

MONTANA KAIMIN

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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."



POLITICAL CARTOON



KAIMIN KOMICS: #9 NEVER TOO OLD



AJ26
Jm

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Election Day should be a federal holiday

Voting should be as easy as possible. A significant barrier to this is Election Day not being a national holiday.

It always pains me to hear someone say they don't plan to vote because they have to work. Tuesday is a strange day to hold an election, and a job should not prevent someone from participating in the democratic process. This plight is doubled for students, who may have school obligations on top of work. To expand voting rights and labor rights, Election Day should be a federal holiday.

Despite the rise of early voting methods, the Pew Research Center reported that in the 2022 midterm election a plurality of U.S. voters showed up to the polls in person on Election Day.

A federal holiday would fix two key problems: younger and poorer people are less likely to vote. For young, working class people, every hour away from work can make a difference. Guaranteed paid time off to vote would significantly increase turnout among these demographics.

Elections are run by the states, not the federal government, which is why Election Day isn't an official holiday across the country. But the general election is on the same day in every state, so I don't see why it can't be a holiday everywhere.

Let's compare this idea to minimum wages. There's a federal minimum wage, which multiple states follow, but many states have higher minimum wages. The federal rule functions as a baseline. With a federal Election Day, all states would have a holiday, but some states might have even more protections or voting opportunities. Currently, 11 states, including Montana, and Puerto Rico observe Election Day as a state holiday.

A federal holiday wouldn't — and couldn't — guarantee everyone a whole day off. It would likely only give government, education and corporate employees the day off, so further legislation would be needed to require employers to offer employees a couple hours of paid time to go vote.

The United States' overall voter turnout — 61% in 2024 — is lower than other Western nations. An Election Day holiday would improve access to voting across the U.S., raise voter turnout and show that the country cares about its civic processes and its citizens' right to participate.

An official holiday is just one way to improve access to voting across the country. Montana's 2024 turnout, 76%, is higher than the national average because

of better voting accessibility. Voters can vote by mail without an excuse, vote early for a whole month before Election Day and even same-day register to vote at the polls.

Other states could similarly expand early voting times and allow mail-in voting without an excuse. But having Election Day as an official, country-wide holiday, along with making it illegal for employers to not let their employees go vote, would help make voting more accessible to a significant portion of the working class across the United States.

- Mariah Henry, copy chief
Like it? Hate it? Let us know.

Email us your opinions at
henry.doellinger@umontana.edu

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Medium

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:

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

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

Going long



Gavin Neilson tries to catch a football on Oct. 26 on the Oval. Neilson and his teammate, Luke Hawkins, were practicing for an upcoming game with their intramural flag football team. **MARS JOHNSON | MONTANA KAIMIN**

In local news...

CORBIN VANDERBY | NEWS REPORTER
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MILITARY 'SUPER RANGE' EYES HAYS AREA AS POSSIBLE LOCATION

A new military weapon testing site may be built in the Hays Military Operations Area in north-central Montana.

United States Sen. Tim Sheehy has been pushing for what Donald Trump called a "super range" at an Aaron Flint rally in Kalispell Oct. 14 to be built in Montana. When Trump announced the plan at the rally, little details were provided except that it would be used for high-tech weapon testing.

"Montana will continue to play a critical role in the development and testing of cutting-edge military technology," Trump said at the rally.

No location was listed, but last Friday a spokesperson for Sheehy said "We can confirm the Hays MOA is being looked at as a potential range site" in an email to the Billings Gazette.

The Hays area is currently used to train combat pilots and is even designated as a "lights-out" training area, allowing pilots to fly with no lights to simulate real combat scenarios.

Sheehy also posted a video on social media saying the weapons to be tested would be electronic war devices, communication jammers and hypersonic projectiles.

"If we tie these equities together, equities that span Air Force, private, National Guard and Army, if we use them as a unified facility to test, train and develop 21st-century technology, this will unleash us in a way we haven't been before," he said in the social media video.

DATA CENTER DEVELOPER DONATES RECORD AMOUNT TO YELLOWSTONE

Tallgrass, a natural gas energy company that recently began developing data centers in Wyoming, donated \$105 million to Yellowstone National Park — the largest private gift in national park history.

The donation was sent to Yellowstone Forever, the park's nonprofit partner, on Oct. 12 and is meant to fund research, conservation and a new education center at Norris Geyser Basin, according to Yellowstone Forever President Lisa Diekmann.

The donation has raised concerns, as Tallgrass recently began constructing a 1,300 acre data center just south of Cheyenne, Wyoming. Brian Childers lives near a Microsoft AI data center and the Tallgrass construction site south of Cheyenne and spoke to Mountain Journal about his worries.

"I'm glad (the park) got the money, but if these things are going to impact the people around southeast Wyoming, (the corporations) need to be paying a premium on the electricity they use so that the people don't have to pay extra," Childers said.

On Oct. 16, U.S. Interior Secretary Doug Burgum, the governor of Wyoming and representatives from Tallgrass gathered in front of Old Faithful Geyser to sign the donation agreement. During the event, the topic of data centers and their environmental impact was not brought up.

"More than 120 years ago, President Theodore Roosevelt laid the cornerstone of Yellowstone's iconic gateway, enshrining the promise that our National Parks exist for the benefit and enjoyment of the American people," Burgum stated in a press release. "This historic \$105 million investment honors that legacy, bringing together the best of American enterprise and conservation to expand access to Yellowstone and inspire the next generation to experience America's great outdoors."

Keepourcourtsimpartial.

VOTE YES ON CI-132

"I'm voting yes because judges should be elected on their record and qualifications, not politics."
—Pat Cotter, Retired Montana Supreme Court Justice

"I'm voting yes because politics has no place in everyday court decisions."
—Craig Anderson, Retired Sheriff and U.S. Marshal

"I'm voting yes because judges shouldn't cater to political parties and their money."
—Quint (aka "Old Goat")

"I'm voting yes to keep judges accountable to the constitution, not politics."
—Jeff Sherlock, Retired Montana District Court Judge

"I'm voting yes so judicial elections remain nonpartisan."
—Mike Talia, Business Attorney

ENDORSED BY THE KALISPELL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

THE PEOPLE YOU TRUST ARE VOTING

YES ON CI-132

VOTE YES BY NOVEMBER 3

PAID FOR BY MONTANANS FOR NONPARTISAN COURTS, KELLEN ALGER, TREASURER
PO BOX 87, HELENA MT 59624



A reconstruction sketch of China Gulch ca. 1870.
CONTRIBUTED | ERIC CARLSON

This week on the Kaimin Cast...

In the late 1870s, gold miners flocked to a creek about an hour northwest of Missoula after word spread that gold had been found there.

They established a camp of a few thousand until the gold dried up and winter approached. However, 200 yards away, at another mining camp known as China Gulch, Chinese immigrants had nowhere else to go for the winter. A University of Montana Ph.D. student conducted archeological digs in 2007 at the site of China Gulch and the findings told the dark story of what happened when winter came.

"They were dehumanized into such a level that it was OK just to kick them out of a mining district. It was OK if they starved up a side canyon," said Chris Merritt, an archeologist and UM alum.

This week's episode is by UM graduate student Libby Riddle. She shares the story of Merritt's excavation at China Gulch and what it surfaced about Chinese immigrants that joined the search for gold.

Check out this week's episode of the Good Bones series, "Boiled down to nothing," by heading to our website at montanakaimin.com or wherever you find your podcasts.

