

FAMILY OUTING



RACHEL LEATHE/CHRONICLE

A small herd of deer graze in a field along the upper Madison River on Dec. 15.

Clinic's rewards program draws fraud complaint

By **KATHERYN HOUGHTON**
Kaiser Health News

A Montana addiction clinic's plan to give people with substance use disorders as much as \$1,966.50 in gift cards and vouchers to follow its treatment program is raising questions about the use of financial incentives with patients.

The tug of war over the effective but largely unregulated tool is playing out in the northwestern Montana town of Kalispell, where a local government grant is financing rewards for people who stick with treatment provided by the outpatient clinic Oxytocin.

Such incentives have gained momentum among individual health clinics and states in recent years. Since 2021, California, Washington, and Wisconsin have started incentive-based programs. Some private clinics offer their own rewards, such as giving clients gift cards for successfully passing a drug test.

In Montana, where Republican Gov. Greg Gianforte has made expanding behavioral health care a priority, a state pilot program offers prizes to people with addictions who stay off drugs. Oxytocin's program, while funded by a government grant, is separate from the pilot program.

The allowable value of prizes that go to beneficiaries of federal health programs, like Medicaid, is a legal gray area, so totals vary from one program to the next.

The federal government doesn't have a rule limiting the size of financial awards or guidelines detailing best practices, said Richard Rawson, professor emeritus in the Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences at UCLA.

"People don't know where to look to understand this method, so states and providers make it up as they go along," said Rawson, who has studied such incentives for about 20 years.

In June, Montana's Flathead County awarded the Kalispell clinic, Oxytocin, a \$500,000 grant funded by state alcohol tax revenue.

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MSU project step closer to lunar landing

By **LIZ WEBER**
Chronicle Staff Writer

A Montana State University computer system project is one step closer to its moon landing.

A prototype of the RadPC, a computer system designed to withstand the strong radiation found in outer space, was handed off to an aerospace company ahead of its eventual lunar landing. About the size of a Rubik's cube, it might replace more expensive and cumbersome computers used by NASA.

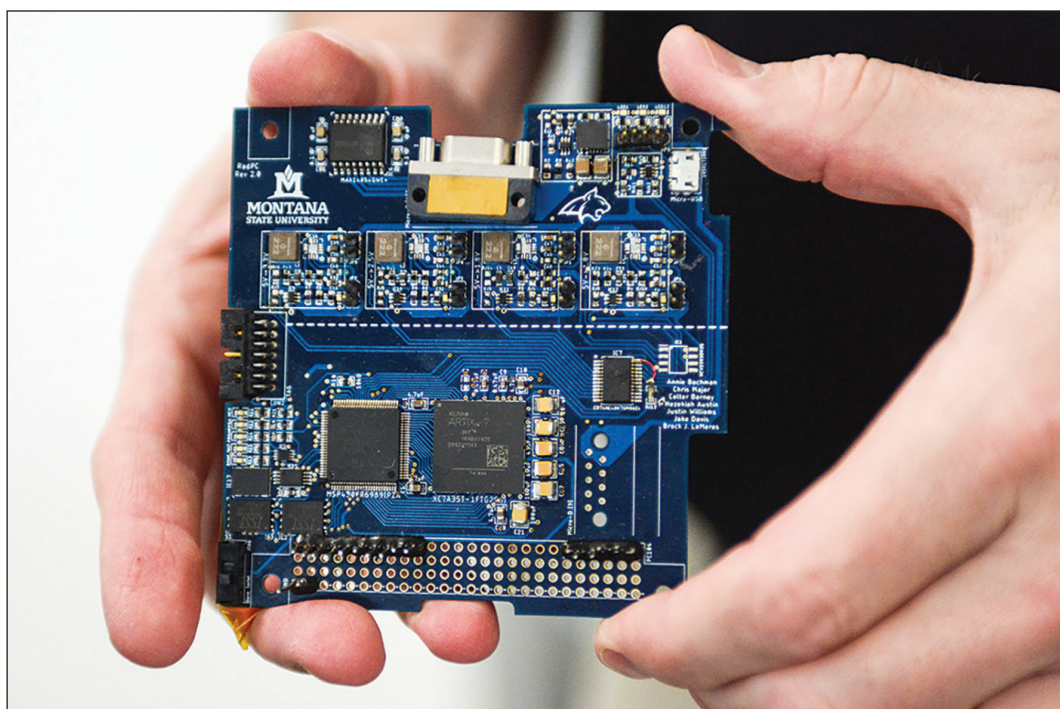


The project was selected in 2019 by NASA to be one of several payloads sent to the moon for testing.

