

secular idaho

Humanists Of ID, ID Atheists, BUUF Sages, Huumanists, BSU SSA, West Valley Freethinkers, ID Society of Reason, Cosmos Coffee Club, ID Falls, Twin Falls HS Freethinkers, CSI Secularists

Free Thought Treasure Valley Coalition of Reason www.TreasureValleyCoR.org

December 2013 www.secularidaho.org

A REASONABLE MOVE FORWARD...

Jeanette Ross

Dustin Williams is organizing us, seriously, purposefully. Taking over from longtime atheist and Coalition of Reason coordinator Susan Harrington, Williams has gathered representatives from the six groups that originally founded CoR, to lead a marathon meeting November 23 in Boise.

Representatives of the original six (since expanded, bringing Idaho's Society of Reason into the fold) have agreed to an informal structure with a starter set of procedures. Our new objectives, suggested by Dustin and other group leaders, include regularly scheduled meetings that support a range of actions to be described in this newsletter. They provide a path to greater visibility and energy for today's secular groups and a way to connect to those who can't imagine being what's possible. The plan: our parent organization, the West Valley Coalition of Reason, will hold planning meetings at least once every 3 months, with our January meeting dedicated to jointly organizing shared events for the 2014 year. Each member group (now Humanists of Idaho, Idaho Atheists, BSU Secular Student Alliance, West Valley Freethinkers, Cosmos Coffee Club, Idaho Society of Reason, BUUF Huumanists) will vote; all those interested may attend, have a voice, and decide if they wish to formally join.

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Secular Idaho is a voice for Treasure Valley Coalition of Reason and other independent thinkers. Susan Harrington coordinates TV CoR. Electronic copies available without charge; contact Paul, roligpd@spro.net

Why a Coalition of Reason? *Bill O'Reilly doesn't get it*

Jeanette Ross

Four years ago United Coalition of Reason, was formed to help freethinkers find each other and collaborate. Fred Edwards, the national director, acts as a traveling organizer and spokesman (he stuck to his message despite hectoring from Bill O'Reilly of Fox News.)

Local secularists (by whatever self-naming) become eligible for substantial support from UCOR when they reach a certain mass. Six or more community groups, formally or informally self-organized, can make a request for UCOR affiliation. The 'Treasure Valley,' including groups in Ada and Canyon counties, invited Edwards for an initial visit in late 2011.

Fred Edwards met with a collection of representatives and activists from state nonprofits Atheists of Idaho and Humanists of Idaho, along with BSU students in the recently-organized Secular Students Alliance. Edwards provided a media training workshop and insight into the opportunities available through UCOR. Our application was accepted, with IA president Susan Harrington as first coordinator.

The first benefit to joining UCOR was visual, a pair of billboards with a gently inviting message, essentially announcing that nontheists are here and welcoming in our region. This earned bemused but not hostile publicity. Next, UCOR paid for a large banner that displays the names of member groups at our booth, for friendly events.



Humanists of Idaho, a chapter of American Humanist Association & Council for Secular Humanism, is a nonprofit corporation promoting ethical, democratic, and naturalistic Humanism through public awareness, education and community involvement. We meet 4th Mondays, Jan-Nov, back at upper room of the Flicks, Boise. Open discussion and eat at 6:30pm; business 7pm; program 7:30pm pm, **Monday January 20, 2014**

President's Message

For our November meeting, we tried a new venue called "Drink," located inside Lake Harbor, just off State. Their conference room is an enclosed floating dock on the lake, an interesting sensation; food was good and reasonably priced. The view would be spectacular in late spring or early fall, benefiting from daylight savings time. In November it was too dark to appreciate the view, and despite the heaters, too cold to enjoy the event. It might be worth a second try at another time of year.

