

# MONTANA KAIMIN

**IN TODAY'S POLITICAL  
CLIMATE, JOURNALISTS  
FACE BUDGET CUTS,  
FEDERAL THREATS AND  
PUBLIC MISTRUST**

STORY BY MADELYNN PANDIS,  
MARIAH HENRY, GRACE  
GOLBACH, HENRY DOELLINGER  
AND SAV CHAVEZ

# JOURNALISM UNDER FIRE



**7 ASBESTOS HALL**

**13 THERAPY DOGS ACTING**

**15 WRESTLE MANIA**

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY HENRY DOELLINGER

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The Montana Kaimin is a weekly independent student newspaper at the University of Montana. The Kaimin office and the University of Montana are located on land originally inhabited by the Salish People. Kaimin is a derivative of a Salish language word, "Qe'ymin," that is pronounced kay-MEEN and means "book," "message" or "paper that brings news."

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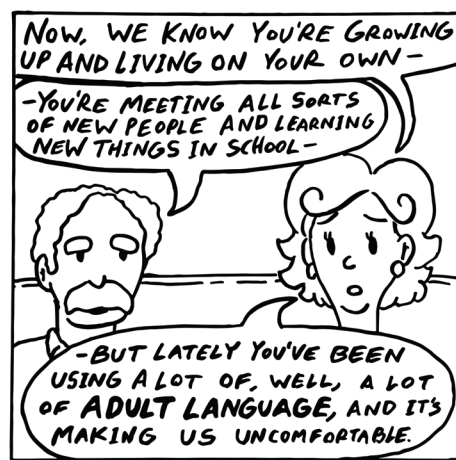
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## POLITICAL CARTOON



# More than Can the Cats

Even though the University of Montana Griz football team didn't win the epic Brawl of the Wild game at Washington-Grizzly Stadium this year, we did win another fierce competition – the Can the Cats food drive.

In conjunction with the Brawl of the Wild football game, where the Grizzlies square off against the Montana State University Bobcats, Missoula and Bozeman also battle to collect food donations.

This year, the Montana Grizzlies won with over one million combined pounds of food collected and dollars donated, the most the school has ever raised in the competition. Combined with Bozeman, the drive resulted in over two million pounds and dollars raised.

The money and food donated in Missoula came from dozens of charity events held at downtown bars, UM campus locations and grocery stores.

This food drive could not have come at a more fortuitous time. The federal

government shutdown on Oct. 1 ran all the way until Nov. 12, making it the longest in history. In that time, benefits for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known as SNAP, ran out when they should've been released. Not every state released SNAP benefits, and some not at all. When asked if state funding would step in to provide emergency assistance, Montana Gov. Greg Gianforte stated in a news conference that he would not be tapping into state-level assistance to supplement the loss of federal funding.

SNAP benefits were eventually released on Nov. 15, and one week later was the Brawl of the Wild, marking the end of the 26th Can the Cats food drive. While the UM Food Pantry and the Missoula Food Bank now have food and money to provide to Missoulians in need, we can not – and should not – assume that one food drive before winter's harshest marathon is enough to support impoverished and hungry Montanans.

In the wake of the government shutdown, we've had an opportunity for total clarity. Now more than ever, it's clear that the leaders holding office at the most local and national levels do not have the interest of the public in mind. To put it plainly: They don't care if we starve.

The best way to change this is to vote, but until Election Day rolls around next November, what can we do in the interim? We can look out for each other.

Can the Cats is an example of what people can do when they step in, come together and directly support each other.

Now that it's over, it's so important that everyone continues that action. According to the Department of Agriculture, 40% of SNAP benefits go to children. The food bank here in town supported one in five Missoula County residents last year. That's one in five Missoulians at one time or another needing assistance to eat.

I can't imagine what it's like to not know where I'm going to find my next meal, but my fellow classmates, friends and coworkers have, and the same may be true for you, too. Whether by donating food or money to the food bank or to the UM food pantry on campus, we can prevent that.

We shouldn't stop donating just because Can the Cats is over. Charity driven by rivalry is fun, but charity driven by a motivation to help each other should be even more fulfilling. Our lives are busy, the world feels loud and everything is so damn expensive. Maybe that should be the motivation we channel to care. Maybe that's the key: bring that same intentionality to our everyday actions that we do to a drive like Can the Cats.

Next time we're at the grocery store, skimming the aisles of cereals, soup and snacks, we can grab something extra to drop off to the food bank. Maybe the next time we're looking through our cabinets for a snack, we'll set aside that can of soup we still haven't cooked, and bring it to the UM Food Pantry.

The ability to change things, to make life a little less hard, is ours if we decide to use it.

- Elle Daniel, editor-in-chief

Like it? Hate it? Let us know.

Email us your opinions at [elle.daniel@umontana.edu](mailto:elle.daniel@umontana.edu)

## Pregame prayer



Members of the University of Montana Griz foot team kneel in prayer in the endzone before the Brawl of the Wild game at Washington-Grizzly Stadium on Nov. 22.  
JACKSON MAILEY | MONTANA KAIMIN

### SUDOKU

Difficulty: Easy

4					5	1		
				9		5	4	
	3							6
	7							
9				7	2	3		
				3		4	1	
1								
3	4			6				
2		9	1	4		8	7	

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Edited by Margie E. Burke

#### HOW TO SOLVE:

Each row must contain the numbers 1 to 9; each column must contain the numbers 1 to 9; and each set of 3 by 3 boxes must contain the numbers 1 to 9.

Answer to Previous Sudoku:

2	4	6	3	7	5	8	9	1
9	3	5	8	1	4	2	7	6
7	8	1	9	2	6	5	3	4
6	9	4	5	3	2	7	1	8
1	5	3	7	8	9	4	6	2
8	7	2	6	4	1	9	5	3
3	6	7	4	9	8	1	2	5
5	1	8	2	6	7	3	4	9
4	2	9	1	5	3	6	8	7

# In local news...

AIDAN GRAHAM | NEWS REPORTER  
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## SHOOTING DOWNTOWN

A shooting occurred in downtown Missoula last week, leaving one man hospitalized.

On Nov. 25 at 7:30 p.m., shots were fired outside Red's Bar. Missoula police officers discovered a 27-year-old man had been shot in the leg.

Officers issued a shelter-in-place order to downtown residents while securing the area, and assisted in transporting the victim to medical services.

While searching the area, officers recovered a firearm which they believed was used in the shooting.

Police released the shelter-in-place order around midnight and have since assured residents there is no further risk to the public.

On Nov. 26, officers detained a male and female subject in a routine traffic stop and have since stated all people involved with the shooting have been found and interviewed.

## BITTERROOT MINE PROPOSAL

Ravalli County commissioners held a city council meeting on Monday to discuss the mining project proposed in the West Fork region of the Bitterroot Valley.

The Sheep Creek project, a proposed rare earth minerals mine north of Darby, has been listed to be "fast-tracked" for federal review, gaining pushback from environmental groups and local residents for its possible impacts on environmental stability, recreation and public health.

The meeting, held at the Ravalli County Fair Grounds, saw an estimated 500 attendees opposing the project.

Commissioners are preparing to approve a letter opposing the expedited consideration of the mine, according to attendees.

## MISSOULA COUNTY CONFIRMS FIRST INFLUENZA DEATH OF SEASON

Missoula County health officials confirmed the first influenza death of the 2025-26 season on Monday.

A news release from Missoula Public Health and the Montana Department of

Public Health and Human Services has confirmed 234 cases of influenza, six hospitalizations and one death in Montana since October. Seven of these cases were confirmed in the Missoula County area.

Health officials have emphasized the importance of vaccinations and other preventative measures as residents head further into flu season.

## MOUNT JUMBO TRAILS CLOSE FOR WINTERING ELK

Missoula Parks and Recreation has announced closures for Mount Jumbo trails to protect wintering wildlife.

The mountain's North Zone will be closed from Dec. 1 to May 1, while the southern zone will be closed from Dec. 1 to March 15.

The parks department stated this is to protect local elk herds and other wildlife who view humans and dogs as predators. Protection of the animals prevents them from exhausting themselves in harsh winter conditions as well as allowing uncompromised study of their travel patterns.

The department is also hiring "Elk Spotters" to study wildlife in the area during the closure.

During this time, the L trail and Marshall Canyon trails will remain open, however, hikers must keep all dogs leashed.

## MONTANA TO RECEIVE \$27 MILLION FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR

Because of the Department of the Interior's fiscal year 2025 energy revenue disbursements, Montana will receive \$27 million according to figures released by the Office of Natural Resources Revenue.

The nationwide disbursement totaled to nearly \$15 billion. While this is lower than last year's total, it is the fifth largest since 1982.

The funds come from energy production on federal lands within the state and can support things like infrastructure, education, emergency services and conservation, according to NBC Montana.

Montana is ranked 12th among states in total disbursements and will share part of the \$4 billion distributed to 34 states based on mineral and energy activity within their borders.

- Sav Chavez, news editor



## Last week on the Kaimin Cast ...

Winter is a time many athletes like to put on weight and gain strength. Depending on the athlete and their goals, lifting can look very different.

Lifting is an outlet for many people to clear their heads, although the impacts of repetitive motion call for caution in a very physically explosive hobby. A study done by the National Center for Biotechnology Information showed that college athletes are the most common demographic to sustain injury, finding an average of two injuries per athlete each year.

As injuries pop up, athletes take care to recover. Alex Renney, a fourth-year pharmacy student, has tons of experience lifting after injury.

"I tore my rotator cuff and tore rhomboids on my back during one of the accidents, so I was really big into lifting before that," Renney said. "It was really defeating at that point to be completely down on the bottom, like can't lift my own arm's weight, and so tracking has been a really good metric for me."