"It was a massive milestone for our team as we've been working on this for three years. This represents the final delivery of the computer payload for MSU," said Brock LaMeris, professor in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering.

LaMeris has led the research into a radiation-tolerant computer for the last decade.

While LaMeris ended up not being able to make the



RACHEL LEATHE/CHRONICLE

Brock LaMeris, a professor in the electrical and computer engineering department at Montana State and founder of Resilient Computing, holds up a RadPC single board computer, a piece of technology that he and his students have been working on for the past 12 years, on Dec. 8, 2021, at MSU.

trip at the last minute, two of his graduate students, Chris Major and Jake Davis, transported the device.

The two engineering graduate students were tasked with delivering the finished prototype in October to Firefly Aerospace's facilities in Austin, Texas. The aerospace

company will prepare the lunar lander for its 2024 NASA mission.

"It was very stressful," said LaMeris of the transport. "It is sensitive equipment... It was also cleaned for operation in space, so it isn't supposed to be touched outside of a clean-room facility."

Despite red warning labels from NASA placed on the case saying, "sensitive space hardware — do not open," the team was still worried airport security might ask to take it out and inspect the RadPC, according to LaMeris.

More **MSU** | **A10**

Jan. 6 panel urges Trump prosecution with criminal referral

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House Jan. 6 committee urged the Justice Department on Monday to bring criminal charges against Donald Trump for the violent 2021 Capitol insurrection, calling for accountability for the former president and "a time of reflection and reckoning."

After one of the most exhaustive and aggressive congressional probes in memory, the panel's seven Democrats and two Republicans are recommending criminal charges against Trump and associates who helped him launch a wide-ranging pressure campaign to try to overturn his 2020 election loss. The panel also released a lengthy summary of its final report, with findings



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At a final meeting Monday, the committee alleged violations of four criminal statutes by Trump, in both

the run-up to the riot and during the insurrection itself, as it recommended the former president for prosecution to the Justice Department. Among the charges they recommend for prosecution is aiding an insurrection — an effort to hold him directly accountable for his supporters who stormed the Capitol that day.

The committee also voted to refer conservative lawyer John Eastman, who devised dubious legal maneuvers aimed at keeping Trump in power, for prosecution on two of the same statutes as Trump: conspiracy to defraud the United States and obstructing an official proceeding.

More **TRUMP** | **A7**



A video of former President Donald Trump is shown on a screen as the House select committee investigating the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol holds its final meeting on Capitol Hill on Monday.



Bozeman 7-Day Forecast

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Today	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday
29 -6	0 -38	-19 -24	14 8	34 25	38 28	35 28
A thick cloud cover	Frigid with a bit of snow	Frigid with a little snow	Cold; partly sunny, then mostly cloudy	Not as cold with a little snow	Mostly cloudy with a bit of snow	Cloudy with a couple of snow showers
RealFeel: 17 / -2	RealFeel: -5 / -42	RealFeel: -22 / -29	RealFeel: 9 / 8	RealFeel: 30 / 15	RealFeel: 31 / 23	RealFeel: 31 / 22
Chance of precip: 20%	Chance of precip: 90%	Chance of precip: 50%	Chance of precip: 20%	Chance of precip: 50%	Chance of precip: 60%	Chance of precip: 55%

Area Summary

Cloudy today. Little or no sunshine with average relative humidity 55% and fair drying conditions. Snow at times tonight, accumulating 1-2 inches. Chance of precipitation 90% with average relative humidity 60%. Snow tomorrow. Little or no sunshine.