End of year charitable efforts are in full swing. HOI made a substantial donation to Interfaith Sanctuary Homeless Shelter, to help provide for the seasonal increase in the need for homeless housing. Sanctuary is also in need of volunteers for the season, for any of you who have some spare time. You can reach Sanctuary by phone at 208-343-2630, or e-mail at info@interfaithsanctuary.org. We also sent our support to Planned Parenthood, and bought a goat for a third world family through Heifer International.

We will be collecting donations for our WCA adopt-a-family until @ December 8, when gifts and gift cards will be delivered to WCA. We thank all who donated cash or gifts. A little bit is a big help to a family in need, especially to make their holidays a little brighter. Our last 2013 charitable effort will be in conjunction with the annual Winter Solstice Party. We encourage guests to bring food donations (unopened, unexpired, canned or boxes) to the party, for delivery to the Idaho Food Bank. This is a critical time of year for the food bank, whose resources become stretched in the winter months.

Speaking of the Winter Solstice Party, we hope for a record turnout. The various member groups of TV CoR have all seen growth this year, enthusiasm is on the rise, and we have seen a lot of new faces lately. This year, the party will actually be on the Solstice, Saturday, December 21st, from 5PM until whenever. The "Kid Cave" will be set up with toys, games, and VCR. Details for the party can be found on any of the TV CoR groups meetup (meetup.com) pages. Hope to see you all there.

D G Van Curen
President, Humanists of Idaho

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A New Look for 2014

Jeanette Ross

Several of our member groups have new leadership, which adds fresh perspective and possibilities. Dustin Williams moves into the key position of leading Treasure Valley Coalition of Reason, as well as maintaining contact with the national United CoR. Sander Karas has moved in as coordinator and facilitator of Cosmos Coffee Club, an opportunity for conversation with a venue within walking distance from the BSU campus. Speaking of the campus, a full slate of officers at their Secular Student Association, led by Jake Wolford, is looking toward a Darwin Day program, probably the weekend of February 15-17 2014 (leaving time for those interested to drive north for the Palouse CoR conference February 8-10.) A listing of their new officers is on the BSU SSA page.

In the West side of the valley, Art Rigsby and David B, new leaders of the Society of Reason, were unanimously invited to join TV CoR. They are looking for appropriate venues so they can move their conversation-rich group back to Boise.

West Valley Freethinkers have a firecracker of a female who goes by the appropriate moniker of Charlie Nitro. Char is interested in writing for this newsletter; the editor intends to persist in making that happen.

Steady momentum and a sense of history will be maintained by D.G. Van Curen, as president of Humanists of Idaho. Gary Mitchell continues as web master while now leading Idaho Atheists. Paul Rolig still prints, mails the news.

Meetups and other informal groups

West Valley Freethinkers, Nampa Contact Charlie B deepbluesigh@gmail.com wvfreethinkers@gmail.com

C of Southern Idaho Secular group see Facebook "Secular Student Alliance at CSI". For Freethinkers Twin Falls Contact is Erica, erical@eaglemail.csi.edu

COSMOS COFFEE CLUB conversation varies. Meet 6:30pm 1st & 3rd Mondays at Papa Joe's (handicap accessible). <http://www.meetup.com/CosmosCoffeeClub>

Humanists in Idaho Falls meet at the Unitarian Universalist Church. Ask Doug at gerstner_doug@yahoo.com

Idaho Society of Reason is led by Art and Dave. They have just officially joined the Treasure Valley Coalition of Reason. Their webpage has links to several other groups, also. <http://meetup.com/nontheist/events>

Local Objectivists meet last Wednesday 6pm each month at varying restaurants, for food and conversation. Interested? email Tim Scharff at tim@scharffdesignworks.net

Meet An Atheist or several, socialize 2nd Tuesdays, typically at The Reef. Their contact info is on next page.

Secular Families and Secular Homeschooling provide community for secular families. Contact Candace Norvell, at secularmama@yahoo.com.