Listen to this semester's last Kaimin Cast, "Bulking and Training Trends: Powerlifting on Campus" to learn more about how lifters train and recover over the winter.

-Samuel Armstrong-DuBois,  
audio reporter



New Kaimin Cast  
episode out this  
week. Stay tuned.  
Scan for the latest



## LUIGI MANGIONE CASE HEARD TO BAR EVIDENCE

Luigi Mangione, the 27-year-old accused of killing United Healthcare CEO Brian Thompson last December, appeared in court on Monday in a hearing to bar key evidence his defense claimed was seized unlawfully.

During Mangione's arrest, New York police officers seized a backpack containing several pieces of evidence, such as a firearm, a loaded magazine and a notebook containing entries which prosecutors claim connect him to the shooting.

Mangione's attorney, Karen Friedman Agnifilo, submitted a court filing this month requesting the evidence, which was seized without a warrant, to be barred from the case.

While the prosecution has disagreed with the defense's claims, they agreed to a hearing which began this last Monday and is expected to last several days.

The hearing follows the dismissal of two charges in September: murder in the first degree in furtherance of an act of terrorism and second-degree murder as a crime of terrorism. Mangione still faces nine charges from the state and the death penalty prosecution from the federal government. He has pleaded not guilty on all charges.

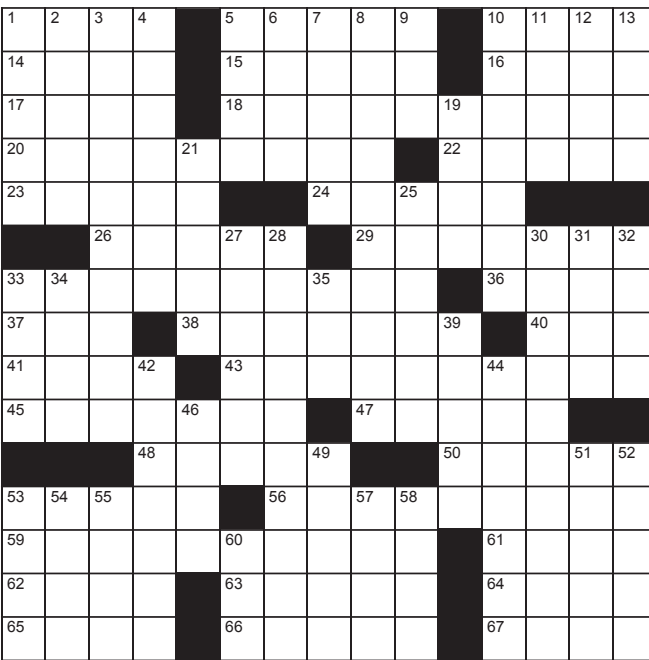
## STARBUCKS STRIKE CONTINUES

The Starbucks workers' strike has entered its third week since calling the strike on Nov. 13, with negotiations at a standstill and no end in sight.

Starbucks Workers United, in protest against the company's labor practices, has demanded higher pay, more consistent hours for better turnover and denounced the company over claims of union busting practices. The strike follows nearly 200 hours of contract negotiations between Starbucks Corporate and the union since April.

While the union claims over 2,500 of its 11,000 members are on strike, the company has disputed these numbers and further claimed stores have experienced minimal disruption.

All negotiations have halted since the strike began. While the union waits for the company to put forward new proposals that meet their concerns, Starbucks continues to hold out for negotiations to continue.



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ACROSS

- 1 Rumple, as hair
- 5 \_\_\_ del Sol
- 10 Orch. section
- 14 "\_\_\_ Dinka Doo"
- 15 Bread spreads
- 16 Opera feature
- 17 Working hard
- 18 Saving gas, say
- 20 Shortcut
- 22 Bobby of tennis fame
- 23 "The Zoo Story" playwright
- 24 Took to jail
- 26 Like draft beer
- 29 Renders invalid
- 33 Taunts on the field
- 36 Meetup, slangily
- 37 Sculler's need
- 38 Gibraltar and Magellan
- 40 Nonpro sports gp.
- 41 It ebbs and flows
- 43 Denier's words
- 45 Trap
- 47 "Peer Gynt" composer
- 48 Street reps
- 50 Indian flatbreads
- 53 Social no-no
- 56 "Calvin and Hobbes" cartoonist
- 59 "It's news to me"
- 61 Bones, in anatomy
- 62 Golfer's cry
- 63 Water and elec.
- 64 Fortune teller
- 65 Heads-up abbrs.
- 66 "One of \_\_\_ days...."

DOWN

- 1 Sporty Mazda
- 2 No further than
- 3 Wave-riding platforms
- 4 Shiny fabrics
- 5 Cola starter
- 6 One of five Norwegian kings
- 7 More parched
- 8 Highest rated
- 9 Japanese volcano
- 10 Steinbeck's birthplace
- 11 H.S. math
- 12 Smoke or napkin follower
- 13 Yields to gravity
- 19 Copier insert: Abbr.
- 21 Rogen and others
- 25 Trojan War figure
- 27 Clothing
- 28 Gave up, reluctantly

- 30 Quells, as rioters
- 31 Son of Isaac
- 32 "On the Verge" actress Elisabeth
- 33 Shopper's bag
- 34 Parade spoiler
- 35 \_\_\_ Cruces, N.M.
- 39 "Goosebumps" writer
- 42 Makes a cryptogram
- 44 Fragrant bloomer
- 46 Elvis' middle name, originally
- 49 Sink of "Stranger Things"
- 51 Plastic surgery targets
- 52 Catch
- 53 Minor quarrel
- 54 Call to a mate
- 55 Italian seaport
- 57 Business card nos.
- 58 Shock, in a way
- 60 Ump's call

Answers to Previous Crossword:

A	C	M	E	A	D	A	M	S	O	M	A	S
C	R	U	X	M	I	L	E	C	L	I	V	E
T	A	L	C	M	A	I	N	T	A	I	N	E
O	N	C	E	M	O	R	E	E	L	O	I	S
R	E	T	R	O	I	N	G	R	E	S	S	
		P	R	E	S	S	E	R	T	A	D	
V	A	S	T	E	S	T	L	A	R	C	E	N
I	N	T	E	N	T		P	E	A	R	C	E
I	S	A	D	O	R	E	M	I	S	U	S	E
I	I		R	O	R	I	E	N	T	S		
		R	E	A	G	E	N	T	E	A	T	U
S	E	W	A	G	E		D	E	A	D	L	I
P	R	E	S	E	N	T	E	R	S		I	N
O	I	L	E	R		W	E	E	K		T	E
T	E	L	L	S		O	D	D	S		Y	A

# Airport-o-scope

NICOLETTE SEIBEL | ARTS & CULTURE REPORTERS  
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The holiday season is coming to town! Between TSA lines, navigating the terminals, boarding and finally taking off, airports make for a doozy of a day. What type of person are you on a plane?

**SAGITTARIUS (NOV. 22-DEC. 21):** Sagittarius, all you need on a plane is a neck pillow and your Nintendo Switch to keep you satisfied. Even if you get bored of Animal Crossing, you have loads of iPad games to jump between, and as an added bonus, halfway through you'll get a free little soda and some of the good pretzels. You may be an iPad baby, but at least you're happy.

**CAPRICORN (DEC. 22-JAN. 19):** The airport lounges are very familiar with your face, Capricorn. If you are cruising through the air, you are doing it with class: first class, that is. You're turning heads with your business suit attire and that gigantic watch, for some reason. Most people only see you going through the fast pass TSA check-in. I wish I was living that kind of luxury.

**AQUARIUS (JAN. 20-FEB. 18):**

Aquarius, wake up! You fell asleep mid-packing the night before and now your Uber driver is calling you to take you to the airport. It's okay to have missed one or two flights in your life, but three! This is becoming an issue. Maybe we should stick to driving home for the holidays.

**PISCES (FEB. 19-MARCH 20):**

Pisces, I know that something about being up in the clouds makes you get all nostalgic and sentimental, and you really lean into it. I see you with headphones listening to the "Freudian" album by Daniel Caesar, staring down at the city lights and writing down poetry in your journal about this new phase in your life.

**ARIES (MARCH 21-APRIL 19):** Fitted with the best-worn oversized grey hoodie, the OG wired headphones and some classic flannel pajama pants, comfort always takes precedence over style when you're traveling home. Aries, your confidence makes this outfit complete and really hides the fact that you just rolled out of bed and headed straight into the Uber and strutted into that airport.

**TAURUS (APRIL 20-MAY 20):** Don't worry, Taurus, I know you feel getting to the airport three hours early is a non-negotiable, but this is the Missoula airport we are talking about, darling, not LAX! If you want to pack your bags the week before your flight you go for it. You're doing better than most, but your flight leaves at 7. If you get there

at 5 then you're gonna be at the airport before literally everyone else.

**GEMINI (MAY 21-JUNE 20):** Gemini, you are the flight attendant, specifically the one who shows the emergency procedure that, let's be honest, we all know no one is really listening to because they all still have wifi. You don't take it to heart, though! You're there because you thought that being a flight attendant would mean you are getting paid to travel, but now the only exciting thing about the job is being occasionally seductive when collecting trash from a niche internet celebrity traveling in economy.

**CANCER (JUNE 21-JULY 22):** It is your voice over the intercoms that fade into the chattering abyss of a boarding terminal. Cancer, without you there would be chaos. You are strong-willed and the only one who can cut through the bull and blatant stupidity of passengers trying to find a new flight when theirs gets cancelled, and also empathetic enough to help the solo college travelers just trying to get home.