Air Quality Index

TODAY: **Good**
MONDAY: **Moderate**

Source: Montana Department of Environmental Quality

Almanac

Information taken at MSU Bozeman ending at 2 p.m. Monday

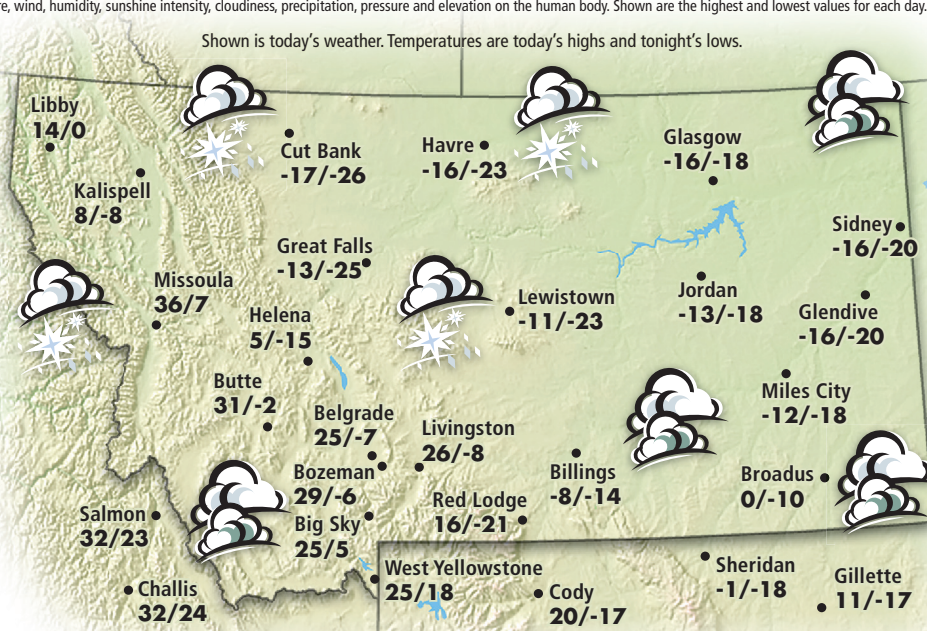
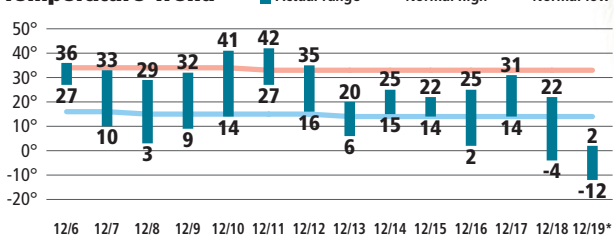
Temperature:
High* 2
Low* -12
Normal high 33
Normal low 14
Record high 55/1979
Record low -28/1924

Precipitation: in inches
24 hours through 2 p.m.* 0.00
Month to date* 1.38
Normal month to date 0.65
Year to date* 23.71
Normal year to date 19.65
Normal for year 20.03

Information taken at Bozeman Airport ending at 2 p.m. Monday

Temperature:
High -3 at 2:00 p.m.
Low -20 at 5:14 a.m.
Normal high 31
Normal low 9
Record high 55/2004
Record low -25/1949

Precipitation: in inches
24 hours through 2 p.m. 0.00
Month to date 0.52
Normal month to date 0.28
Year to date 12.64
Normal year to date 13.27
Normal for year 13.43



