

Top local stories of 2024

Jill Bond

The Herald-Times

USA TODAY NETWORK

Reporters at The Herald-Times brought you about 2,000 articles in 2024 and our connection to the USA TODAY Network means subscribers get comprehensive coverage of local, state and national stories. The H-T posted thousands of articles, columns, videos and photo galleries this year telling the stories of the Bloomington and Monroe County community and beyond.

Here are some of the news stories and issues we covered that drew the most readers this year.

Eclipse 2024

Bloomington was smack dab in the middle of the path of totality for April's total solar eclipse. From first responder preparations to hotel room prices to traffic and more, H-T reporters covered it all.

Freelance photographer Bobby Goddin took perhaps the most widely published image of the 2024 eclipse while assigned to capture the day at Memorial Stadium when he shot this photo of a plane flying overhead.

Our reporters and photographers were deployed all over Monroe County to give live updates on everything from William Shatner's speech at Memorial Stadium to the eerily quiet downtown to activities at Switchyard Park and Dunn Meadow.

And when it was all over, reporters Boris Ladwig and Laura Lane asked, "Where were the crowds?"

Administration changes at MCCSC

After a tumultuous school year filled with unpopular proposals and a close vote on a second referendum, Monroe County Community School Corp. parted ways with Jeff Hauswald. Hauswald

See STORIES, Page 2A

Stories

Continued from Page 1A

served as superintendent of MCCSC from 2021 to 2024.

During his tenure, Hauswald proposed aligning high school schedules, prompting hundreds to protest on the Monroe County Courthouse lawn. Also under Hauswald, the district paid Jennifer McCormick, a former Democratic candidate for governor, for unclear contracting services, struggled to get children to school on time and bought unreliable electric buses from a company with connections to the district's transportation department.

Hauswald quickly moved on, signing a contract to lead the school district in Boone County, Kentucky.

Booms rattle nerves miles away

Summer foliage dampens the sounds of ammunition destruction at Naval Support Activity Crane, but in late October and early November people in Monroe County reported hearing and feeling earth-shaking booms.

Cheyenne Mobley said she could hear the dishes in her kitchen cabinets rattling and local police had no explanation for the widespread noise.

Turns out, it's just another day at the base, where military munitions are regularly destroyed. Reporter Laura Lane tracked down the source of the disturbances and followed up with a report on what goes on at Crane.

Cyber criminals attack Monroe County government

Hackers infiltrated Monroe County's computer systems, shutting down government activities for a week.

The county reported it had been attacked by the Blacksuit syndicate, a ransomware outfit blamed for a number of such cybercrime incidents.



An airplane passes near the eclipse during the Hoosier Cosmic Celebration at Memorial Stadium on April 8. BOBBY GODDIN/HERALD-TIMES

Rather than pay the \$900,000 demanded by the computer hijackers, Monroe County paid about \$74,000 to a law firm and a cyber risk management firm to recover its data.

Protests at Indiana University

Tensions on campus came to a head in April when Indiana University's leadership called in Indiana State Police to break up a pro-Palestine encampment in Dunn Meadow. Police returned to Dunn Meadow a few days later, arresting more than 50 people in all.

The day before the first arrests, IU administrators held a late night meeting to change the rules governing use of the longstanding free speech zone to outlaw temporary structures such as tents.

The action was followed by no confidence votes and calls for IU President Pamela Whitten and Provost Rahul Shrivastav to resign. IU closed Dunn Meadow for months, citing a need to make "extensive repairs."

Changes in Bloomington-based media

In September, Radio and Television Services executive director Brad Kimmel and CFO Christina Lirot were fired by Indiana University. In a message to staff members, WFIU reported, IU Provost Rahul Shrivastav cited low morale and said RTVS was "not going in the right direction." Jay Kincaid was appointed interim director. Ongoing financial struggles, Amid

staff of the Indiana Daily Student learned in October that IU was eliminating its weekly print edition. Under a Media School plan to consolidate the IDS with other student media into a "multiplatform learning lab," the newspaper will share business services with WTUX student radio and Indiana University Student Television.

And after five years covering Bloomington and Monroe County government, local news blogger Dave Askins announced he was shutting down his site, the B Square Bulletin. Askins attended numerous public meetings, including some boards and commissions, and gave his readers fact-filled reports on local government.

Reach Jill Bond at jbond@heraldt.com.

Comptroller joins GOP movement to defund IU

Brian Rosenzweig

The Herald-Times | USA TODAY NETWORK

Almost a year after Indiana University contemplated severing the Kinsey Institute from the university, lawmakers and state officials in Indianapolis are urging the Legislature to completely defund IU.