- Grace Golbach,
audio editor



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



COURT RULES TRUMP'S FIRING OF EPSTEIN PROSECUTOR UNLAWFUL

A Federal District Court judge in Manhattan ruled last Monday that President Donald Trump's firing of Maureen Comey, an attorney known for prosecuting Jeffrey Epstein and Sean "Diddy" Combs, was unlawful.

The Department of Justice fired Comey in July 2025, in a move the court said violated her due process rights as well as federal administrative law. There was no reason given for her firing other than Article II of the Constitution, which outlines presidential powers.

But Comey believes her firing to be because her father is James Comey, a former director of the FBI, and her "perceived political affiliation and beliefs," she told the New York Times.

In his decision Judge Jesse Furman said to accept the Department of Justice's firing "would be to unsettle the very equilibrium established by this nation's constitutional system."

Comey was also awarded back pay through December 2025 and the decision could result in more fired federal workers seeking appeal against Trump.

"This hard-earned victory belongs to Ms. Comey, to all civil servants and to all fighting for the rule of law," the lawyers for Comey wrote in a statement. The decision "reaffirms our bedrock system of checks and balances."

ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK TO PAY SETTLEMENT TO SEXUAL ABUSE VICTIMS

In the second largest legal settlement involving a Catholic archdiocese in the United States, New York's agreed to pay \$800 million to about 1,300 parishioners who said they were sexually abused by the clergy.

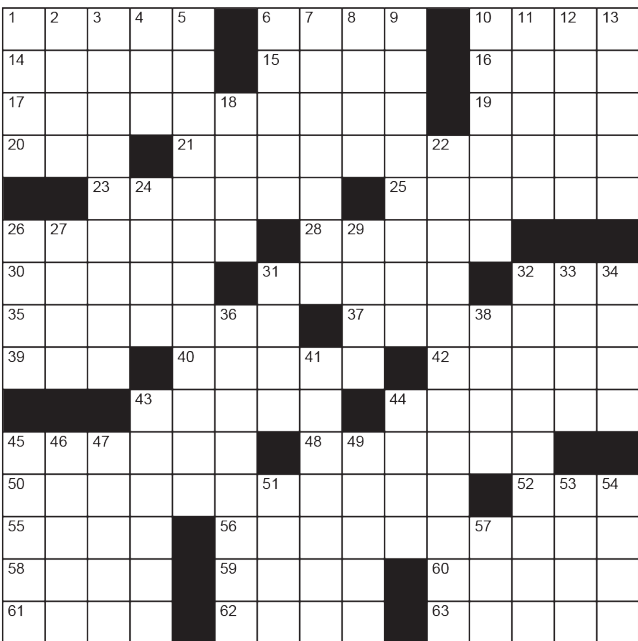
Archbishop Ronald Hicks sent an email last Saturday confirming the large figure, but the settlement won't be final until both the archdiocese and the parishioners' attorneys sign an agreement on Nov. 6.

The only larger settlement came in 2024 where the Archdiocese of Los Angeles paid \$880 million to 1,000 abuse victims after already having paid \$740 million in a previous case.

If signed in November, this agreement would end an over seven-year battle of lawsuits between the parishioners and the Archdiocese of New York.

"The unanimous agreement of survivors who filed claims against the Archdiocese of New York marks a powerful moment in the pursuit of justice," Jeff Anderson, an attorney for the parishioners, said in a statement to PBS. "Through their courage, sacrifice, and determination, survivors have helped bring about a reckoning and a meaningful step toward accountability."

The Weekly Crossword by Margie E. Burke



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ACROSS

- 1 More eccentric
- 6 Pilgrim to Mecca
- 10 Greek god of war
- 14 Sierra _____
- 15 Togo's capital
- 16 Word with back or knuckle
- 17 Charge of wrongdoing
- 19 iPhone voice
- 20 "Fee, ___, foe, fum"
- 21 Insect's outer shell
- 23 Top-of-the-line
- 25 Show stopper?
- 26 Hardy's cohort
- 28 Formal proclamation
- 30 More up to the task
- 31 Sticker figure
- 32 Rocket killer: Abbr.
- 35 Beat, as a heart
- 37 Mouth piece?
- 39 Sow's pen
- 40 Bit of statuary
- 42 Coffee additive
- 43 Pancake topping (var.)
- 44 Just say no
- 45 Trojan War figure
- 48 Takes in
- 50 Like population growth
- 52 Scottish cap
- 55 Nuclear particle
- 56 Swiss policy since 1815
- 58 Burn soother
- 59 Pinball error
- 60 Kind of sax
- 61 Monocle part
- 62 Knock 'em dead?
- 63 Plant disease
- 22 Car attachment
- 24 Angers
- 26 Pool exercise
- 27 Rest up against
- 29 Carthage queen
- 31 Machu Picchu locale
- 32 St. _____, FL
- 33 Bikini tops
- 34 A ___ pittance
- 36 Heavy down-pours
- 38 Hair piece?
- 41 Burger flipper
- 43 Lapidary's wares
- 44 Hearty laugh
- 45 Himalayan nation
- 46 Napoleon's fate
- 47 Flatware piece
- 49 Simple song
- 51 Simon or Sedaka
- 53 Molecular bit
- 54 Vidal's "___"
- 56 Batted first, with "off"

DOWN

- 1 Norwegian king
- 2 Supermarket section
- 3 In a sad way
- 4 Compass heading
- 5 Renewal, biologically
- 6 Some choir members
- 7 Party hearty
- 8 Run ___ (go wild)
- 9 Church position
- 10 Roll call mark
- 11 Indian yogurt dip
- 12 Flynn of classic film
- 13 River by the Louvre
- 18 Skater's jump

Answers to Previous Crossword:

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

Loser candy-o-scope

AIDAN.GRAHAM | ARTS & CULTURE EDITOR
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This weekend brings Halloween and everything that comes with it. On Oct. 31, the streets will be chock-full of ghosts, ghouls, drunk college kids and that one creepy guy in the Michael Myers mask who takes the whole act a little too seriously. Among the crazy outfits and copious amounts of booze sits the holiday's centerpiece, candy, ready to be devoured by the costumed masses. However, every year, pieces lay scattered at the bottom of the barrels, the rejects of the sweets world. Here's what loser candy you would be based on your sign.

SCORPIO (OCT. 23-NOV. 21): Scorpio, you're loved for the vibes you bring, but not your substance! Unwrapped and unbothered, everyone loves the imagery you bring to the table, but you're never anyone's first pick. You're candy corn!

SAGITTARIUS (NOV. 22-DEC. 21): Sagittarius, you have layers, lots of them, and while some might see that as a positive, it often gets you left at the bottom of the barrel. However, those who choose to discover the layers underneath will see a variety of flavors they couldn't imagine. You're a jawbreaker!

CAPRICORN (DEC. 22-JAN. 19): We're not quite sure how you got here, but inexplicably, you've always been. You're a mystery no one wants to unwrap, but you always somehow find your way into the mix. That's dedication my friend, you're a circus peanut.

AQUARIUS (JAN. 20-FEB. 18): Aquarius, you're — well, just fine. You're not always last in the candy-bowl, but you're certainly not the first out either. Your taffy texture is slightly off-putting and your almost-chocolate flavor just leaves us wanting more. You're a Tootsie Roll.