"All Politics Is Local" By Tip O'Neill

Review by Wally Keltner

Tip O'Neill's 51 year career in Massachusetts and the US House of Representatives) is an easy read – I finished it in one sitting. It is a collection of O'Neill's experiences, observations and philosophy from his life of public service. I found it enlightening, uplifting, funny, practical, poignant, and maddening.

O'Neill gives us a peek into a time, only a few decades ago, when our government functioned because of the caliber of candidates who were elected, and not in spite of them. Dedicated statesmen focused upon governing through communication and compromise. Politics was indeed local and interface among politicians and the public was at the forefront. Big corporations and lobbies had only begun to negate the strength of each citizen's vote.

This book shines a positive light on government – within and between both parties, in all branches, and at all levels. It is a reminder of what our democracy was and can become again. But alas, it also is a reflection of today's morass in the halls of government. Tip reminds the reader, "The art of politics is compromise." In another place he tells us, "Democracy can't work if it's every person for himself or herself." One cannot avoid noticing these two concepts are contrasts to our current situation. Today, one party in particular has declared compromise so odious that our government should cease functioning before they yield a political millimeter. And far too many of today's politicians place themselves above their own electorate, and reward themselves with perks and benefits while doing little to justify their offices and titles.

The rewards for O'Neill were mostly non-monetary, and he believed in the honor of being elected, and the obligations of service. His words on this topic give the reader appreciation for those who truly serve, regardless of party or philosophy. The reader sees what has changed within government. One illustration is his opposition to term limits. In his day, government needed its sage corps of veterans – "We need quality people," he writes. Today, we the people lust for the ouster of the more arrogant, obstructionist, and selfish among our elected congresspersons. For some locals, term limits seem to be the only way to mitigate incumbency of the incompetent and unmotivated.

One story illustrates our current plight as related in a tale about Sam Rayburn, a staunch Texas Democrat and Speaker of the House, upon the election of Dwight Eisenhower, a Republican, to the presidency. The retired general and hero of World War II was totally inexperienced with respect to the federal government. Rayburn tells his fellow House Democrats that the incoming president is vulnerable and says, "Remember that we are Americans first, and Democrats second. Any jackass can kick over the barn, but it takes a carpenter to build one."

Contrast this with today's practice among our legislators. Strategist Frank Luntz, at a 2009 meeting with a dozen prominent Republicans from both legislative houses, declared a policy of obstructionism with respect to President Obama's economic policies. Since that time our congress has ossified into non-productive, two party gridlock on virtually all issues, including even the approval of presidential appointments. Tip O'Neill would certainly be despondent if he were to observe our government today.

We must look beyond our times to a better, brighter future. Our loin-girding for tomorrow's challenges must include Tip O'Neill's positivity, wisdom, and openness. This approach can provide a basis for hope in the future, and an incentive to be a better citizen. And the expense will be a mere two or three hours of easy, enjoyable reading



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Meet an Atheist night: <https://www.facebook.com/events/514997328561655/>

Our Solstice potluck: December 21 starting 5pm at 1506 Rand street, Boise. food, drink, conversation!

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Donate through Idaho Atheist website

(mailbag@idahoatheists.org), or contact us to donate via PayPal. Donations are tax deductible.

“Deep Economy” By Bill McKibben Wally Keltner

The subtitle of Bill McKibben’s book is “The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future”. McKibben is a veteran of several books, scholar in residence at Middlebury College in Vermont. These attributes attracted your intrepid reviewer to supplement Alan Weisman’s book, “Countdown, “on population reduction and climate change, with a projection of the economies of the future. At the very least, it was to generate some new thoughts in this aging but curious noggin.

The author met only a small fraction of this reader’s objectives. “Deep Economy” is a narrowly focused excursion into the world of community based economies. McKibben incorporates his experiences living in Vermont, his global travels and input from a network of like-minded activists. He presents and explores the advantages of “small”, and offers a grand tour of small farms, businesses, governments, currencies, educational systems, and other small. He demonstrates how a “small” philosophy works in the hamlets and towns of Vermont, and worldwide on every continent and within every climate. Further, McKibben schools the reader in the benefits of low tech, social enterprises, the strengths of “small” living, and community effort.