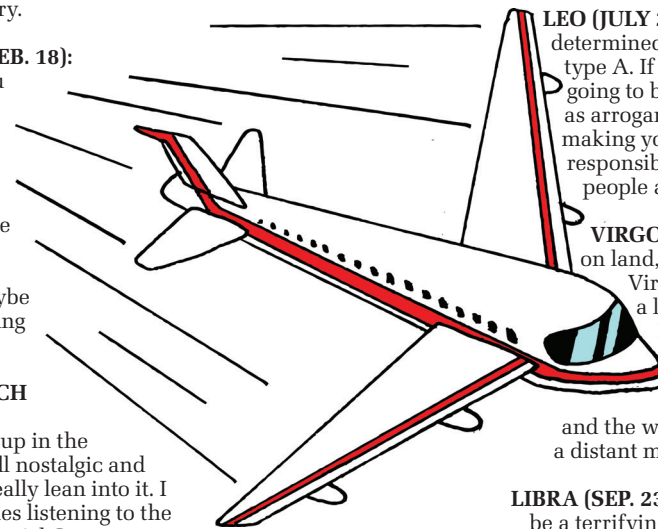
**LEO (JULY 23-AUG. 22):** Leo, you are determined, dominant, and definitely type A. If you're on a plane, you're going to be the one flying it. You are as arrogant as you are courageous, making you the perfect person responsible for carrying hundreds of people a day 40,000 feet into the air.

**VIRGO (AUG. 23-SEP. 22):** While on land, you remain pretty calm, Virgo, but in the air, you need a little assistance to stay chill. No need to worry, though, a couple of gummies help take away the scary thoughts during takeoff and the whole experience will be only a distant memory. Just pack eye drops!

**LIBRA (SEP. 23-OCT. 22):** An airport can be a terrifying, confusing, stressful place, and you, Libra, are the little light in the craziness of it all. You're the kind of

person to switch a seat so a family can stay next to each other or help put up someone's overhead bag, maybe spark up a conversation. Unfortunately for you, Libra, not everyone, or most people, are looking to have hour-long conversations with you just because you are seated next to each other.

**SCORPIO (OCT. 23-NOV. 21):** If anyone looks the most prepared to be on a plane, it is you, Scorpio. Flying for you is a tactile mission, and your uniform is an off-white Alo sweatsuit and a matching rolling suitcase with a Louis Vuitton tote bag. You are turning heads even on the plane with your facemask, supplements and eyemask routine, which is pertinent to keeping your face from getting dry and, God forbid, puffy.



BARRETT CLEMENT | MONTANA KAIMIN

# UM veteran law group restarts

SABRINA PHILIP | NEWS REPORTER

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Veterans at the University of Montana recently restarted the Veterans Law Group at the Alexander Blewett III School of Law.

The group was brought back with goals of educating veterans on military benefits for higher education, adapting to the civilian world, continuing legal education and creating a lasting pro bono network.

“The Veterans Law Group started as just this little idea I had last year,” Veteran Law Group President Remington Prochaska said. “I always say ‘You miss the clowns, but you don’t miss the circus.’ So this was a way for us to bring the clowns together and do some good within the law school and in the community.”

While the group originally started 20 years ago, David Ley, a second year law student and member of the group, said it disappeared on campus due to changing veteran interests and COVID-19. The group was restarted last spring by Prochaska, a second-year law student from Everett, Washington, who majored in forensic psychology at Arizona State University.

“The whole goal is to build a network that we can lean on, and that network will still be in place when David and I graduate,” Prochaska said. “Then we can be a part of that network from the outside. We want to build something that isn’t going to get pushed to the side for two years and then somebody else comes and picks it up and tries to reinvent the wheel.”

Prochaska shared that there are about seven or eight 2L cohort members in the group. The law school divides different cohorts based on progression in the program: 1L, 2L and 3L.

The members of the group have an initiative to share the group with other veterans on how to attend law school debt free.

Another goal of the group is to share with other veterans how to attend law school for no cost using military benefits. Prochaska said he was able to use his Government Issue Bill, a federal program that gives benefits to veterans or active service members, to pay for his undergraduate education, and his



Veterans Law Group President Remington Prochaska, left, and law student David Ley stand outside the University of Montana's Alexander Blewett III School of Law on Nov. 21. **TORI KUEHL | MONTANA KAIMIN**

Chapter 31, the Veteran Readiness and Employment Program, to pay for law school.

“Now, it’s just us trying to get the word out and pass on to other vets like ‘Hey, you have the ability to do this and you should,’” Prochaska said.

For Ley, because most veterans are coming back hurt, he wants them to know they are also entitled to vocational rehab benefits. It’s important to the group as all seven members of the cohort are disabled veterans.

“Since we’ve been at war for so stinking long, most of us are coming back hurt and we have some classification on the disability scale, which entitles us to our vocational rehab benefits,” Ley said.

Those vocational benefits help train people to get back into employment and back into society.

“Those benefits are what’s paying for most of our law school people,” Ley said.

Prochaska said part of the group’s plan is to “reenergize the veterans section of the Montana State Bar.” He said his plan is to focus on organizational leadership, and how that affects the differences between leading civilians and leading soldiers.

Prochaska said he hopes to address changes in Veterans Affairs benefits and how it affects the lowest level of soldiers.

“In order to do that, we have to get everybody in the same room, and get them excited about the same things,” Prochaska said. “Right now, we are planning a CLE, which is a Continuing Legal Education course. Essentially, you set up speakers and panels that come in and talk about whatever your overarching umbrella is.”

Prochaska’s goal is to hold a Continuing Legal Education course in the near future to build a network the group is able to lean on for pro bono opportunities for legal assistance for veterans.

The group also focuses on reform through legislative projects. At the state level, the group’s efforts are centered around license plate reform for disabled veterans and creating awareness for ambulatory issues for veterans.

“The ability to kind of put the discretion and deference in the veteran’s hands on whether or not they need to park close to a building, it makes a difference,” Ley said. “There’s been days where I’ve had to miss class because I knew I couldn’t crutch across the parking lot with my little cane because it was going to take too long or I was worried about slipping on the ice.”

Ley continued the federal legislative project of the group involves building a pro bono network. In wanting to do this, they are working with Congressman Ryan Zinke.

“For a federal entity to receive volunteer help, which is what our pro bono system is going to be, there needs to be a statutory federal law enabling them to receive the volunteer service,” Ley said.

The group aims to build a pro bono network that connects with VA centers and clinics across the state and use them as referral networks because the centers see more veterans than anyone else.

“If they know veterans are facing legal issues, they can refer them to this pro bono network and we can build an intake process to receive that,” Ley said.

Prochaska said the estimation of 500 veterans on campus, and the University’s status as the number one military friendly school, allows the group to be a source that faculty and staff, such as Pat Beckwith, director of military and veteran services can use.

According to a UM press release in September, there are 397 student veterans on campus, making up 3.6% of the student body.

Prochaska emphasized the importance of leaning on the network of the group which pushes veterans to succeed in school in a financially efficient way.

“The ability to go to law school without having any debt is crazy,” Prochaska said. “We spend so much time getting paid to break down our bodies, it’s time to start working with our minds a little bit.”

**CHIMNEY CORNER**

**HAIRSTYLING**

**Walk-Ins Welcome**

**Ask for Sarah**

**(406-824-2298)**

**Appointments**

**Monday - Wednesday**

**540 DALY AVE STE B MISSOULA, MT**

# Parties in daycare asbestos lawsuit to move toward settlement

AUBREY BOWERS | CONTRIBUTED  
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Guardians of kids who attended a daycare at the University of Montana are set to meet with UM’s lawyers in April to discuss a settlement on a lawsuit regarding dangerous amounts of asbestos exposure in McGill Hall.

This development is part of a five-year legal battle after UM temporarily closed McGill Hall. Plaintiffs, whose children or grandchildren attended the Associated Students of the University of Montana Child Care, filed a complaint against UM in May 2020 after test results from 2018 showed dangerous amounts of asbestos exposure in McGill Hall, the building that hosts the child care center in the basement.

The building was closed in 2019, but reopened a few months later, according to KPAX. Now, five years later, the plaintiffs may see movement on the case.

The case has been making its way through the Missoula County District Court since it was filed in 2020. In May, UM motioned for a summary judgement, which aims to close a court case before a trial occurs due to limited dispute from the defendant about the facts of the case. UM’s motion was denied, and the case remained open.

A scheduling order filed in June will bring the lawyers from both parties together to discuss settlements, in a lawyers’ resolution conference. If a settlement is not reached, the case will go to trial at a later date. The conference is scheduled to occur on April 24 next year.

According to the lawsuit, tests were performed in November and December of 2018 after maintenance personnel were attempting to fix a fan in the ceiling space of the building and found a possible disturbance of asbestos. Further testing within the daycare revealed asbestos fibers were found on surfaces that were easily accessible to the children, such as tables, mats and toys. The results showed amounts of asbestos fibers up to 400,000 per square centimeter, which is 80 times the recommended limit.

The Craighead branch of ASUM Child Care, which is now vacant, was also tested and found to have excessive amounts of asbestos exposure, with 270,000 fibers per

square centimeter. Neither buildings were closed until roughly a month later in January 2019.

The University temporarily moved the childcare centers into different buildings after the closure. Parents and staff were then notified of the situation and UM urged individuals who may have been exposed to seek health care and medical testing.

According to the filed complaint, plaintiffs claimed UM was negligent in its management of the situation when it failed to notify building staff and parents of the incident for several weeks and caused emotional distress in fear for their children’s future health and safety. The complaint also states that due to UM’s failure to follow its own asbestos treatment policy, parents were unable to make informed decisions on behalf of their children. They cited the fact that asbestos-related health symptoms may not be present until 10 to 40 years after exposure, according to the Mayo Clinic.