PISCES (FEB. 19-MAR. 20): Pisces, you let yourself go. Probably leftover from last year's candy bowl, you've become hard and unpalatable to most. However, if those who chew you can get past the breaking of teeth, you still have some sweetness to you. You're bubblegum.

ARIES (MAR. 21-APR. 19): Aries ... just because you're chewy doesn't mean you're candy. The bane of every child's Halloween, you have a bold taste only loved by the truest of Halloween maniacs. We know you're the original, but people love your knock-offs for a reason. You're black licorice.

TAURUS (APR. 20-MAY 20): Taurus, we don't know why you're always getting skipped over. A variety of flavors and textures, you have all the qualities to get chosen. Maybe it's the way you get stuck between our teeth or because you're a general choking hazard? Either way, you're always inexplicably left behind. You're hard candy!

GEMINI (MAY 21-JUN. 20): Gemini, you're controversial for a reason. Unassuming, sweet looking, yet the instant someone takes a bite, bam, coconut! For most, you're an unwelcome surprise to any candy-bowl, but those who really know you pick you every time. You're an Almond Joy!

CANCER (JUN. 21-JUL. 22): Cancer, they say a pinch of cinnamon goes a long way, and you did not listen one bit. Your red-hot exterior means we can only handle you in small doses. While some people love the heat you bring, it makes others hesitant to pull you from the bowl. You're Hot Tamales!

LEO (JUL. 23-AUG. 22): Leo, you're a catch, but your novelty can wear some people down. You have a sweetness to you, but it's work to bring it out. You're eye-catching, but sometimes people don't want to deal with what's left behind. You're a Wax Bottle!

VIRGO (AUG. 23-SEP. 22): OK Virgo, we don't know what kind of joke you're trying to make, but it isn't funny. Is this some statement about the state of dental care? Or are you just being an asshole? Either way, you don't have to be controversial about everything, it's honestly performative. You're a toothbrush.

LIBRA (SEP. 23-OCT. 22): You know exactly why you're getting left behind. No one comes to Halloween to be healthy and it's real presumptuous to try and make the holiday about nutrition-consciousness. We know you had good intentions, but frankly, you're not nature's candy. You're a box of raisins.



ALYSSA JO MURNION | CARTOONIST

New loan cap adds another hurdle to financial aid process

COLBY SUKO-CLARK | NEWS REPORTER
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The One Big Beautiful Bill Act created lifetime federal loan caps for college students in July, adding complexity to the financial aid process, which many students say is already difficult.

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA, is open, and a new lifetime federal loan cap of \$257,500 affects many University of Montana students by limiting how much they can borrow before turning to private loans.

“This is extremely difficult because I am poor and need the money,” said Caitlin King, a 19-year-old philosophy major in the pre-law program and sophomore at the University. King is one of many students that use aid from FAFSA or other financial aid services, and the new limit caps have added another step to college planning.

The One Big Beautiful Bill Act went into effect on July 1 and affects loans for all years of college. This includes both undergraduate and graduate school, which leaves a difficult choice for many out-of-state students.

The average price for an out-of-state undergrad student to spend four years at UM is \$241,816, according to the University. While this number is still under the cap, it means that many UM students will be unable to rely on loans if they want to go to graduate school after receiving their bachelor's degree. Graduate School for an out-of-state student is \$50,000, which would put students over the cap in a year if they relied on federal loans as undergrads.

In-state students are also impacted. The average cost for in-state students

is \$136,344 for all four years. Graduate school costs \$34,923 per year for such students. This means that in-state students could use loans to pay for a master's degree, which typically requires one or two years of graduate school, but a four to seven-year Ph.D. may be out of the question. This means families may have to pay out of their own pocket, but not everyone can do that.

“I am independent, and I had to prove it to the University last year that my parents were not able to help me,” King said. “How am I supposed to pay for my graduate school?”

The price of school is not the only thing affected by the cap on student loans. Paying up front for college means a student may have to take out private loans, which can require payments starting the next month.

“I am limited in what I can afford for housing, especially with the prices in Missoula,” King said. “If I have another payment to make, I am suddenly in an unstable environment because I can't afford good housing, food and loans.”

Drew Riley, who serves as UM's chief enrollment officer, explained that the University's financial aid office can educate students about those loans. “So many students require loans, and we are offering a safe space for students to better understand their private loan options,” he said. These safe spaces include the Education Loan Management for an online option, but also in-person services at the financial aid office.

Banks and credit unions rely on credit scores to check if someone is able to pay the loan back. If a payment is missed, because the loan is through the bank, it has the ability to lower the credit score. This is one of the reasons the FAFSA was created as a way to help students directly.



The student financial aid office sits on the fifth floor of Aber Hall. The Trump administration introduced the One Big Beautiful Bill Act in July, which includes lifetime loan caps for college students. **MARS JOHNSON | MONTANA KAIMIN**

“We are running a campaign on information, and communicating proactively with everyone, to make sure that every student is equipped with the knowledge of what the next steps for college look like,” Riley said. The University has been attempting to build a system that works with national law.

The University started prep work for this act in the spring of 2025, and helped work with the Education Loan Management Resources. This website allows students to compare their private loan options in an easier and more seamless way. UM spent the spring and summer getting it set up as prep for the bill since no university was given the guidelines until July when the bill was put into effect.

The bill also limited graduate student borrowing specifically, in addition to lifetime caps. The first limit is a loan cap of \$20,500 per year for graduate students, which is \$14,423 less than the average cost of graduate school at the

University for someone in-state.

Out-of-state tuition costs an average of \$55,666, which means that students have to get more private loans or pay the difference out of pocket. It also caps at a limit of \$100,000 for grad school, even if a student has no loan spending from undergraduate studies. Riley said that it will have effects on enrollment in the coming years, which has already taken a hit for graduate students.

The enrollment numbers for fall 2026 were released a few weeks ago. One takeaway is that there was a 68-person decrease, or 5%, in continuing graduate students from spring 2025 to fall 2026. However, the total number of students in graduate school did increase by 27. The Alexander Blewitt III School of Law also saw a total decrease of six students between spring 2025 and fall 2026.

“We are preparing for an enrollment decline, but this bill does change the idea many graduates have from ‘How much can I borrow?’ to ‘How much

should I borrow?’” Riley said. These limitations are already making their presence known to many students who are questioning if they can stay in Montana.

“I was planning on attending graduate school here, but with these new amounts, I should’ve just stayed in Iowa,” said Paxton Panada, an 18-year-old freshman majoring in anthropology. Panada is one out-of-state student who pays toward the maximum amount of \$60,000 a year and is starting to question the next steps.

“I am a little bit pissed off about it, and I don’t know what else to do in my future to keep me in college, but won’t bury me under financial death,” Panada said.

For a lot of students, the new bill is not the first headache they have faced with financial aid, but the most recent one.

David Wolfe, a second-year wildlife biology major, said that the University tried to pull money from his account and didn’t notify him when it failed.

The University then spent months adding interest fees for not paying the bill on time until it reached a maximum, and then sent out the notification, according to Wolfe.

“Suddenly the school told me I had three days to pay back all of the money, which was thousands of dollars, or I would be dropped from all my classes,” he said. The amount after the failed payment was thousands higher than it was before, which meant more money was taken out.

“The process to get the refund was so long, and I would not wish it upon my worst enemy,” Wolfe said. He then proceeded to take out several private loans and was in the negative for all of his bank accounts for months until the University announced a refund on the extra thousands of dollars.