Indiana Attorney General Todd Rokita and Comptroller Elise Nieshalla say they're not convinced that IU has stopped spending public money on the institute, as required by law.

Next week, Nieshalla and several Republican lawmakers will attend a press conference in Indianapolis hosted by Purple for Parents United calling on the Legislature to fully defund the state's largest university for allegedly "violating state law."

Purple for Parents United is a nonprofit advocacy group that seeks to "protect children from harmful agendas" in education.

Why would activists want to defund the Kinsey Institute?

The Kinsey Institute is among the U.S.' foremost gender research institutions and holds one of the largest collections of materials related to sex, gender, and reproduction.

See DEFUND, Page 2A

LOCAL STATE

Defund

Continued from Page 1A

But the institute on IU Bloomington's campus has long been controversial for its research on human sexuality. Critics also have repeated untrue claims that the institute experiments on children.

In 2023, state representative Lorissa Sweet authored a bill that passed along Republican Party lines barring the Kinsey Institute from receiving any state dollars.

Does the Kinsey Institute receive money from Indiana taxpayers?

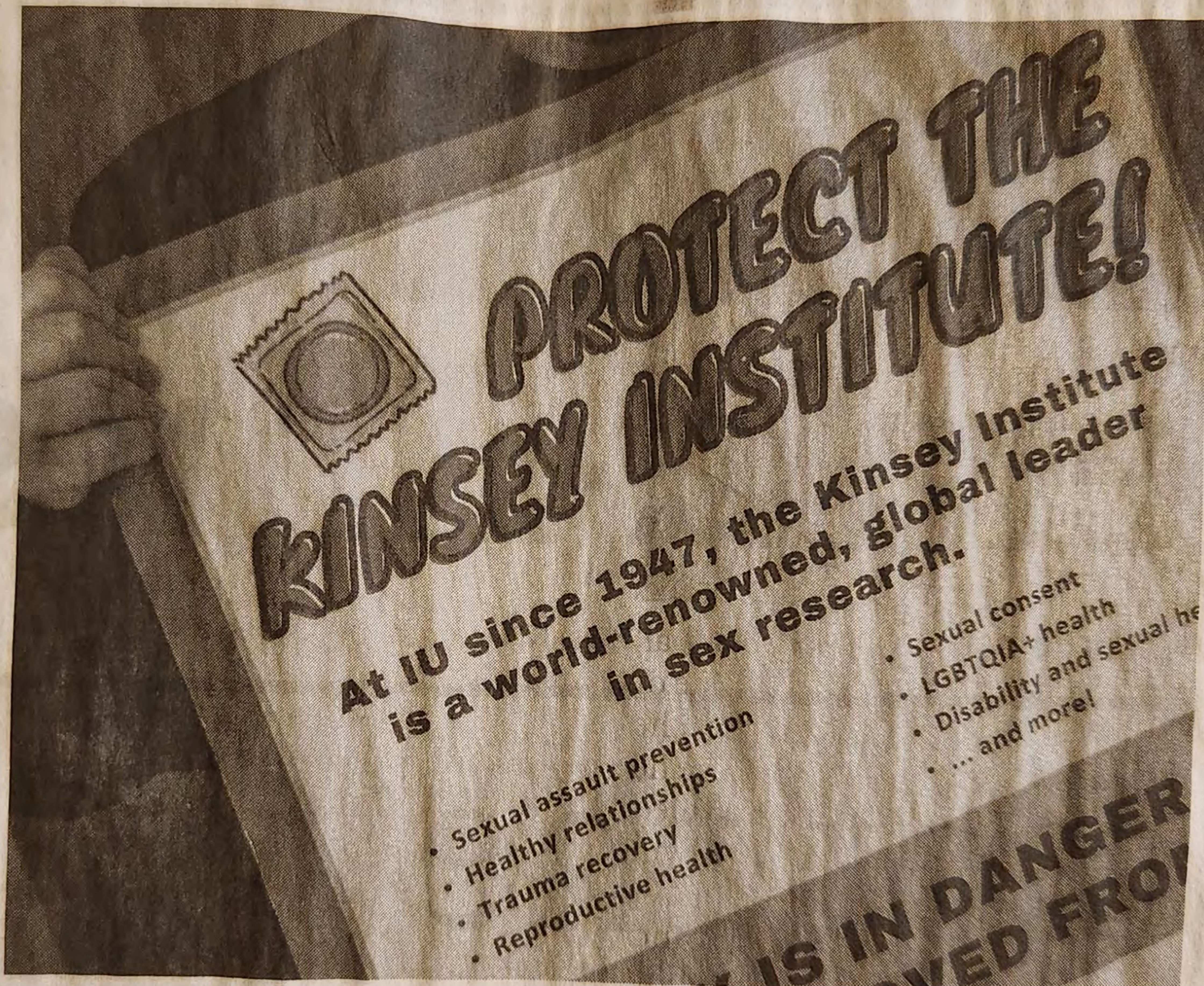
After the state bill passed, IU initially planned to turn the Kinsey Institute into a nonprofit – a plan that received push-back from inside and outside of the institute.