“We’ve maintained that we did what was right through the eye of the law with the

information that we had at the time and made pretty swift changes to make sure that health was a top priority,” said Dave Kuntz, UM’s director of strategic communications.

According to Kuntz, there are U.S. Environmental Protection Agency guidelines, rules and regulations for levels of exposure that require different action, and UM’s policies are in line with those guidelines on levels of exposure.

“To speak frankly, there’s just lots of buildings, and not just here at the University, but all through Western Montana and the region, that there’s gonna be at times small exposures to asbestos,” he said.

Asbestos was widely used in building materials, such as insulation and floor tiles, in the 1900s, and many of UM’s historical buildings contain the substance. As long as it stays confined and undisturbed, however, there is no risk for exposure. If it is disturbed, Kuntz said, that is when action is necessary.

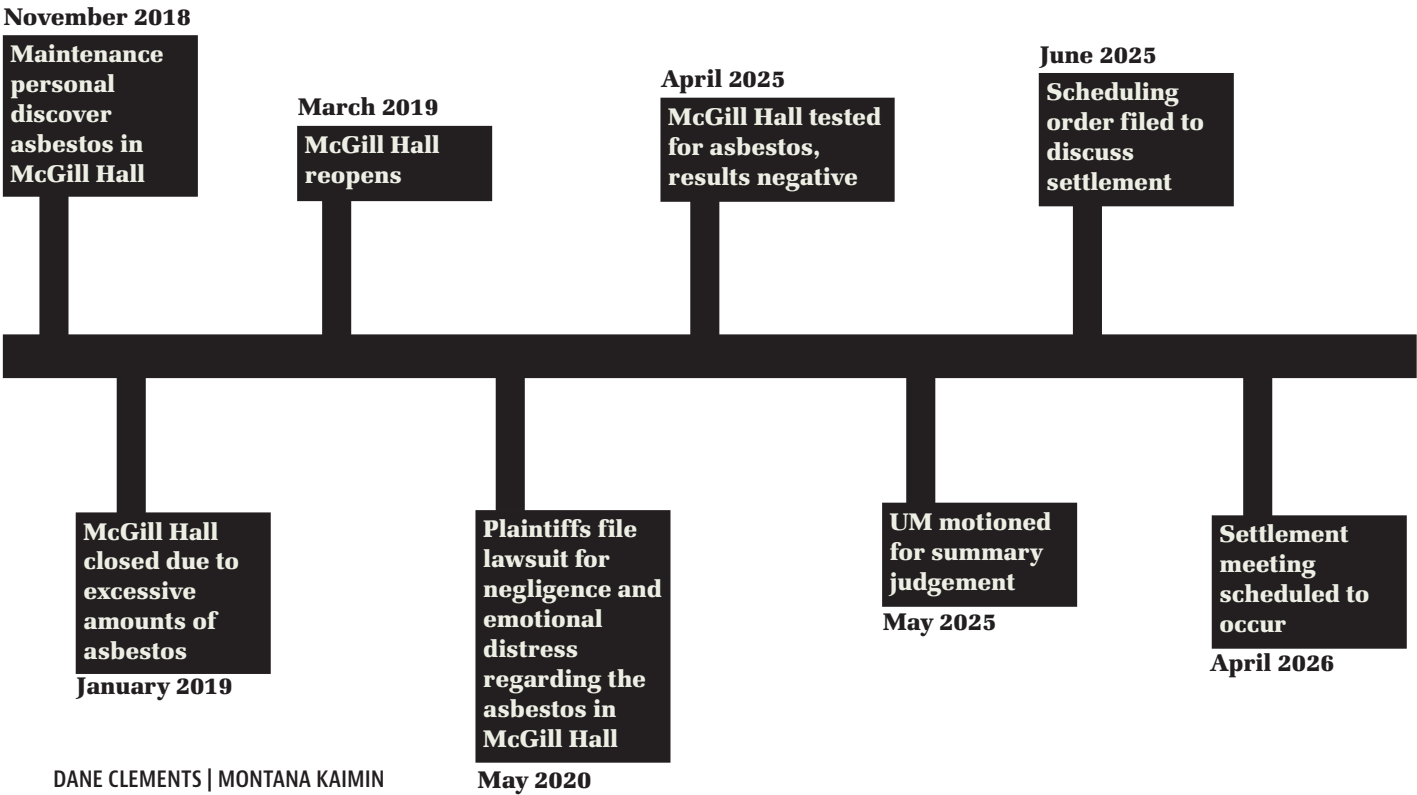
Since the discovery of asbestos in McGill Hall in 2018, UM’s asbestos management

plan has made some changes. Trent Drinkwalter, the occupational health and safety officer at UM, said that McGill Hall is tested biannually. The building was tested in April 2025 and results were negative. It was also recently tested in October 2025, and the University is still awaiting results.

“If suspected to be asbestos or planning to disturb, asbestos facilities must be notified before any work can be done. Our facility staff is trained on recognition and methods of how to handle it,” Drinkwalter said.

Regular air tests are also conducted in the Craighead building University apartments for students, although there is no longer an operating daycare center there. Drinkwalter said all the testing since the event has been negative.

“If there are issues, we have three experts on campus, plus a few more who can address those things. And that’s something that has been a huge priority for the University for a while now, but especially coming out of the McGill situation, and it’ll continue to be a priority,” Kuntz said.



DANE CLEMENTS | MONTANA KAIMIN

# JOURNALISM UNDER FIRE

STORY BY  
MADELYNN  
PANDIS,  
MARIAH  
HENRY, GRACE  
GOLBACH,  
HENRY  
DOELLINGER  
AND SAV  
CHAVEZ

## IN TODAY'S POLITICAL CLIMATE, JOURNALISTS FACE BUDGET CUTS, FEDERAL THREATS AND PUBLIC MISTRUST IN THE MEDIA

**T**he rise of AI programs, news influencers and the budget cuts to public media by the Trump Administration combined are working against journalists.

Now, newsrooms have to work harder than ever to support their readers in feeling confident in their reporting and content. AI and news influencers often publish content without any editorial checks, helping spread misinformation quicker than before, and news consumers are beginning to become wary of journalists and the public media.

When President Donald Trump adopted the term “fake news” in 2017, it quickly became a staple of the political lexicon. Journalists and newsrooms felt the public begin to lose trust in their abilities to produce non-biased and accurate news.

According to the Pew Research Center, public trust in the media has been rapidly decreasing over the last half century.

“Midway through the 20th century, the news media was among the most trusted institutions in the United States. Today, it sits near the bottom of the list, outflanked only by Congress in most surveys,” a 2024 Pew Research Center article said. Today, that trust and the future of news is in a period of uncertainty.

- *Madelynn Pandis, features editor*

### THE PRESS, THE PUBLIC AND POLITICS

As reporting from social media, independent sources and publications without professional journalistic editing rises in popularity, more people will be exposed to partisan news and echo chambers.

There's a dramatic political divide regarding trust in the mass media — a slim majority of Democrats, 51%, trust the media, while only 8% of Republicans express the same confidence, according to a September Gallup Poll. A sizable majority of Republicans reported no trust in the media at all. Independents' trust sits at 27%.

Trump, a Republican, has continued to rally against “fake news” and fact-checking since he took office for his second term in January, primarily through the White House press secretary, Karoline Leavitt.

In February, Leavitt announced the Trump Administration would take control of determining which outlets and reporters will be allowed in the smaller, 13-member White House press pool. Previously, assignments for the press pools were determined by the White

House Correspondents' Association, an independent group of journalists elected by their peers.

The new pool assignments include seats for outlets “that have long been denied” access to the daily briefings, Leavitt said, with a designated “social media seat,” which is allocated on a day-to-day basis. The pool no longer has a guaranteed seat for wire services such as The Associated Press, and instead is focused on “new media,” including conservative-leaning outlets such as the Daily Wire, Breitbart and The Federalist Society.

In October, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth instituted a new press policy at the Pentagon, barring reporters from obtaining or asking for any information not explicitly released by the Department of Defense. Legacy institutions such as The Atlantic, CNN, The Wall Street Journal and others refused to sign the policy, officially losing their credentials to the Pentagon.