“I hope that it doesn’t happen to anyone, because no one deserves to live in the negative, or be without a degree because the government doesn’t want to help the people that need help,” Wolfe said.

Breaking down the cost

Total loans lifetime cap \$257,500	Undergrad in-state tuition for one year \$34,086	Undergrad in-state tuition for four years \$136,344
	Undergrad out-of-state tuition for one year \$60,454	Undergrad out-of-state tuition for four years \$241,816
Graduate school loans yearly cap \$20,500 Lifetime cap \$100,000	Grad school yearly in-state tuition costs \$34,923	→ This is goes over the yearly federal limit by \$14,000
	Grad school yearly out-of-state tuition costs \$50,000	→ This is goes over the yearly federal limit by \$30,000
This cap partially funds 5 years of grad school, which is two years less than most Ph.D. programs	Law school yearly in-state tuition cost + costs of attendance \$30,020	→ This is goes over the yearly federal limit by \$10,000
	Law school yearly out-of-state tuition cost + costs of attendance \$57,612	→ This is goes over the yearly federal limit by \$37,112

Average costs of attendance from the University of Montana website. GRAPHIC BY LILY PETERSON

SUNRISE
Saloon

Missoula's only Country
Western Saloon!

Karaoke - Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday 🕒 9PM

Country Dance Lessons
with Misfit Country - Tuesday, Thursday 🕒 7 PM

Trivia/Bingo - Wednesdays 🕒 7PM

Rocking Karaoke - Oct 30 🕒 9PM

Western Meadowlarks & Costume Party - Oct 31 🕒 9PM

📍

1101 Strand Ave, Missoula, MT 59801



INSIDE THE ENVELOPE

A stack of filled out mail-in ballots sits in a bin in the sorting room of Missoula County Elections office on Oct. 16.

Missoula's election officials remain confident in the integrity and necessity of mail-in voting despite political threats to the process

Story and photos by Jackson Mailey

Though she lives an active life, Elle Eberts, 33, relies on absentee ballots to vote. Eberts has Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, which is an unpredictable genetic condition that prevents her from standing for long periods of time, some-

thing commonly done at a polling place.

"I have been in situations the last few years where I physically would not have been able to make it, and my vote wouldn't get counted," Eberts said.

Eberts is one of nearly 600,000 Montana voters, many of whom live in rural



Senior election aide Peggy Chilcote, 62, works on absentee ballots in her office at Missoula Votes on Oct. 16. Chilcote manages the process of mail-in ballots in Missoula County.

When President Donald Trump first took office, he made it his mission to limit or even get rid of mail-in voting. Though Trump has reversed his stance in the 2026 election cycle as GOP candidates trail in polls, his earlier statements still created doubt about the reliability of mail-in voting.

This past August, Trump posted on Truth Social, “I am going to lead a movement to get rid of MAIL-IN BALLOTS.”

Peggy Chilcote, who lives on a ranch in Lolo and serves as Missoula County’s senior election aide, oversees the county’s mail-in voting process. In her nearly 30 years working in elections, she tells voters who distrust mail-in voting one thing.

“I know the process, and I know how it works in Missoula County, and I know [voter fraud] can’t happen,” Chilcote said.

Claims and pushback

In April 2025, President Trump tried to issue an executive order that would require the U.S. Postal Service to mail ballots only to a list created by the Department of Homeland Security of all eligible U.S. citizens. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, a nonprofit law and policy institute at New York University

School of Law, that list was “incomplete and unreliable.”

Trump has also pushed Congress to pass the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act. This act, according to the Bipartisan Policy Center, nullifies “the benefits” of mail registration by requiring documentary proof of citizenship to be delivered in person to an election office instead of mailing in a voter registration application. In the 2022 midterm election cycle, only 5.9% of Americans registered to vote in person nationally.

The Department of Justice recently reported that there were 190,000 people on the California voting rolls who it said are ineligible, a number it then corrected to 20,000. After an investigation by Los Angeles County, the department’s findings didn’t independently determine whether the 20,000 noncitizens were noncitizens or if they had cast illegal ballots.

A mayoral race in Dodson, Montana, in 2021 made national headlines after Montana’s Secretary of State, Christi Jacobson, reported that the election had two non-American citizens vote. The race was later decided by two votes.

The Montana Free Press then reported the two voters were Filipino nationals

in the United States on exchange visitor visas, making them ineligible to vote in the election.

In the Montana 1st Congressional District debate on Oct. 13, Republican candidate Aaron Flint recalled the Dodson mayoral race.

“Obviously, we’ve got a lot more work to do as a country when it comes to election integrity,” Flint said in the debate.

Trump and the Republican party’s rhetoric of delegitimizing elections and calling mail-in ballots unreliable has also led to public distrust. In a Marist Poll with a sample size of 1,280 registered voters, 41% of voters believe there is a “great deal or good amount” of voter fraud when it comes to voting by mail.

Though Trump has shared negative views on mail-in ballots in the past, he is now reversing his statement in the wake of the midterms. In his past stumps around America, he has urged people to vote any way they can.

“If your state has early voting, do not wait. Go out and vote. Vote early, vote by mail or vote in person on Election Day Nov. 3,” Trump said in his visit to Wasilla, Alaska, on Oct. 13.

counties, who depend on mail-in ballots to make their voices heard, according to Montana Free Press. As a number of politicians question the method’s validity, election officials in Missoula remain confident in the process. If ballots aren’t mailed to voters’ doorsteps in the 2028 election, these officials say, nearly three-quarters of Montanans will have to find a new way to vote.

The process

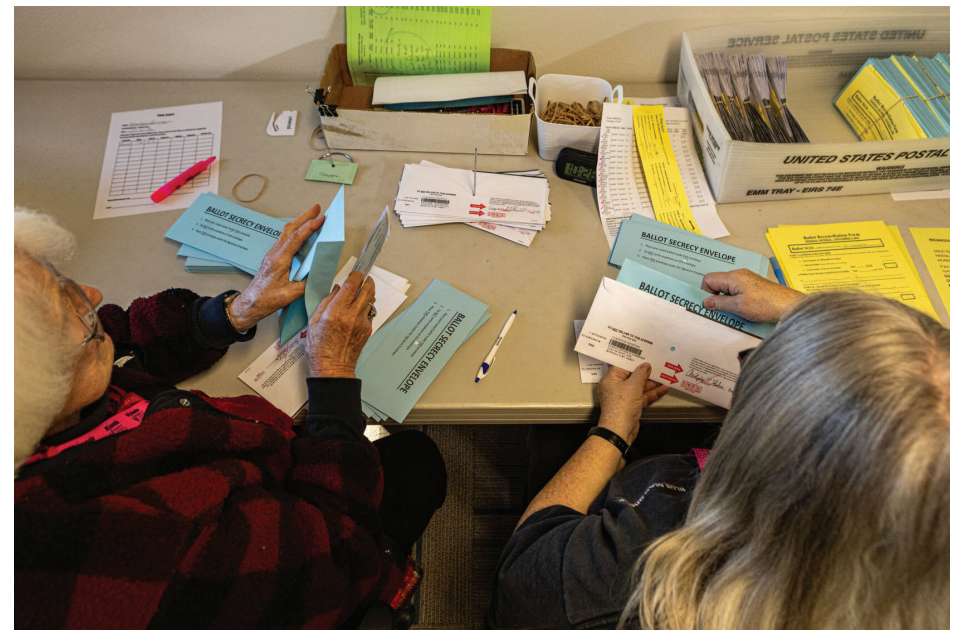
An absentee ballot's life begins in a large, brightly lit room at the Missoula County Elections facility. Almost 50 election assistants pack the ballots by hand. All election officials have to swear an oath to the constitution to remain nonpartisan on the job before they are hired. Glory Blood Artis, who has worked in the elections office for

the past six years, takes a freshly addressed envelope and puts inside a ballot for the voter to fill out, a secrecy envelope for the completed ballot to go in and information about the candidates and initiatives for this midterm election.

