparked to life this week after a longtime outfitter sued President Joe Biden and the Department of Labor over a new rule spiking the minimum wage for federal contractors to \$15 an hour.

“This is not about minimum wage. We already pay our guides way above \$15 an hour. What’s really at stake here is the overnight rafting trip. We are just not going to be able to comply,” said Duke Bradford, the owner of Arkansas Valley Adventure, who joined the Colorado River Outfitters Association in suing the federal government in Colorado’s U.S. District Court over a rule that Bradford said would raise the cost of rafting across the country. “I want to offer trips that everyone can afford. If I jack up prices to pay these wages, it would be trips for only the wealthy.”

Some outfitters rallied to support Bradford and Colorado River Outfitters Association, which represents 50 of the state’s rafting companies. Some guides blasted Bradford, arguing he was fighting against increased pay for workers who serve as the backbone for that state’s \$150 million rafting industry.

“It’s become harder and harder to make a living doing this,” said 25-year guide Antony McCoy with Timberline Tours. “The only reason...



federal contractors to raise minimum wage to \$15 an hour, up from \$10.95. It also requires overtime of \$22.50 an hour for work beyond 40 hours.

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