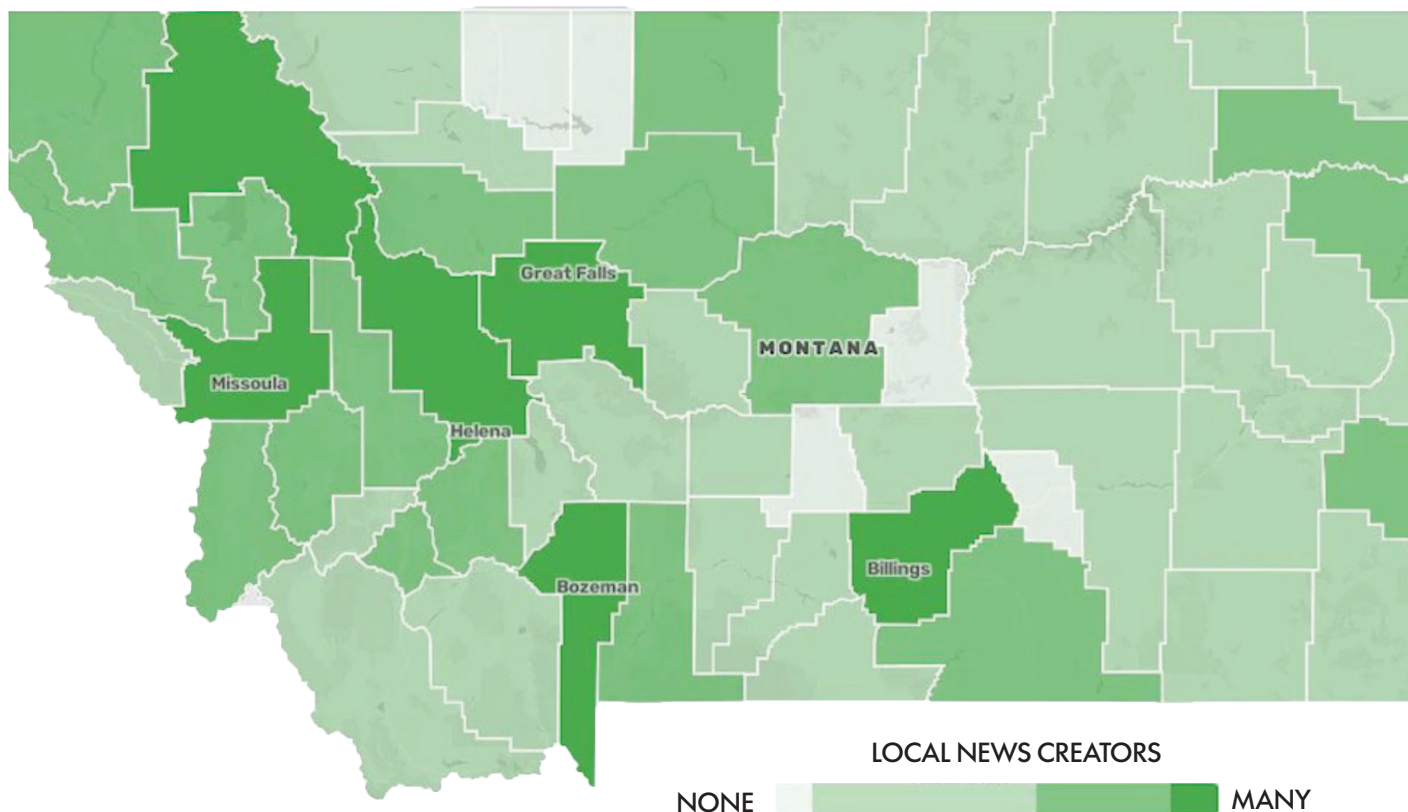
Publications that signed the new press policy include many of the same conservative-leaning outlets as the new White House pool. Right-wing influencer Laura Loomer was also granted access.

Leavitt has held separate briefings for influencers, including Link Lauren,

former adviser for Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.'s presidential campaign, former Treasury Department official William Upton and Trump's former press secretary, Sean Spicer.

Influencers like these have gained their following over a variety of platforms, including TikTok, Instagram and Youtube. Substack, a site where anyone can independently publish newsletters, posts and even podcasts, has also become popular for writers who want to directly engage with their subscribers. According to Reuters, social media has become the main source of news in the United States, with more people saying they get their news from social networks than from TV or news sites.

Last week, the Trump Administration created a new “media bias tracker” page on its website, which lists the “media offender of the week.” This week it's The Boston Globe, CBS and The Independent. The list also includes an “offender hall of shame,” with The Washington Post at the top of the “leaderboard” as “repeat offenders.” The site also lists the names of reporters who wrote the stories. At the bottom of the page is a sign-up for weekly “truth” newsletters with “offender alerts.”



## CONTRIBUTED| NON-STOP LOCAL BILLINGS

One factor that lends legacy media companies their credibility is the rigorous editing process. Lynda Robinson, a retired former local enterprise editor for The Washington Post, spoke about the role of editors in the newsroom.

“People don’t understand how complicated it is to report,” Robinson said. “It’s very labor-intensive and very costly. People don’t understand the multiple sets of eyes [on a story]. One of the values of more traditional sources of information is they’ve been vetted by more people.”

Robinson said in the current media landscape, people are “bombarded with information ... it can be hard to tell what’s real and what isn’t and what can be trusted.” Because of this, people feel more drawn to citizen journalists because they’re just one person writing or making videos about issues they care about.

As a result of the public’s desire for more human connections within the news, Robinson said legacy institutions like The New York Times and The Washington Post have been including more biographical information about their reporters and editors and have been encouraging reporters to respond to comments and answer questions. This way, the news sites feel more conversational and personal, where discussions can be held between the

reporter and the audience about the news as it happens.

But, Robinson said, these changes may be “too little, too late.”

Without editors, independent journalists are missing guidance for their stories throughout the reporting process. Editors help with finding sources, ethical dilemmas, structuring the story, fact-checking and fine-tuning the actual language used. At big papers like The New York Times, lawyers will also read over stories to make sure they don’t include any libelous language.

“[Editing is] not the easiest job in the world, but it’s a really important job,” Robinson said. “The value of traditional journalism is pursuing a very nuanced picture of what’s happening.”

A recent development in legacy media editing is Paramount’s hiring of Bari Weiss, a former New York Times opinion writer, as CBS’ new editor-in-chief. Weiss has no previous experience in traditional journalism reporting or editing, for TV or otherwise.

Weiss’ stated goal for CBS is to broaden its selection of stories and sources to eliminate bias. But in choosing sources for coverage, Weiss might reveal her own editorial biases, Robinson said.

“Bari Weiss would be talking about liberal bias, but there are other kinds of

biases as well,” Robinson said. “If you replace one set of biases with another, are you improving things?”

*- Mariah Henry, copy chief*

## BROADCAST UNDER BURDEN

Before creating the “media bias tracker,” on May 1, President Trump issued an executive order to end federal funding for National Public Radio and PBS under claims that funding journalism is outdated, unnecessary and produces biased reporting.

The Rescissions Act, passed in July, officially rescinded \$1.1 billion in funds for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private, non-profit corporation established in 1967 through the passing of the Public Broadcasting Act. The corporation provided funding for 1,500 local radio and television stations across the country.

After six decades of serving the nation by allocating federal funds for the public media, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting is starting to shut down due to the rescission of the public media’s funding. This shutdown and the loss of the funds the corporation provided has caused radio and television stations across the country to reduce their workforce, cut programs and shut down. It’s added to an already widening amount of news deserts in rural communities.

The Public Broadcasting Corporation established PBS in 1969 and NPR in 1970. With the corporation’s funding, both enriching and informative programs were provided to local radio and television stations that all communities could access.

An article published by the Montana Free Press reported that the Corporation for Public Broadcasting provided roughly 16% of funding to stations like Yellowstone Public Radio, Montana Public Radio and Montana PBS.

According to the Montana Free Press, Montana Public Radio, which is western Montana’s NPR affiliate, faced a \$350,000 shortfall. The station lost around 11% of its annual operating budget after the rescission was passed. However, through an emergency pledge drive and other fundraising efforts, it raised nearly \$500,000, helping to offset the negative impacts.

Other smaller Montana stations have not been so lucky. Tribal station KGVA, serving the Fort Belknap Reservation, relied on the federal government for 80% of its funding and was the state’s only tribal station recipient for public broadcasting’s Community Service Grant. It now faces \$100,000 in cuts.

KGVA’s station manager, director and sole full-time employee Jack Jones told the Montana Free Press the station is at risk of shutting down. Because it’s a rural station, few local donations are ever brought in.

The Montana Free Press also spoke with the president and CEO of Native Public Media, Loris Taylor, who said 36 of the 57 licensed tribal radio stations across the nation “could go dark.”

These stations are important to the culture and connection of tribal communities nationwide.

Taylor told Montana Free Press, “For rural tribal communities, radio is not optional. It is core infrastructure.”

Similar struggles to fight closure are seen across the country at stations large and small. According to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, New Jersey’s PBS and Penn State’s WPSU will cease operations in 2026. This loss of stations can lead to the creation of news deserts. News deserts occur when a community does not have access to newspapers, or has limited access to credible and unbiased news sources.

Chicago’s PBS station, Window to the World, stated, “The number of local news deserts in the U.S. has jumped to record levels this year.”

As of Oct. 29, seven more counties in the United States have become news deserts this year, joining the previous 206. An additional 1,524 counties receive news from a single source. This follows

136 newspaper closures that occurred this year.

Non-Stop Local in Billings reported that there are currently five counties in Montana that have no local news and another 28 counties that rely on a single newspaper. This equates to nearly half the state having no source, or only one single source of local news. Limited reliable local news leaves communities without the informative stories citizens rely on.

Many public stations remain committed to providing informational news to their watchers and listeners. The Montana Free Press spoke with Montana's major public media organizations about finding other ways to raise funds, such as attracting more monthly donors, creating fundraising campaigns and continuing to seek grants from foundations like the Greater Montana Foundation.

The Rescissions Act left stations in turmoil both in and outside of Montana. The job and program cuts public media stations face has placed accurate and adequate journalism under fire, but stations are doing their best to keep communities connected.

In an interview with the Montana Free Press, Yellowstone Public Radio's news director, Jackie Coffin, said, "We provide a vital service to our listeners. We make it possible for people who live in very rural parts of the country to be informed and updated on world news and events, to connect with people of different cultures through different programming, to learn new information, to voter guides and information, and we're going to keep doing that no matter what Congress votes to do."

But broadcast journalism isn't the only journalism subgroup that is feeling the pressure of an evolving news industry.

*- Grace Golbach, audio editor*

## DANGER ON THE FRONT LINE

In an era of smartphones and social media, photojournalists must battle for their place in an arena of content creators and activists, groups that often flock to news events where most of them are lacking journalistic training and boundaries.

In the U.S., building trust with a camera has grown difficult, as local news outlets close and select government officials attempt to delegitimize the press by restricting access and criticizing journalists.

For Brontë Wittpenn, a University of Montana graduate and now a staff photographer for the San Francisco Chronicle, visual journalism has always been under threat, but rapidly evolving



Brontë Wittpenn photographs the Palisades and Eaton fires from a helicopter over Los Angeles on Jan. 11. **CONTRIBUTED| MYUNG CHUN**

technology and corporate consolidation have added strain.