"They take pride in their work," Chilcote said. "They're [going to] make sure it's done right."

The team of 48 packed almost 64,000 absentee ballots by hand over three days in late September. The ballots are then sorted into trays according to zip codes and are driven two miles over to the Towne Mailer, which specializes in uploading invoices and statements, processing ballots and making sure they are correctly addressed.

Once the ballots are processed, bulk mail operator Mikaela Badzioch hops onto a forklift and carefully loads up thousands of packaged ballots into a U-Haul truck. Operations Manager Karen Slattery gets in the U-Haul and drives five minutes over to the United States Postal Service office. The ballots are picked up by USPS mail handlers to be shipped to homes across Missoula County.



TOP LEFT: Election assistants at the Missoula County Elections office work on the process of ballot packing on Sept. 28. The assistants take the components that go into a mail-in ballot and prepare them to be sent out to the post office.

TOP RIGHT: Jeff Moore, general expeditor at Missoula County's post office, pulls a cart of mail-in ballots into the mailing room to be sent out to voters on Oct. 8.

BOTTOM LEFT: Nicole Seward, mail operator at Missoula's Towne Mailer, wraps up boxes of mail-in ballots for the post office on Oct. 8. Missoula's Towne Mailer has the task of processing the ballots, along with making sure they have the right address on them.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Election assistants Marlys Swanson, 86, left, and Pat Turnage, 71, work on the process of reconciliation for mail-in ballots at Missoula Votes on Oct. 16. Reconciliation is the process of removing the "ballot secrecy envelope" from the main envelope so that the vote becomes anonymous for counting on Election Day on Nov. 3.

After the voter fills out their ballot and drops it off in a dropbox or their mailbox, Chilcote and her team's job is to pick the returned ballots up from the Missoula County post office.

Chilcote or two other election assistants have to do this every morning at 7:30 so they can stay on track of how many ballots have already come back.

The election assistants then have reconciliation day, where absentee ballots are sorted by location, signatures are verified and all that remains is the blue "secrecy envelope" with the ballot inside, to ensure every ballot counted becomes anonymous.

"You have no tie to who signed the envelope, and then those are all boxed and ready to come over here to the counting center on Election Day," Chilcote said.

Chilcote's election team works in pairs so each person can cross-reference the other's work. They do this for ballot packing, picking up the ballots, reconciliation and counting.

Though Chilcote oversees the process, it couldn't happen without her team of election assistants. These assistants want to work as many hours as they can, not just for the money, but also for the tight-knit social community.

"It's not just you know them here, they become your friends," she said.

Who's counting?

The Missoula County Elections facility looks like a bingo night. Almost every election assistant is elderly.

"There sure are a lot of gray-haired ladies that work here," 75-year-old election assistant Kathy Holden said.

However, the group often takes a monotonous job that demands long, unpredictable hours, and they make it a little more fun.

"It's a family," election assistant Robyn Heyer said. "You get to know these people, and we have a lot of laughs and we tease each other."

Chilcote and her team have traditions they enjoy every election season. During the ballot packing, every time a team of two packs ballots, they get a raffle ticket. Chilcote then draws a winner at lunch and at the end of the day, to receive a cash prize of 20 dollars.

On Sept. 28, during ballot packing, one of Chilcote's election assistants, Katherine Millhouse, who goes by KC, couldn't make it because they were having surgery. The entire team signed a "get well" card, and her colleagues made sure her name was still entered in the raffle. "She won the \$20 prize and she wasn't even working," Chilcote laughed.

But, aside from the lighter moments, "These people are very serious about their job," Heyer said. "It's knowing that you have each other's back, but we could question each other."

Doris Walther, a 79-year-old Navy veteran who used to "keep everyone in



Election assistants Robyn Heyer, left, and Kathy Holden, right, wheel in ballot drop boxes for the filled in ballots to be signature verified and ready for counting on Oct. 21.

line," passed away in early October. The entire team showed up for her memorial service. The crew even started pinning up Dove chocolate wrappers to remember her, since she always brought chocolates as a snack.

"I like being with people, and working with people, and I think it's really important as you age," election assistant Pat Turnage said as she worked on reconciliation. "I'm a motivator. I don't want to sit at home, so I thoroughly enjoy it."

The election team also takes remaining nonpartisan on the job very seriously, according to Chilcote. She described a time when an election assistant accidentally brought a water bottle to work with political stickers on it.

"She got a sheet of paper and tape, and she totally covered it up," Chilcote said.

With traditions, side gossiping, gift-giving and making sure everybody keeps working, Missoula County's election officials come from all walks of life and are able to give some personality to repetitive tasks of counting, double-checking and sorting. If mail-in ballots were taken away or altered in the next election cycle, these people could face cuts, and if mail-in ballots became obsolete, they would all lose their jobs.

The future of mail-in

Bradley Seaman, Missoula County's election administrator, feels confident in the trust that Missoula County voters have when it comes to voting by mail.

"We've got 80 to 83% of Missoula County that votes by mail, trusts the process and feels comfortable with it," he said.

According to Seaman, as of Oct. 23, almost 67,000 people in Missoula County will vote by absentee ballot this season, and about 15,000 will vote in person. Around 75% of Montanans vote by mail, according to the Daily Montanan. Revoking mail-in would jeopardize these voters' ability to participate in elections. Nationally, according to the States United Democracy Center, nearly a third of Americans voted by mail in 2022 and 2024.

"That's a big thing to take away that service to many voters," Seaman said.

Although Missoula County has the most polling places of any county in Montana, Seaman believes its current infrastructure could not meet demand without mail-in ballots.

"These locations are used to serve 200 people [at a time], so if we're now taking 60,000 votes by mail voters and adding them to the polling places we would likely need some larger consolidated locations," Seaman said.

Those new locations would cost taxpayers. According to a report by Montana's Secretary of State in 2013, if all counties chose to run federal elections by mail ballot, the state would save about \$2 million every two years. "When we have higher turnout, and it's the same cost, we're getting a better bang for our buck," Seaman said.

Eight states have already switched to mail-only elections, including Vermont, Washington and California, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

"I don't want to work one day at a polling place, I like this process," Chilcote said.

Although some voters still believe there is fraud in mail-in voting, Missoula County Elections ensures the process is accurate and carefully carried out. The office also lets people see the steps for themselves.

"We've held tours and invited people to come, and nobody will show up," Chilcote said.

The office also provides videos of the mail-in process on its website to show there's no fraud in Missoula County elections.

"We're trying to share accurate information and I've had to learn that sometimes there are people who aren't interested in disproving their own false narrative," election administrator Seaman said.



ARTS AND CULTURE SHAKING THINGS UP

These days it's more important than ever to step away from the hard news and bring some levity to the pages! But we're not just here to entertain.