Regional Cities

	Today	Wed.
	Hi/Lo/W	Hi/Lo/W
Belgrade	25/-7/c	-2/-39/sn
Big Sky	25/5/sf	10/-34/sn
Billings	-8/-14/c	-12/-27/s
Butte	31/-2/sn	12/-31/sn
Dillon	27/10/c	21/-22/sn
Ennis	30/-2/c	14/-26/sn
Glasgow	-16/-18/c	-15/-25/sn
Glendive	-16/-20/sn	-16/-26/sn
Great Falls	-13/-25/sn	-21/-33/sn
Havre	-16/-23/sn	-18/-33/c
Helena	5/-15/sn	-14/-33/sn
Kalispell	8/-8/sn	-3/-29/sn
Livingston	26/-8/sf	3/-33/sn
Manhattan	25/-7/c	-4/-41/sn
Miles City	-12/-18/sn	-16/-26/sn
Missoula	36/7/s	14/-27/sn
Three Forks	24/-10/c	-5/-36/sn
W. Yellowstone	25/18/sf	21/-24/sn

National Cities

	Today	Wed.
	Hi/Lo/W	Hi/Lo/W
Albuquerque	45/26/pc	48/29/s
Anchorage	0/-7/s	6/-3/pc
Atlanta	42/38/sh	47/40/c
Baltimore	44/25/pc	46/30/c
Bismarck	-8/-16/pc	-10/-15/sn
Boise	36/32/sf	34/4/sf
Boston	40/26/s	39/30/pc
Charleston, SC	49/42/c	48/46/r
Cheyenne	40/25/c	39/26/c
Chicago	34/18/pc	30/28/c
Cincinnati	42/24/pc	43/32/c
Cleveland	38/26/pc	40/31/c
Dallas	54/37/pc	52/35/pc
Denver	47/23/pc	49/-22/sn
Flagstaff	42/7/pc	49/24/pc
Honolulu	79/65/sh	81/67/s
Houston	58/39/pc	56/44/c
Indianapolis	41/23/pc	40/33/c
Kansas City	23/17/c	34/-2/sn
Las Vegas	54/36/pc	59/40/s
Los Angeles	67/45/s	69/48/s
Louisville	48/27/pc	47/38/c
Miami	80/68/t	81/71/pc
Minneapolis	3/-8/c	4/-2/sn
New Orleans	53/47/r	55/53/c
New York	40/28/s	39/32/pc
Omaha	13/4/c	26/-8/sn
Orlando	74/58/r	74/61/pc
Philadelphia	42/27/s	42/32/pc
Phoenix	64/40/pc	65/43/s
Pittsburgh	37/22/pc	44/31/pc
Portland, OR	47/31/r	39/18/c
St. Louis	43/23/pc	39/33/c
Salt Lake City	36/33/pc	43/17/sf
San Diego	64/42/s	64/46/s
San Francisco	56/45/c	57/48/pc
Seattle	38/24/pc	31/18/c
Spokane	18/-1/sn	7/-8/c
Topeka	21/16/c	36/-3/sn
Washington, DC	44/28/pc	45/34/pc

Ski Reports

Area ski resort conditions as of 4 p.m. yesterday

Bridger Bowl	Big Sky
New snow: 0"	New snow: 0"
Base: 31"	Base: 28"-39"
Conditions: Packed Powder	Conditions: Packed Powder

Weather Trivia

Q: What mountain pass shares the same name with one of Santa's reindeer?
A: Donner Pass in Northern California

Sun and Moon

	Today	Wed.
Sunrise	8:01 a.m.	8:02 a.m.
Sunset	4:42 p.m.	4:43 p.m.
Moonrise	4:49 a.m.	6:10 a.m.
Moonset	2:25 p.m.	3:00 p.m.



World Cities

	Today	Wed.		Today	Wed.		Today	Wed.
	Hi/Lo/W	Hi/Lo/W		Hi/Lo/W	Hi/Lo/W		Hi/Lo/W	Hi/Lo/W
Athens	54/48/c	56/40/pc	Havana	85/63/pc	82/62/sh	New Delhi	72/47/pc	70/45/pc
Amsterdam	51/41/r	48/42/sh	Hong Kong	64/57/pc	67/56/pc	Paris	53/47/r	54/49/pc
Baghdad	69/46/pc	70/53/sh	Jerusalem	64/46/s	59/44/c	Phnom Penh	89/73/c	90/73/c
Bangkok	87/69/pc	89/71/pc	Kabul	52/29/s	51/26/s	Rio de Janeiro	75/71/r	76/71/r
Beijing	39/18/pc	33/18/c	London	54/41/r	51/46/pc	Rome	59/43/pc	61/48/pc
Cairo	74/57/pc	67/56/s	Madrid	53/49/c	60/45/c	Singapore	86/76/r	86/76/t
Calgary	-16/-23/pc	-22/-24/c	Mexico City	71/53/pc	70/52/pc	Tokyo	51/40/s	52/40/c
Dublin	47/39/pc	47/41/sh	Moscow	19/3/c	29/26/sn	Toronto	34/24/c	34/28/c
Geneva	52/45/c	51/43/r	Nairobi	78/60/c	78/60/pc	Vienna	32/29/c	34/31/c