"What I see as the biggest threat is just the changing landscape of how we're consuming news now," Wittpenn said. "We're losing local journalism."

As more cities lose their local media outlets, an increasing number of people rely on sources outside of journalism for their coverage, leading to misinformation and growing distrust in media. For photojournalists, approaching a story with large professional cameras and lenses while also building relationships through asking for permission to photograph sources can be especially hard.

"People that I work with, they've had a lot taken from them already, and so I'm very cognitive of that. When I feel like the time is right, that's when the camera comes out. I want it to feel collaborative, depending on the work," Wittpenn said.

Photographers are especially at risk covering protests. Several journalists have been targeted by law enforcement at demonstrations in the past year, including a CNN news crew that was detained while covering protests against Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Los Angeles,

according to the Columbia Journalism Review and The Guardian.

"Journalists are being targeted in some of these protests," Wittpenn said. "We saw it recently with ICE. We've seen it with George Floyd — name that major news event, you know?"

Increasing numbers of content creators have also interfered with breaking news coverage. First responders may struggle to differentiate between the two groups during times of conflict, and bad reporter behavior, influencer or not, can negatively impact access and safety for everyone.

During the January 2025 Los Angeles wildfires, influencers acting without journalistic training impacted access in the days following the event, resulting in officials setting up more checkpoints and requiring more identification as issues of illegal drone usage and trespassing arose, according to the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

"I'm seeing this influencer thing becoming a problem, especially when we have high-stress situations that they aren't trained for, but they just want clicks and views," Wittpenn said. "It's disheartening and it's damaging."

Personal safety is crucial to covering events such as wildfires and protests. Proper protective gear and training often allows photographers to work in closer proximity to the subject matter. Wittpenn works with colleagues when possible, allowing them to focus on photography while knowing she has their back.

Communication is also important. Wittpenn recalled one anti-ICE protest where she chose to introduce herself to a National Guardsman and clarify where the boundaries were.

"I've been in areas where there's rubber bullets and I just wanted to make contact and be like, 'I'm just trying to do my job like you're trying to do your job, so don't mace me in the face,'" Wittpenn said.

Once, at a protest in Texas after George Floyd's killing, Wittpenn was maced directly, along with other members of the press.

According to a survey of 500 working photojournalists by the Committee to Protect Journalists, almost half of those surveyed have reported being detained while working worldwide.

Chris Johns, photojournalist, former editor-in-chief of National Geographic and

an adjunct professor at UM’s School of Journalism, has always observed a degree of opposition to media, and noticed a correlation to increasing political divide.

“Part of that comes down to powerful people throughout the world with an agenda who want to interfere,” Johns said. “I think it’s also a reflection of some of the major political divides we see across the world.”

Photojournalists have always been threatened, agree Johns and Wittpenn. It is inevitable given their role to document controversial topics and find the truth, but the industry is now at a time of change. It is crucial that publications embrace new forms of multimedia, like video and online content, and maintain dedicated staff who can spend the time and build the trust to tell impactful stories.

“If you’re scared, it’s only because you’re scared of change and what you might have to leave behind. But if you are open to change and if you’re ready to walk into the future with everyone else, then it might be really exciting, and we might have more power than we think,” Wittpenn said.

- Henry Doellinger, multimedia editor

BUSINESS AS USUAL

Many reporters and news organizations are working during an all time low trust in media, including Senate reporter for Fox News Digital and UM Alum, Alex Miller.

For Miller, work has not been affected by President Trump’s administration or by the lawsuits from the White House.

When it comes to working with staff on Capitol Hill, Miller said, “There’s an understanding that if you want people to know what you’re working on, you have to talk to the media.”

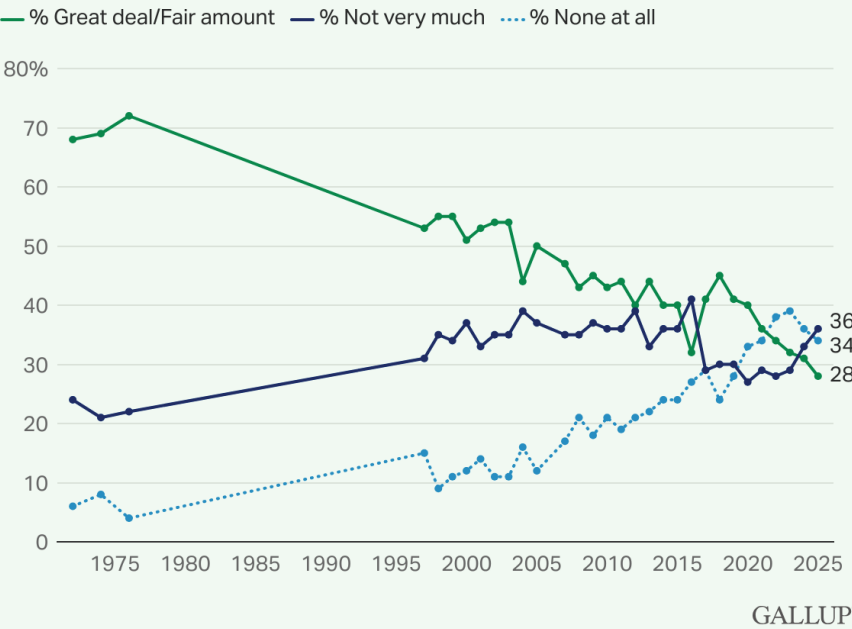
Miller worked on Capitol Hill in 2023 as a House reporter for the Washington Times, so he had some knowledge of what he was getting into with the reporting on the Senate. But according to Miller, the two have an ocean of difference. Miller has been a Senate reporter for Fox News Digital since May, switching from reporting on the House to the Senate, which he described as a hectic transition. Fortunately, he said he was able to learn the ropes quickly.

“The way things work out here, and any gig in journalism, is that your biggest currency is trust and honesty,” he said. “Most of my job, outside of writing, is maintaining those relationships.”

Miller mentioned an Associated Press court case, which centers around AP News’ refusal to change the name of the “Gulf of Mexico” to the “Gulf of America,” causing the White House to limit the

Americans' Trust in Mass Media, 1972-2025

In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in the mass media — such as newspapers, TV and radio — when it comes to reporting the news fully, accurately and fairly — a great deal, a fair amount, not very much or none at all?



CONTRIBUTED| GALLUP

news organization’s access to presidential events.

Despite this, Miller said he is not affected by what is happening in the White House and it does not “splash over” into his work.

For Miller, the headlines today look to be creating tension rather than fear, which is a result of disagreement on many levels, but this hasn’t stopped people from talking to him when he is reporting.

“Lawmakers understand the give and take, their staff largely understand the give and take. I’ve never heard someone say ‘Oh well the president said this, so I am not going to say anything anymore,’” Miller said.

Since he is removed from the chaos and tension between the federal administration and other organizations like CBS, ABC and The Associated Press, Miller said the hardest part of his job is finding sleep, at times having to work 29 hours at the Senate to keep up on the news.

Some journalists have not experienced the negative impacts in the industry, but that doesn’t mean that all journalism is safe from public and political scrutiny.

- Sav Chavez, news editor

A WORLD WITHOUT NEWS

The journalism industry has faced challenges before. The dot-com bubble and its burst nearly crushed news organizations across the globe. But the industry has managed to adapt and move forward by educating future journalists on how to thrive in today’s climate. However, the number of student journalists are declining nationally.

Emerson College, a private university in Boston, has a nationally recognized journalism program. It has been named one of the best in the country, according to the Boston University Beacon. Despite its national rankings, the school has experienced a lack of students registering for its journalism program.

The Beacon reports that Emerson has started cutting required classes for its journalism program because of lack of enrollment.

“This year, one journalism professor reported having their Foundations of Journalism course, one of three required introductory journalism classes, cut due to enrollment decline specifically in the journalism program, as part of the larger trend. While there were 64 freshmen enrolled in the program in September 2023, this year there were only 34,” wrote the Beacon.

As the public is starting to rely more heavily on non-traditional forms of news, social media, influencers and podcasts, job security for journalists has simultaneously started to decrease, playing a major role in the recession of journalism students.

Lee Banville is the University of Montana School of Journalism dean. While he oversees the journalism program, he also teaches journalism students. He said that despite the national decline, the University’s journalism program has not seen a loss of enrollment.

“We’re never going to be a huge program, but I mean, our goal is about 50 students a year. This last year, we didn’t hit that number. But the last two years, we have. The year before, we were super low. So, I would say, enrollment has been flat,” Banville said.

The journalism program is on track to have 50 more students enrolled this coming fall, according to Banville.

One thing the University is doing to help journalism students adapt to changing times is by implementing a “Center for Ethical AI in Journalism” policy. This initiative will “launch a series of short courses to expose students to the practical ways AI is manifesting in the work of professional journalism” where students can earn a credit for taking the class. There will be one class offered a semester.

The initiative will also launch a series of public roundtable discussions and hands-on experience and training about how to use AI that will be available to students, the public and UM faculty.

By teaching students through the implementation of programs like this, Banville still has hope for the role of the journalist among the implementation of more and more AI programs.

“My hope is that with AI rising, and sort of making information more generic and less attached to people, that journalists can kind of emerge as like, look, I’m the authentic intelligence in your community that actually did go to that meeting and looked at these people in the face, asked them questions, and told you what happened,” Banville said.

In spite of the tense climate, Banville remains hopeful for the future of journalism.

“There’s a part of me that’s optimistic,” said Banville. “But I’m also realistic that it’s a tough moment for journalism.”