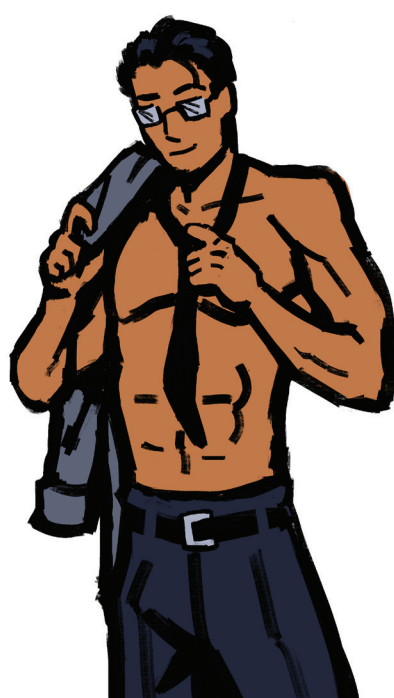
We at the arts section are here to be a resource for answering those burning questions and helping get you involved in your community. But we can't do it alone. Have some wild campus observations? Planning an event? Trying to launch that DJ act? Give us a call, email, telegram, we're here to help! This week, we're bringing back

columns and welcoming the overdue return of our weekly events calendar. Just in time for Halloween, we're exploring the most frightening thing for any college student: looks, sex and love. Beyond the scares, we have a number of events to spice up your Halloween weekend and a bit of heartwarming real-world magic to end on.

Sure, we're not reinventing the wheel here, but hopefully it's enough to keep you coming back for more. I mean, who doesn't love a makeover?

— Aidan Graham,
arts and culture editor

Students on UM's hottest major



RIVER BLAZEJEWSKI | ARTS REPORTER
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Are stereotypes associated with your major affecting who's into you?

The Kaimin asked University of Montana students what they believe the hottest major is — or, at least, what a person's choice of major might indicate about their romantic potential. While the answers were diverse, one major came out on top.

Gretchen Collins, a sophomore, said she believes someone majoring in art is more in touch with their emotions.

"I've hung out with a couple criminology majors, and it seems like they have a pretty good head on their shoulders," junior geoscience major Caleb Yankee said.

Unfortunately, not every major could survive in the dating pool. Psychology and sociology received the most red flags across campus. One student said he didn't want

a constant diagnosis from his partner. Accounting, chemistry and math were also given red flags.

Philly Tillman, a junior, said his ideal partner was "anyone but foresters."

Luckily, you don't have to be a forester to work in environmental science, a popular answer among the student body. "That's where the granola baddies are," freshman Jasper Pickett said.

Intriguingly, most students' self-selected "hottest major" didn't align with their own.

Not everyone was turned off by the prospect of music majors trying to sell you on their band's latest debut. Music majors, especially jazz studies, polled high among the student body because the dedication, skill and confidence the craft requires.

Several students nominated a major but didn't explain why. These honorable mentions include: nursing, journalism and physical therapy.

An arts or criminology major may make excellent conversation, while a future CEO may bring home that bread. But in the end, environmental science majors seemed to dominate the "hottest" field on campus. In Missoula, where access to outdoor opportunities is unparalleled, many students viewed someone with environmental empathy who enjoys getting outside as the most attractive.

However, the major doesn't make the student, so if you're not in environmental sciences, don't worry. Maybe consider asking that person you've been thinking about on a hiking date, or even a picnic. Campuswide consensus says that's pretty hot.

Yet, as with any preference, there will always be outliers, as one anonymous student asked: "Are professors an option?"

ALYSSA JO MURNION | CARTOONIST



AIDAN GRAHAM | ARTS & CULTURE EDITOR
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HALLOWEEN SCARES

Haunt in the Halls — *Free Cycles*, Oct. 29-31, 6-8 p.m.

The Shining on 35mm film — *The Roxy*, Oct. 29, 5:15 p.m. and 8:15 p.m.

Graveyard Stomp swing dancing — *Free Cycles*, Oct. 31, 6 p.m., all ages (no cover)

MUSIC

Jazz Night — *The Old Post*, Oct. 29, 7 p.m. (no cover)

Jazz: UM Big Band Jazz Standards — *Dennison Theater*, Oct. 30, 7:30 p.m.

Theater: Rocky Horror LIVE! — *The Wilma*, Oct. 30 and 31, 8 p.m. and 12 a.m. (Tickets may vary)

Rock: The Spills — *Union Club*, Oct. 30, 8 p.m. 21+ (no cover)

Rock: Seditious Activity, TV Letdowns, No Policy — *ZACC*, Oct. 30, 8 p.m., \$12 Cover

Funk: Halloween with Joan Zen — *Union Club*, Oct. 31, 8 p.m., 21+ (no cover)

Folk: Northfork Crossing — *Top Hat*, Oct. 31, 10:30 p.m. 21+ \$12 cover

Country: Tanner Laws — *Top Hat*, Oct. 30, 10 p.m. 21+ (no cover)

EDM: Halloween at Monk's Bar — Oct. 30 and 31, 9 p.m. 21+ \$5 cover

SPECIAL EVENTS

Festival of the Dead — *Downtown Missoula*, Nov. 2, 8 p.m.

Light in the Dark live storytelling — *Free Cycles*, Nov. 3, 7 p.m.

ON CAMPUS

Public Halloween Sewing Day — *Fine Arts Building*, Oct. 31, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

UC After Dark, Halloween weekend events — *University Center*, Oct. 29-31, 10 a.m.-10 p.m.

OPINION:

THE SITUATIONSHIP EPIDEMIC

People often say Generation Z is the generation of hookup culture.

Dating apps have created a slot-machine-like atmosphere where the next hot, available single could be one swipe away, so why settle down? While hookup culture is central to the modern dating scene, I would argue we're plagued by a different curse: the situationship.

A situationship is when you're seeing someone for more than sex, but without the dating label. You might read that and think, "That's a relationship," but it's not — no commitment, no security, no expectations. It's a "situation," if you will. "It's complex, confusing, it kinda makes you feel like you don't know what the other person is thinking," said Brooke Russell, an 18-year-old wildlife biology student.

According to Andrea Meltzer, psychology area director at Florida State, growing research shows that situationships are less satisfying than relationships with more commitment. "Their ambiguity is associated with hypervigilance, lower self-esteem and poorer well-being," Meltzer said.

I've often heard friends justify this by saying it's easier than committing to another person; you get companionship while still keeping the freedom of being single.

Over the years I've watched my friends go through hell, banging their heads against the wall trying to figure out if the people they're seeing want to date them or not, all while trying to convince everyone around them that they don't care. This is ridiculous, it makes a very simple situation unnecessarily complicated. A typical situationship has two participants: the person with commitment issues and the person who's lying while saying they're OK with it.

The person with commitment issues typically likes the other person just fine, but not enough to commit. The other party sticks around, hoping the first will see their potential and change their mind.

This lack of commitment and general confusion harms people by making them live in what ifs and feeling like they aren't good enough. One feels guilty about not letting go while also not giving the other person what they want. The other person doesn't feel good enough with them.

It's hard to know what to do when you want connection, but feel like you can't commit to someone. If you can't sit down with the person you're sleeping with and have an honest conversation about your expectations, you might not be mature enough to be emotionally involved with someone. Which is why it's important to keep investing in your other relationships; just make sure you don't sleep with them in the process.

How Missoula's Bar Fairies advocate for sober driving

SABRINA PHILIP | ARTS REPORTER

sabrina.philip@umontana.edu

When we were young, the tooth fairy rewarded us for losing our baby teeth, often slipping cash under our pillows.

