

FLATHEAD BEACON

Massive march planned in Helena on Presidents Day

Montana Meth Dismisses Report, Prepares for Legislature



Kalispell native Tony Brockman is helping organize a large march on the state's Capitol in February for the Montana Meth Project.

By [Myers Reece](#)
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A study released in early December refuting the effectiveness of the Montana Meth Project comes at a crucial time for project coordinators. With the 2009 Legislative Session approaching, MMP will soon be fighting for its piece of the budget pie. But coordinators, including Kalispell native Tony Brockman, are downplaying the report's significance.

The study was conducted by David Erceg-Hurn, a PhD student at Western Australia University. According to his report, MMP has not been effective in preventing meth use and has, in some instances, increased abuse. In a press release from the Society for Prevention Research, Erceg-Hurn said, "Meth use had been declining for at least six years before the ad campaign commenced, which suggests that factors other than the graphic ads cause reductions in meth use."

Peg Shea, executive director of MMP, said Erceg-Hurn's findings are based on selective analysis of statistics. She said the results are "out of context" and "erroneous claims." Coordinators also point out

that Erceg-Hurn wasn't in Montana during his research. He recently declined an invitation from Gov. Brian Schweitzer to come to Montana and discuss his findings with lawmakers, citing financial reasons.

"I think Montanans and decision makers are aware of the positive support (MMP has)," Shea said.

The Montana Meth Project is an aggressive advertising campaign that uses graphic depictions of methamphetamine users to dissuade people – especially youths – from trying the drug, using the motto, "Not even once." It was founded in 2005 by billionaire and part-time Montana resident Tom Siebel.

Since its inception, the program has gained widespread notoriety and inspired similar projects in other states, including Wyoming, Idaho and Illinois. Both the Montana Attorney General's office and the state's Office of Public Instruction have compiled reports showing a substantial decline in methamphetamine in recent years, giving large credit to the MMP.

Brockman, a Kalispell native who has worked for Montana Meth since the 2007 Legislature, said the effects of the report haven't been damaging: "Nothing has changed." Despite the major attention the report has received from media across the world, Brockman is expecting good things at the Legislature.

"The report is from Western Australia," Brockman said. "We can walk out on Main Street and see the differences here."

One reason behind Brockman's enthusiasm is a rally and petition he is helping to organize statewide. On Feb. 16, Presidents Day, Brockman and other MMP organizers are planning to bus more 1,000 high school kids from around the state to Helena.

A rally will be held at Helena High School, where prizes such as iPods are to be given out. Then the large group, escorted by police with a Blackhawk helicopter circling overhead, will march down the street to the state Capitol. There, the plan is to present stacks of the signed petitions – declarations of support for MMP – to Gov. Schweitzer and lawmakers.

The day's events will also feature an appearance from a popular Billings radio personality, drummers, fire trucks, live music and a diverse cross-section of young MMP supporters, including a strong showing of American Indians, Shea said.

"We're trying to pull together talented, energized young folks," Shea said. "I think it's an appropriate way to spend to spend your Presidents Day."

High school kids interested in participating in the "March Against Meth" should sign up by Feb. 2. For more information, visit <http://www.montanameth.org>.

The rally's show of support, organizers hope, will serve as a reminder that the state is still backing the anti-meth program. Also, they figure more than a thousand people standing on the lawn of the Capitol should leave an impression on legislators as they decide how to divvy out the state's coffers.

Since Siebel quit funding the project two years ago, staff and volunteers have been responsible for finding money. Some of it comes from federal grants and private donations, but the state plays an important role. In 2007, through the attorney general's portion of the budget, the Legislature approved \$1 million for MMP. Shea is hoping for \$2 million this time.

Brockman, a history and political science major in his senior year at the University of Montana, said he became involved with the MMP after watching the Eames Yates documentary, "Montana Meth." One of the scenes in the movie shows kids from Kalispell hooked on meth, including a few of Brockman's acquaintances. Brockman graduated from Flathead High School in 2004.

"I didn't think those kinds of things happened here," he said. "It blew my mind."
Two years later, Brockman is more active than ever and he said he doesn't plan on that stopping after

college.

“They’re making such an impact in the state and it’s good to be part of it,” he said. “I’ve never been a part something that’s so cool.”