- Madelynn Pandis, features editor

# Sci-Fi play combines accessibility and mental health awareness

BEE REISWIG | ARTS REPORTER  
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Reggie Herbert made his way to center stage. He tapped his white mobility cane on the old plaid couch, pivoting a bit, and tapped it again on the small coffee table. Realizing he'd made it to his destination, he stopped. Smiling out at the nonexistent crowd, he readied himself to practice his opening speech.

Herbert directed the mental health-focused play "Future Tripping" by Brian Gene White, which opened at the Zootown Arts Community Center the week of Thanksgiving. The production is part of his larger effort to make art and live theatre more accessible and inclusive through adaptive technology and venues.

"We do what we can," Herbert said. "I don't like to think of it as above and beyond. I like to think of it as the new bare minimum."

For some showings of "Future Tripping," closed captions were available. Those who would benefit from them were directed to sit in the front left of the audience. Audio description was also provided for those who are blind or have low vision. The audience member is given a receiver and a trained describer explains the main visual elements of the performance from an area

where they can see the production.

The Zootown Arts Community Center allows those with mobility devices to sit wherever they'd like. Chairs can be easily moved around, different from riser seating or typical theatre venues. In Herbert's introduction, he explained that folks are able to leave for whatever reasons they need, and the door is always open for them to come back. They only ask to do so as quietly as possible.

Herbert founded A Quantum Dream, a local non-profit arts accessibility advocacy organization and theater company. Its goal is to combine sci-fi and speculative fiction-focused storytelling with disability issues "to explore what it truly means to be human," according to its website.

"Future Tripping" kicked off in a homely living room. A shockingly loud banging on the door announced one of the main characters' arrival, Maddy, played by Nadia Mell. She dragged a dead body in to the sound of her father saying, "Happy Thanksgiving."

As it turned out, it was the body of her future self. The rest of the play followed her journey to repair a relationship with her father, rebuild her life and solve the paradox of time travel.

"'Future Tripping' is both grounded and fantastical," Meg Denny, co-producer and



Nadia Mell, right, acts with Tim Ballard, left, while playing an upset daughter in "Future Tripping" at the Zootown Arts Community Center on Nov. 19. LEO SPERRY | MONTANA KAIMIN

technical director, said. "It's about healing and growth and hope and reconciliation, but it's also about time travel. So it tells this really human story in a really interesting way that I haven't seen done before."

The play dealt with topics surrounding mental health, suicide and addiction.

Denny, a doctoral student in clinical psychology at the University of Montana, brought some of her expertise to the production. For example, they don't dance around any of the harder themes. Denny explained it's one of the first things that one is taught about suicide screenings, prevention and awareness: Don't avoid it.

"A Quantum Dream is working very hard to invite in people who feel like theater is not for them or for people who think that the stories won't interest them," Herbert said.

Beyond its work in theater productions, A Quantum Dream provides disability advocacy and services to organizations outside of itself. It works as a consultant for businesses, services, events or non-profits to make them as inclusive as possible. The focus is on physical accessibility, information access and inclusivity in the programming, services or goods provided.

The organization also provides audio

description for live events, videos or still images. Its website proclaims that it offers "significantly lower rates than traditional audio description providers to encourage our community to begin to use this service."

"Future Tripping," of course, lives in a world that's a little bit different. Though Maddy attempted to commit suicide, she instead shot her future self. It's a science fiction twist on "killing yourself."

"What does it mean to find meaning?" Denny said about the play. "What does it mean to have had this intent and this plan and then forced to face your own mortality in a very different way than you would have maybe expected?"

Despite the fact that many of the themes have a serious tone, Denny noted that it also played with humor and ridiculousness. A good chunk of the play took place with the two main characters going through time travel media: books by Kurt Vonnegut, a joking reference to Avengers: Endgame. The father-daughter duo teased each other and made light of the crazy situation they'd fallen into.

"It is both serious and funny," Denny said. "Humans are ridiculous, and I think that's one of my favorite things about [us] is that we're all a big mess of contradictions."



Nadia Mell, left, acts with Tim Ballard, right, in "Future Tripping" at the Zootown Arts Community Center on Nov. 19. The show was written by Brian Gene White and directed by Reggie Herbert.

LEO SPERRY | MONTANA KAIMIN

# Therapy dogs: From story time to the stage

SYDNEY MOATE | ARTS REPORTER

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After bringing a street dog home to the orphanage, Annie, the titular character in the hit musical, “Annie,” sings, “And he really comes in handy, especially when you’re all alone in the night, and you’re small and terribly frightened, it’s Sandy, Sandy who’ll always be there.”

Sandy’s role as a faithful and comforting companion takes on a new meaning in the Missoula Children’s Theatre’s current production of the classic 1977 Broadway musical “Annie,” with two therapy dogs in the role of Annie’s street dog, Sandy.

Golden retrievers Tuffy and Boomkin are certified as therapy dogs through the nonprofit Pet Partners.

“It’s been great having two therapy dogs, Tuffy and Boomkin, play the role of Sandy because they are so well trained, responsive, and follow directions,” the musical’s director, Abigail Gilbert, said. “Even though the cast is on stage, the lights are bright and the audience is applauding, they are accustomed to staying focused and following directions despite other factors, which makes everyone’s jobs easier.”

Boomkin is 7 years old and has been a therapy dog for two years. He is a calm and gentle golden retriever that sits quietly while people pet him.

Boomkin is Felicia Saunders’ first therapy dog. Saunders saw a sign for the “Read to Me” program, a national program where kids read to dogs at the Missoula Public Library. Wanting Boomkin to be a part of it, she was directed to Pet Partners and got Boomkin certified. Saunders joined “Annie” after hearing about it from Thornton.

“I’m not a theater person,” Saunders said. “To get to see how this play comes together, it’s amazing. I’m really loving the experience.”

The other dog, Tuffy, is energetic and 4 years old. He has been a therapy dog for three years. His owner, Audrey Thornton, got involved with Missoula Children’s Theatre after responding to the casting call a friend sent her.

Thornton brings Tuffy to stress relief events at the University of Montana a couple of times a year and has had events at the University Center, the Mansfield Library and the Payne Family Native American Center.

Tuffy is known for sitting on his hind legs and giving people hugs. Thornton said her favorite part of doing therapy work is “sharing

my beautiful dog with other people. Therapy work is really rewarding. It brings a lot of joy to people of all walks of life.”

Each dog does one show a day when there are two show times. Sandy is in three scenes, usually just running to Annie and sitting quietly while the cast sings. Elena Wicknan from Wind River Canine Partners came to Missoula to train Thornton and Saunders to give the commands to the dogs to walk to Annie and react to the actress’s call.

When not rehearsing, the cast spends their time petting Tuffy and Boomkin, who are proving to not only be actors, but also stress relievers on set. Thornton said they are always careful to call their dogs “therapy dogs” and never “service dogs,” so they don’t create the belief that their dogs can’t be touched.

Lexi Stoops, an 11-year-old student at C.S. Porter Middle School, plays Annie. She usually races off stage on breaks to give Tuffy a hug. “They’re really cute, and they’re friendly,” Stoops said. “One of them hugs me, which is really nice.”

Gilbert, the director, said, “It’s been so fun to have the dogs around the cast! The great part about them being trained therapy dogs who love people is that they’ve helped the cast feel relaxed and brought them so much joy.”

Since the beginning of “Annie” on Broadway, the show’s original animal trainer, William “Bill” Berloni, created a tradition of finding a rescue dog in a shelter to play Sandy, which has continued countless times on the Broadway stage, national tours and in other productions of the musical. Every Sandy on Broadway has been a rescue dog.

The therapy work with their dogs is completely voluntary, but Thornton and Saunders love having these experiences and sharing their dogs. Saunders said she would love to do more plays, but since “Annie” doesn’t open until Dec. 4, “we’ll see how this goes.”

MCT’s “Annie” runs Dec. 4 to 21, Thursday through Sunday. Tickets available at [mctinc.org](http://mctinc.org).



Boomkin, a 7-year-old therapy dog, poses with 11-year-old Annie actress Lexi Stoops at the Missoula Children’s Theatre on Nov. 18. **SYDNEY MOATE | MONTANA KAIMIN**

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# Griz cheerleading pulled out all the stops for Brawl of the Wild

JACK SNOW | SPORTS REPORTER

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On the sidelines of any sporting event at the University of Montana, fans can spot the cheerleading team getting the crowd and team into the game.

Men throw women impossibly high into the air, landing in towers of bodies in perfect synchronization. Applause and cheers echo around the eastern auxiliary gym, where they practice with every successful stunt. Teammates repeat counting to eight out loud to time moves while coaches advise from the edges of blue mats spread out on the light grey floor.

The result is a whirlwind of auditory and visual stimulation that makes the room hum with energy. It's almost like a miniature version of the buzz on Griz gamedays, where the cheer team leads a horde of fans in supporting University of Montana athletics.

The squad shows out for every event, but the lead up to Brawl of the Wild is a different beast altogether. "We all want to throw stunts a little higher, cheer a little louder, pyramids want to be a little sharper," senior Cooper Kress said.

Kress joined the team a few years ago after he saw the cheer squad at a Griz game. "I went to the NDSU game a few years ago, and I saw them stunting on the sideline, and it just looked fun," he said. "I emailed the director, got into stunt, tried out and it went really well."

Now, Kress can be found launching people into low orbit and roaring for the Griz at UM sporting events. His excitement for the brawl is echoed by the rest of the team as well.

Freshman Kynzie Belcher is a rookie on the team, but already shares the spirit of her veteran teammates. "We're working on our halftime this week," she said. "We're making sure that's hammered down so we can show the Bobcats what's up."

Belcher is a former gymnast who started cheer in high school and has found her community in the UM team. "My favorite part of the sport is the culture and the environment, having a team that's basically like a family," she said. "Especially with cheer, we're with each other 24/7, and this team we have a really good environment here."