Now, thanks to a Montana nonprofit, fairies can still be a part of our lives. Instead of trading teeth for money, these fairies trade coffee for safe, sober driving.

The Bar Fairies is a nonprofit founded by Beth McBride and her daughter, Carli, in honor of Beth's son, Bobby, who was killed by a drunk driver on the night of his 21st birthday in Columbia Falls, Montana, in March 2023. The group encourages smart decisions about driving and alcohol use, a priority McBride says most people can relate to.

The idea for the project came in 2023, when Beth and Carli were deep in their grief over Bobby's death. One morning, while walking, Carli noticed frost on the windshields of cars parked outside bars and realized the cars had been left there overnight — meaning those drivers had made the choice not to do what the driver who killed Bobby had done.

Carli wished she had a way to say "thank you," even if that meant just writing it on the windshield with her finger. She called her mother and expressed her desire to do something.

"I told her, 'Carli, why not?'" McBride said. "Why can't we do this?"

McBride's sales and marketing experience, combined with Carli's social media management and barista skills, formed a realistic plan. They settled on showing their gratitude through coffee: they would leave coffee gift cards for drivers coming back to their vehicles. They reached out to Copper Mountain Coffee, which agreed to help.

Since then, the project has expanded to Washington, Ohio, Missouri and other parts of Montana, including Missoula.

According to Suzanna Rosalez, who was a classmate of Bobby's and now serves as the president of Missoula's Bar Fairies chapter, the process begins with organizing volunteers based on the applicants' availability. Then, that morning's group of "fairies" meets between 5 and 6 a.m. on Saturdays and Sundays to sprinkle their magic.

As the fairies walk around downtown Missoula, they leave small brown envelopes on car windshields, sealed with circular black stickers featuring an of a fairy. Inside is a card memorializing a person who was killed or injured by a drunk driver and a \$5 coffee gift card to a local coffee shop.

Rosalez explained that while the group usually meets outside Bodega, they also pass other spots, including Montgomery Distillery, Stockman's, Al's & Vic's Bar,



Missoula regional chapter leader Suzanna Rosalez leaves a gift card on a car parked outside Missoula Club on Oct. 25. **BRAYDEN VALLOW | MONTANA KAIMIN**



A Missoula Bar Fairies envelope sits on a car on Oct. 22. **BRAYDEN VALLOW | MONTANA KAIMIN**

The Oxford and occasionally the cars left in Caras Park. Drop-offs usually include around 20 envelopes and occur every other weekend because of volunteer availability. Volunteers in Missoula, Rosalez said, vary in age and change every week.

According to McBride, responses from both volunteers and supporters have been "overwhelming." She hopes this indicates a desire for change among those who see the initiative. She's grateful for the ways in which social media has spread their message and allowed them to connect to others who have experienced losses due to drunk driving.

McBride and Rosalez attribute the group's success to its message of positive reinforcement. The group does not aim

to judge or shame, she says, and the goal is not to discourage alcohol consumption completely.

"At the end of the day, it's not worth it," Rosalez said of the risk associated with driving under the influence. "Spend the \$15 on an Uber. Ask a friend for help." "I'm constantly telling people, I'd rather you wake me up at 2 in the morning than have to go to a funeral."

McBride also helped draft House Bill 267, "Bobby's Law," which passed in 2025. The legislation established prison sentences of up to 30 years for aggravated vehicular homicide if the driver has a blood alcohol content of 0.16% or higher.

"If we can save lives by people making the right choice, then my son didn't die in vain," McBride said. "His death promoted change."

Gallery | *Bikes gettin' treed*

THE UM BIKE BANDIT

EMBRY ERICSON | PHOTOGRAPHER
embry.ericson@umontana.edu

A few weeks ago, in mid-October, bikes began showing up in trees across the University of Montana campus. They were placed there overnight, and no one could figure out who was doing it or why.

It turns out that the UM “Bike Bandit” is a group effort. “Me and a bunch of my buddies got together and decided to do

this thing,” one member of the group said, who agreed to this interview on the condition of anonymity.

“It’s not really for any enjoyment,” the Bandit said. “People just need to know that they should lock their bikes.” The end goal? For the group to put itself out of business — the banditry will stop, this person says, when there are no unlocked bikes left to snag.

“I just hope it’s an inconvenience enough to convince people to lock their

damn bikes,” the Bandit said.

“At first I didn’t think it was my bike, but then I realized that no one else on campus has a shitty bike like mine,” said Thomas Knudsen, a gender studies major, whose bike has been put in a tree outside of Jesse Hall several times.

Knudsen has enlisted the help of other residents of Jesse Hall to remove his bike from the trees when necessary, citing a lack of height. Even though Knudsen’s bike has been put in a tree

multiple times, that hasn’t changed much.

“It was pretty funny, to be honest,” Knudsen said. “My bike just isn’t valuable enough to lock.”

The group was inspired by Owen Thompson, or the University of South Florida Bike Man, who went viral on Instagram for doing a similar stunt. Thompson stopped operating after facing threats of legal action from USF campus police.

"He shouldn't have shown everyone his face, that was his mistake," the Bandit said of Thompson. So far, around 10 bikes have been lifted into trees across campus in the past week.

The Bandit has a few favorite spots to hang trees. "Jesse Hall has some awesome trees. Aber's trees suck so bad."

Even after the repeated inconveniences, Knudsen doesn't see the need for any punitive measures. "If anything, the UMPD should be thanking the bike man. He's spreading awareness."

LEFT: The UM Bike Bandit puts an unlocked bike in a tree outside of Jesse Hall on Oct. 25. The bike belongs to Thomas Knudsen, an 18-year old gender studies major at UM.

RIGHT: An unlocked bike sits in the crook of a tree outside of Jesse Hall on Oct. 25.



ELOUISE COBELL DAY CELEBRATION

Accountability and Leadership: Elouise Cobell's Legacy in Native Women's Governance

On November 5, 2015, Governor Steve Bullock proclaimed November 5th as Elouise Cobell Day. Elouise led a class action lawsuit against the United States Government for mismanagement of funds across Indian Country. Elouise was persistent and determined to fight for justice. After 15 years of litigation, a settlement was made in the amount of \$3.4 billion. Like a Blackfeet woman warrior, Elouise Cobell is the Great Granddaughter of Mountain Chief. She was an activist, banker, philanthropist, community developer, rancher, and worked as treasurer for the Blackfeet Nation.

A Panel Featuring:
Senator Lea Whitford, Moderator
Senator Jacinda Morigeau
Representative Thedis Crowe
Representative Shelly Fyant

THURSDAY, NOV. 5TH

1:00 P.M. PAYNE CENTER
Opening Prayer & Honor Song

1:15 - 3:15 P.M. PAYNE CENTER
Current Native women legislators
telling stories of leadership in the
spirit of Elouise Cobell.



Find out more about Rankin Tribal College scholarships, AAUW grants and Cobell fellowships. Due dates in November.

Washington-Grizzly Stadium celebrates 40 years

DILLON RICHARDSON | SPORTS REPORTER

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For 40 years, Washington-Grizzly Stadium has been a staple of the University of Montana, home to athletes and fans alike.

Some of the greatest moments in Grizzly athletics – from the 2009 win over Appalachian State University in the Football Championship Subdivision semifinals to the 2015 upset over North Dakota State University – have happened in “the Mecca of FCS football.”

Eric Taber, director of communications for Griz Football, said the stadium symbolizes one thing: passion.