Instead, IU trustees voted last March to use “accounting solutions” to keep the institute at IU while ensuring no state dollars went to it.

Over the past year, Rokita and Nieshalla's offices have demanded detailed evidence that the institute isn't receiving state funds.

IU maintains the Kinsey Institute pays for the building it occupies and has separate financial accounts – but Rokita and Nieshalla say the university has not “worked diligently and transparently to confirm compliance.”

Nieshalla will be joined at next week's press conference by state repre-



Indiana University graduate student Rory Barron holds a board at the Sample Gates trying to gain support for the Kinsey Institute on Thursday, Feb. 15, 2024.

RICH JANZARUK/HERALD-TIMES

sentatives Craig Haggard and Lorissa Sweet and former representative Cindy Noe.

Can Indiana's Legislature completely defund IU?

Possibly, but it's unlikely. IU's state appropriations are set by the General

Assembly, not the comptroller.

While states aren't required by law to support public universities, legislatures in all 50 U.S. states fund their public colleges each year.

IU gets less than 20% of its revenue from state appropriations, but taxpayer dollars still play a vital role in funding IU's operations.



Indiana state comptroller Elise Nieshalla has joined efforts to defund Indiana University for its alleged violation of state law in housing the Kinsey Institute. ROBERT SCHEER/INDYSTAR

Given IU's positive economic impact to the state (the IU system is one of the top 10 employers in Indiana) and a centuries-long history of state funding, it's unlikely that a majority of lawmakers in either the state House or Senate would support efforts to strip the university of its state appropriations.

Reach Brian Rosenzweig at brian@heraldt.com.

IU increases graduate worker pay to \$24K

Second stipend increase since 2022

Brian Rosenzweig

The Herald-Times

USA TODAY NETWORK

The minimum amount that Indiana University graduate student workers make will be \$1,000 more per year starting July 1, the university announced Friday.

Stipends have increased by \$9,000 since 2022

The increase to \$24,000 for a standard 10-month contract marks the second stipend increase for Student Academic Appointees (SAAs) since 2022, when IU raised minimum pay from \$15,000 to \$22,000. Since 2021, graduate worker stipends at IU have increased more than 60%.

"This increase ensures we remain highly competitive with our peers for minimum stipends, which is crucial for recruiting the best students to IU's flagship campus," Provost and Executive Vice President Rahul Shrivastav said in a statement Friday.

In 2022, Provost Rahul Shrivastav tasked Graduate School Dean Dave Daleke to benchmark the university's base graduate worker stipends against Big 10 peers' average stipends every two years, with the goal of staying in the top half of the now 18 schools. SAAs work 20 hours per week in addition to taking classes and often being involved in research and thesis work.

Graduate workers union argues for higher "living wage"

The \$24,000 stipend is still about \$10,000 short of the "living wage" necessary for a single, full-time

See INCREASES, Page 2A



Demonstrators march outside of Ballentine Hall on campus during the graduate student worker strike on

April 17, 2024.

PHOTOS BY
RICH JANZARUK/
HERALD-TIMES

Increase

Continued from Page 1A

worker in Bloomington, according to the MIT Living Wage Calculator. IU's graduate worker union, the Indiana Graduate Workers Coalition (IGWC), has argued since last January that a "living wage" ought to be the benchmark for student stipends as it accounts for cost of living factors.

IU also announced Friday that Carissa Ciampaglia will join the Graduate School as ombudsman for addressing graduate student concerns. Ciampaglia formerly served as ombudsman for Hopics, a Los Angeles homeless shelter.

The press release credited the task force for stipend increases, and did not mention the IGWC, last spring's three-day strike nor a 4-week strike in 2022 as students demanded union recognition and a living wage.

David Garner, IGWC's communication chair, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Reach Brian Rosenzweig at brian@heraldt.com.

Follow him on Twitter/X at [@brianwritesnews](https://twitter.com/brianwritesnews).



Indiana University undergraduate student Mia Holtzman, left, and graduate student Joe Simmons, right, hold a sign outside of Ballentine Hall during the graduate student worker strike.