The University of Montana Cheer Squad performs with Monte on their shoulders to end their routine on Nov. 22. **WILL LADYMAN | MONTANA KAIMIN**

Coaches also feel a unique energy while preparing for Montana's largest sporting event. Head coach Tessa Hogan said there are multiple factors.

"I think there's a different level of focus that happens when we are approaching Brawl of the Wild, partly because we're really excited. The Cat's cheer team also comes, so that's another level of [motivation] for my team," she said. "They know that other cheer team is gonna be here, and they're gonna watch them. They're always wanting to put their best foot forward every game, but especially for Brawl of the Wild."

This year's cheer roster stands out, in Hogan's opinion. "We really try and pick athletes that are dedicated, motivated and really want to be here," she said. "This group

of athletes is the best group of athletes we've had so far."

The team has a unique relationship with Griz fans as well, which contributes to both their popularity and funding.

"So much of the Griz cheer team is very, very fan-oriented. Most of the money that we raise is through fans," Hogan said. "We have a lot of little fans, so young girls, young boys who want to eventually be a part of the cheer team. I feel like [especially when] you're a young girl, there's always that desire. You see the cheer girls on the sideline and you want to be that."

When Saturday finally rolled around, the cheer team didn't disappoint. Head-spinning aerials, cleanly executed pyramids and roaring chants made the Griz's loss a little more bearable. Kress and Belcher both showed out,

the former holding teammates high overhead with the ease of a waiter holding a platter, and the latter soaring effortlessly through the air to top pyramids with inhuman balance.

The cheer team led the charge for the stadium's legendary crowd noise, which contributed to two false starts being called on the Bobcats during the game.

Despite a tragically close loss in the season's biggest game, it's always hard to leave Washington-Grizzly Stadium without feeling good about something. The football team fought hard and the fans were characteristically zealous, spurred on by amazing performances from the cheer team. At the end of the day, Kress put it best.

"Nothing beats game day at Wa-Griz," he said.

# Throw your friends around at wrestling club

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On a quiet Sunday afternoon, a new club at the University of Montana comes together for practice. As bodies slam against the floor, wrestling practice commences.

The new club formed after its sudden disavowal. While it has few members, the club hopes to gain members and start playing exhibition games.

"I think wrestling is one of, if not the greatest sport anybody can learn," said Edward Formell, a freshman physical therapy major who co-founded the club. He's wrestled since his sophomore year of high school. "It teaches self-defense, it teaches discipline and it teaches how to take care of yourself."

Formell founded the club with Noah Tapiz-Siller, a freshman from Arlington, Texas, who started wrestling his senior year of high school. The pair met at the Bear Fair and hit it off immediately. When they learned that the previous wrestling club fell apart after the president transferred, they took it upon themselves to restart it.

"I told my parents that if there wasn't a club, I'd make one," Tapiz-Siller said. "There wasn't one, so now I had to make one."

Formell said he likes the amount of work required for the sport. "I like the way it makes me feel," he said. "I'm happier on the mat."

Right now, the club is in its early stages, with around five members showing up to practices consistently. They practice twice a week on Wednesdays and Sundays.

Formell said they plan to borrow a wrestling mat from a local school. Right now, they tape together taekwondo mats.

"This year, once we have a team, we want to get a pay-per-view funding for exhibition matches," he said. "Just have a mat set up in the center of the gym here and just have people come watch and show what we're all about."

As of right now, the club doesn't even have a proper coach — they rely on each other for coaching and support. "I like to go around and coach up people," he said. "I'll see them wrestle and I'll see things that they can do differently."

Tapiz-Siller pointed to Jamie Greene, a sophomore biology major from Great

Falls, as someone who showed potential, especially with more coaching. Greene started wrestling last year in the previous club.

"Montana's got a really big wrestling culture," Greene said. "I think trying to keep a Montana school with some of that Montana culture is definitely a good thing."

Tapiz-Siller said his favorite part of wrestling is self-accountability. "Any other sport, you can blame someone else," he said. "It's like, 'Oh, my coach should do this,' or whatever. In wrestling, it's really just you on the mat."

He has high hopes for the future of the club. "I think wrestling is one of the best sports there is," he said. "I know there's wrestling fans, and I think that there's a lot of spaces that UM can wrestle in, and I think hopefully whenever we go competitive, we can be good."

He said he loved the physical aspect of wrestling. "I love combat sports," he said. "It's fun. It makes you really think. It's great exercise, and the people are really nice. They're always trying to teach me how to get better."

With the low attendance at practices, there are often mismatches within weight classes. Greene doesn't have anybody in his weight class, so he has to wrestle up or down sometimes. "It's like, 'Okay, well, I got to wrestle a guy who's 80 pounds heavier than me,'" he said. "But, if we were to compete, it definitely makes you better to wrestle someone heavier."

During practices, the club starts with a warm-up around the gym, mixing in plyometrics before they move to the mat to start drilling techniques. Eventually, they transition into live wrestling. Tapiz-Siller and Formell, having both wrestled in high school, help coach members with less experience. Some of the members come from a jiu-jitsu background. Sometimes they spend an entire practice focusing on cardio.

"Don't be afraid to hurt him, he can take it," Formell said while coaching a first-time member performing a takedown on Tapiz-Siller. It's true, too. For two hours, the club members throw each other around and contort their bodies into awkward positions, always getting up ready to drill the next move.

Despite the low attendance at practices, the club has 29 members listed on

GrizHub. Tapiz-Siller said he hopes to get more people to show up during the week. Greene said he wants people to be willing to come out and try wrestling.

"I never wrestled before," he said. "Right now in my life, having done wrestling club, my biggest regret is not wrestling earlier. So, just try it, you know? It's definitely hard, but it's worth it. You feel great afterward, and you meet some cool people."

Tapiz-Siller said the club gets along well. "That's pretty good for a wrestling team," he said, "Especially when you're literally fighting each other for two hours a week, it's good to be friends."



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## SPORTS BRIEFS

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### TOUGH START

The Lady Griz basketball team is off to a bad start as it prepares for Big Sky Conference play with a record of 1-5.

UM is outscored by opponents 464-362 and is losing on defense, as the team averages 14 turnovers a game.

The Lady Griz saw its worst loss of the season against the Big 12 Utah Utes, with a score of 78-38, being overshoot 45% to 17%.

Head Coach Nate Harris told UM Athletics after the game, "I don't know if it was nerves, legs, too much time off, too little. I don't know. We're going to have to get that figured out because 17% isn't going to get it done."

### PLAYOFF MATCHUP

South Dakota State took down New Hampshire University in the first round of the Football Championship Subdivision playoffs, 41-3. The Jackrabbits are now expected to make the 15-hour drive to Washington-Grizzly Stadium and take on the Grizzlies.

Montana got the bye week after finishing the season second in the Big Sky and ending its season 11-1. This will be the first matchup for the Griz after its loss to rivals Montana State in the Brawl of the Wild.

But UM will be on the hunt for revenge against the Jackrabbits after losing to South Dakota in the second round of the playoffs last season with a score of 35-18.

Quarterback Keali'i Ah Yat finished his second season at the position for the Griz with 3,154 passing yards and a 69% passing completion.

Eli Gillman, running back, gained 17 total rushing touchdowns along with 1,261 rushing yards.

Michael Wortham, wide receiver, totaled seven receiving touchdowns and 825 yards.

Linebacker Peyton Wing and defensive end Hunter Peck stole the show for the Griz on the defensive side of the field.

Wing had three interceptions and 59 total tackles, while Peck had a team-leading four sacks and 33 tackles.

The matchup between the Jackrabbits and the Griz will take place on Saturday, Dec. 6 at noon.

# Jazz students perform at combo night

JACKSON MAILEY | MONTANA KAIMIN  
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Inside a warehouse lies a dimly lit auditorium full of students and audience ready for jazz.

University of Montana jazz students brought their work to the Westside Theater on Nov. 20 for their first Jazz Gala at that venue. The concert featured performances from several student groups, including larger sets by the music school's Lab Jazz Band III.

For music students, concerts like this offer an opportunity to show their growth. Simon Hickey, a senior in the jazz program, has played at these combo nights 20 times.

"I like to see the growth in the program, everybody is learning, and everybody cares. It's a beautiful thing," Hickey said.

The combo nights have been a part of the program for over a decade, according to Rob Tapper, director of UM's jazz program. Tapper appreciates the opportunity students have to develop their own music with the community.

"There's a ton of independence [for the students], and I like that a lot," Tapper said.

The combo night included six small groups playing one or two songs as well as a big band performance.

Students in the small groups played covers of their favorite songs as well as some originals. Hickey played his original, titled "Evaporation," with his small group band, and fifth-year jazz studies student Owen Meador played his own jazz interpretation of the song "Nude" by Radiohead with his small group.

"There's auditions and then they place you in the different combos," Meador said, explaining how each small group trains for this night. "Each combo has different meeting times, [a] different number of rehearsals per week and a different instructor."

Combo nights allow younger students to learn and look up to the older students because they can play with each other and improve. Sophomore music education and trombone performance major Olivia Martin appreciates the competition that the music program gives with these combo nights.

"There's people that are way better than me, and that makes me want to practice more," Martin said. "I feel like everyone in the music program is really supportive."

Martin mostly plays classical music on trombone, so it was her first time playing in a small group jazz band.

The jazz program hosts these combo nights two or three times a semester, and the College of Arts and Media has an upcoming showcase on Feb. 27, 2026.



Jazz III gets ready to play in front of the audience on combo night at the Westside Theater on Nov. 20.



Dizzy's Club, a small group, performs on combo night at the Westside Theater. Rob Tapper, director of the jazz program, directed the band.



UM jazz students watch their classmates perform on combo night.