“Passion for a team, passion the community has for the place, passion the players have for playing in that stadium and passion we all have for the University of Montana,” Taber said.

He added that the stadium’s uniqueness comes from the space it occupies.

“There’s a river running right by it. It’s under the mountains. It’s one of the most picturesque settings in America for college football,” Taber said. “We’re really lucky to have our stadium there.”

The revenue the stadium brings in is vital as well, according to Taber.

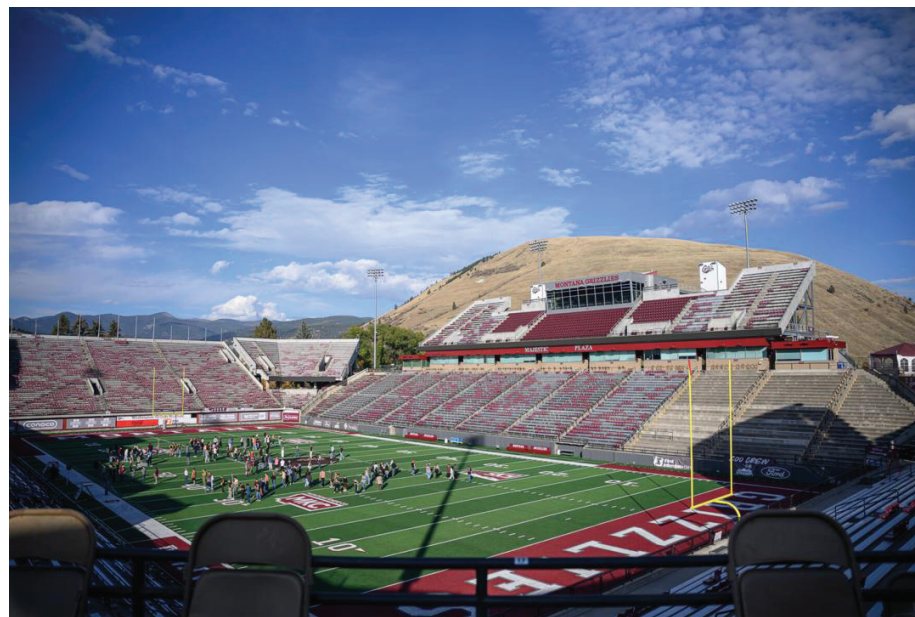
“We could not do what we do at athletics without the support of those folks buying tickets,” he said. Out-of-state visitors spend over \$5 million in Missoula every time Griz football is in town, according to a 2025 Bureau of Business and Economic Research study.

“A Grizzly football game has a significant impact on everybody in the community and that stadium is a big reason why,” he said.

Taber said that the building of the stadium signified a change in Griz football.

“For most of the history of Grizzly football, Montana was just ‘pretty good,’” he said, adding that Dornblaser Field, where UM played prior to Washington-Grizzly Stadium, was an average stadium at best. “That all changed with this stadium.”

Legendary UM coach Don Read’s hiring, combined with the new stadium, helped give “the team and the program a home and an identity as well,” according to Taber.



Washington-Grizzly Stadium in the afternoon while the marching band practices on the field on Oct. 21. The stadium celebrated its 40th anniversary on Oct. 17. **PARKER HOWERY | MONTANA KAIMIN**

On Oct. 17, a day before the 40th anniversary of Wa-Griz’s first game, over 100 former Grizzlies were recognized on the field between the first and second quarters of the Montana/University of Idaho game, and watched the Griz practice during the week as well.

One of those former Griz was Marcus Welnel, who is now an assistant athletic director at UM. Welnel, alongside the Grizzly Former Players Association, helped organize the reunion because he felt there was a disconnect between many former players and the University.

“We are getting so much feedback from almost every player that they truly loved that experience, and just can’t wait to come back and be re-engaged with the program again,” Welnel said.

He said the stadium made his experience as an athlete much better.

“I miss playing the sport,” Welnel said. “But what I really miss is being in Washington-Grizzly Stadium and feeling the energy and the passion of those fans in the stands.”

Fan Brint Wahlberg, 47, has been to almost every game since the mid-’90s.

“As a kid I’d sit in the grass end zones because it was a cheaper babysitter for my parents to put your kid in the end zone than to have someone come over and watch him,” Wahlberg said. “It’s like it’s home.”

He said that the stadium has changed as college sports have changed over the last decade. Now, there’s more corporate influence, which he doesn’t feel is bad – just different.

“It’s changed over the years, but there’s still magic in it,” he said.

Wahlberg would like to see a few upgrades to the stadium, especially to its sound system.

“There needs to be a heavy look at the modernization of the experience fans get,” he said, adding that when he went to Oregon State University, the higher quality sound system, video board and lighting helped keep fans engaged, and because of that, Wahlberg said there is no reason to expand the stadium’s capacity.

“I like where we’re at,” he said. “I would hate to keep building for the sake of an arms race with [Montana State University] or somebody else, and then we have thousands upon thousands of empty seats every game. I’d rather the experience was attended to more than just more seats.”

But at the end of the day, Washington-Grizzly Stadium is still special to Wahlberg.

“It builds a bond with so many,” he said. “I think it’s a representation of our entire town, of western Montana. It’s much more than just a big concrete box with seats.”

SPORTS BRIEFS

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GRIZ SOFTBALL SWEEPS DOUBLEHEADER

The Griz prevailed against Montana State University Billings on Oct. 24 in a thrilling doubleheader. With 32 runs across the two games, the Griz now stand at 6-0.

Game one ended 14-3, with Kailee Mejia hitting two home runs and JoJo Christiaens hitting a two-run home run. Pitcher Carah Sweet struck out 11 MSUB players in five innings, adding to the momentum.

The second game ended 18-8, with Christiaens hitting a bases-loaded triple. Mackenzie Bekofsky, Anna Cockhill and Madison Tarrant each hit home runs.

“We have to continue to raise the bar and be relentless,” head coach Stef Ewing said. “We have a laundry list of things we need to work on, but overall we’re doing a lot of things really well.”

Griz softball wrapped up its fall exhibition period Sunday with two wins over Carroll College. The team will enter the 2027 regular season with a 8-0 record.

VOLLEYBALL INCREASES LOSS STREAK TO THREE

The Grizzlies are now officially 6-15 as they fell 2-3 to Weber State on Oct. 24.

The team is now 2-8 in the Big Sky Conference and is tied for last place with the University of Idaho.

UM played Weber State at home in Dahlberg Arena. The Griz won the first and third sets 25-23 and 25-21. Unfortunately for the Grizzlies, they lost the second, fourth and fifth sets.

Over five sets, three decided by two points, the teams recorded about 200 digs and 130 kills combined.

The Grizzlies had multiple opportunities throughout the high-intensity night. They opened the final set with a 6-0 run, forcing an early Weber State timeout. Unluckily for Montana, Weber State had the answers, scoring 15 of the final 21 points to come from behind for the win.

Mylee Blake, an outside hitter, finished with 16 kills and one ace, and Gracie Cagle finished with 29 assists and one ace. Cagle currently leads the Big Sky Conference in aces.

During the heated match, a Weber State player made an inappropriate gesture to the crowd full of Griz fans. Weber State volleyball posted an apology on its official Instagram in regard to the actions toward Montana.

“We apologize to the Montana program and appreciate the importance of competing with class, integrity and respect for our opponents,” the post stated. “We take this matter seriously and will address it internally.”