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MSU/ from A1

"We also had a bunch of paperwork from NASA saying that it was NASA-owned property and to call them before opening it up," he said.

"The worry was that if airport security did need to call, it could take hours to get approved and they'd miss their flight."

But it all worked out, with security not even taking a look at it — likely because the RadPC looks like any other computer people might carry through security, LaMeres said.

Firefly Aerospace, the lander company, took over responsibility of RadPC once it arrived, with MSU involved with support as needed. Firefly will spend the next year putting together the payloads with their lander, according to LaMeres. It will then have six months to work with SpaceX to get everything on the Falcon 9 rocket.

The launch from Florida is scheduled for mid-2024, LaMeres said.

With the prototype now handed off, the MSU researchers have received additional grants to look at putting artificial intelligence into the RadPC computer system, LaMeres said.

Last year, LaMeres started Resilient Computing to create a finished product that can be sold. It has received interest from investors and has contracts with NASA and the Department of Defense to commercialize the computer system.

The company is also in talks with NASA to provide the computing system for future space missions.

LaMeres said the research team hopes the results of the moon landing will make RadPC a viable choice for companies looking for their next space computer.

"RadPC will be one of only a handful of modern computers that have operated on the moon," he said. "We hope that (it) can help in building the lunar ecosystem that will sustain a human presence on the moon."

Looking back at the last decade of research on the RadPC, LaMeres said it was amazing to be at this point.

"To see RadPC go through all the necessary tests to be in a position for inclusion on a lunar mission just blows my mind," he said. "It doesn't seem like it took that long, but it really has been over a decade of flight testing to get to this point."

The project has seen prototypes tested in high-altitude balloons, three times on the International Space Stations and twice in satellites orbiting Earth. The university estimates over 62 undergraduate students, 17 graduate students and almost a dozen faculty have been involved in the RadPC project.

"When I tell the story of RadPC, I always mention the students that worked on each stage and where they are now. We have students working at companies like SpaceX, Boeing and Raytheon that each worked on some part of RadPC," LaMeres said.

Liz Weber can be reached by phone at 582-2633 and by email at lweber@dailychronicle.com.

Complaint/ from A1

Of that money, \$300,000 was earmarked for incentives for participants to attend treatment, according to the clinic's proposal. It proposed that over a 20-week treatment course, participants could earn as much as \$1,966.50 in either gift cards or vouchers.

In Oxytocin's program, a client has multiple chances each week to earn an incentive by passing urine tests and attending treatment. The dollar amount increases with consecutive successes.

The county chose Oxytocin from among four clinics that applied for the substance use treatment funding. By November, at least one complaint had been filed with state agencies accusing Oxytocin of committing Medicaid fraud by paying its clients — most of whom are Medicaid recipients — that high of a reward to attend treatment.

Oxytocin clinical director Pamela Liccardi declined requests to be interviewed but said in an email that the business had done nothing wrong. "There is a reason the community stands behind us and it is not because we do fraudulent things," she wrote.

Research shows that motivational incentives, called contingency management, can reduce the number of days someone takes illicit stimulants, such as methamphetamines, and can promote abstaining from other substances, such as opiates, by reinforcing healthy behavior with prizes, privileges, or cash.

"We know people are dying from methamphetamine now," said Michael McDonell, a community and behavioral health professor at Washington State University, who has helped states create incentive programs. "Contingency management is the only evidence-based intervention for methamphetamine use

disorder. It's the only intervention that's shown consistently to be impactful."

But clinicians are wary of running afoul of a 1972 federal anti-kickback statute that prohibits offering something of value to a federal beneficiary, such as a Medicaid recipient, to induce them to select a particular provider.

There are "safe harbors" meant to protect certain programs that are unlikely to lead to corruption. But a February legal advisory opinion from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Inspector General said those exceptions don't include incentives aimed at beneficiaries. Federal officials have long been concerned that those types of offers could lead to fraud and abuse.

"Programs that involve giving remuneration to beneficiaries can corrupt medical care decision-making, which could result in overutilization, increased costs, steering to particular providers or suppliers, or inappropriate medical choices," the advisory opinion says.

Whether programs that offer incentives to beneficiaries of federal health programs violate the anti-kickback law is decided on a case-by-case basis, the inspector general's office wrote. Among the factors is the value of the incentives, says the advisory opinion, without setting a specific benchmark.

Rawson and other researchers said most providers consider a total of \$75 per client a year to be safe, based on a 2016 statement from the inspector general's office on inexpensive gifts to beneficiaries.

However, Rawson said research indicates that amount is likely too low to work well as an incentive. Another annual limit that programs encounter is \$600 per client, the threshold for reporting taxable income to the IRS. Exceeding that amount could cause beneficia-

ries to exceed Medicaid income limits, which could lead to loss of coverage.

Last year, Montana officials began a pilot program that expands stimulant use disorder treatments and includes incentives.

Tammera Nauts, with the Montana Primary Care Association, said the state was careful to avoid raising any red flags for the federal government in the rules it set for the state program. For example, participating clinics can't give patients prizes to participate in treatment the federal government covers, such as therapy sessions. State pilot sites' incentives also can't go over \$315 total per beneficiary a year — a cap Montana was allowed through a Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services waiver.

Providers may offer their own rewards program without going through the state, and Nauts said Oxytocin is not one of the pilot sites tethered to Montana's program.

KHN obtained a copy of a complaint filed against Oxytocin. In addition to the allegations of Medicaid fraud, it accuses Oxytocin of having several providers who offer services outside of their area of expertise or without a license. The document KHN received did not include the name of the person who filed the complaint, and state officials declined to provide details.

The complaint was filed with the state's Department of Public Health and Human Services and Department of Justice. Health department spokesperson Jon Ebel said it would be premature to comment on the case before the review is complete. Department of Justice spokesperson Emilee Cantrell said the agency's Medicaid fraud unit was working with the health department but said she couldn't provide details because an active complaint is considered confidential criminal justice information.

Seats/ from A3

Her proposal passed unanimously, although the GOP commissioners noted their opposition to a pair of current Senate districts in the Helena area.

The unanimity may be short-lived. The commission is scheduled to hold another public hearing Wednesday to receive public comments focused on the Senate pairings approved last week. The Senate map is created by pairing up two

adjacent House districts, but which ones to lump together can have major partisan implications.

For example, barring an unusually favorable electoral climate for Republicans, the current map will likely ensure their current supermajority in the Montana Legislature is short-lived.

With some possible technical tweaks still in the works, the tentative House district map adopted by the commission would yield 60 Republican wins and 40

Democratic wins — in a perfectly average election year, based on past results. In the Senate, Republicans would expect to win 31 seats to the Democrats' 18, with one 50-50 toss-up district.

Only eight of the 150 Senate and House districts meet the commission's criteria for "competitive" — one of the discretionary criteria adopted earlier in the map-making process.

Another brief work session is scheduled to follow

the hearing, and commission Chair Maylinn Smith has indicated willingness to revisit the Senate map based on public comments, after last week's initial votes on those districts received almost no public discussion.

The commission will hold the public hearings on Wednesday, Dec. 21, at 9 a.m. in Room 102 of the Montana State Capitol. Those wishing to participate remotely can also sign up to deliver comments via Zoom.