McKibben has no role for big entities in his communal future. He does contrast his ideal world with the evils of “big” He cites the mega-failures of Chinese and Russian Communism, and our current predicament resulting from unbridled and often malpractice of capitalism and democracy. The attributes of big government are ignored. No mention is made of publicly funded and managed entities such as entitlement programs, the military, and management and regulation of potentially harmful activities.

Bill McKibben’s world was also devoid of big private sector. From whence will come tomorrow’s manufacturing essential to modern living – trains, planes and automobiles; computer chips, laptops and cell phones; nails, insulation, wires and circuit breakers; cement, steel and glass? Without infrastructure of today’s industry sectors, all of McKibben’s “small” simply yields a society from three centuries ago. Likewise, “big” institutions such as universities, research laboratories, medical facilities, and the news and information media are ignored, yet essential to much we take for granted today.

Among other missing significant issues in “Deep Economy” are today’s existential issues – pollution, climate change, unsustainable systems of agriculture and energy, resource scarcity and waste, rising sea levels, loss of habitat, and so many others. Well defined and prominent at the time of publication, 2007, they are seldom mentioned And McKibben earns a mammoth tsk-tsk for ignoring over-population. “Deep Economy” is dated at the ripe old age of six. Since 2007, our rapidly evolving world has experienced the bursting of an enormous credit bubble; a global recession; a new, more liberal US government; a winding down of our two Near Eastern wars; a change in Chinese population policy; several years of “Arab Spring”; the Japanese tsunami; and a large growth in identified petroleum reserves, just to note a few prominent developments.

A final distraction in McKibben’s book is its tone, especially within the last 50 pages. The text often degenerates to the level of a 1970s hippie gripe about the evils of capitalism, the American government, our value system, and other elements of today’s society. Any reader needing a granola crunching, back-to-nature rant can borrow past issues of *The Mother Earth News* for more variety in the text and some nice pictures, too.

Your curious reviewer will continue to search for a competent, in-depth analysis and projection of an economy for our future. Humanity must successfully transition through population reduction, mitigation of global warming, and a challenging period of impacts from several centuries of planet abuse before we can have a sustainable, stable home. We’ll need one or more economies to get us to our destination. What must we do and what will we experience economically?

Boise State

SECULAR STUDENT ALLIANCE

Boise

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advisor is Robin W Allen, assoc. Prof.
Social Work

We are a home for secular students. We educate ourselves, encourage critical thought, practice open, rational, scientific examinations of the universe and our place in it. We believe ethics and morality can be based on humanistic and rational values. We present a positive view of atheism, agnosticism, rationalism, secularism, humanism, skepticism and non-religious worldviews. We offer debates, educational workshops, speakers, movies, a book club, open discussion, and social gatherings.

BSU SSA Featured in November Arbiter

Jeanette Ross

New Secular Student President Jake Wolford captured the attention of his school paper when his group held a survey of campus attitudes. The informal survey of students on the Quad tested a common preconception that Idaho is a religious state. Campus responses did not conform to that expectation. Of those asked if religion could be harmful, more than half of those responding to the interview responded affirmatively.

The survey was meant as an opportunity to increase awareness of a secular haven on campus. Co-vice president Anthony Loper summarized the purpose of BSU SSA as “a safe place” where religion and its role in politics and culture could be discussed. The other co-vice president of SSA, Daniel Calderone, is quoted by reporter Hali Goodrich as reminding readers that “There are different points of view out there and it is important for people to know that.”

The interview became an opportunity to share the purpose of SSA, to support human rights and scientific reasoning. Jake Wolford spoke of how Europe’s experiences led to drawing a line between church and state. Secularization is not in opposition to religion, but is meant to keep faith and doctrine out of governmental law and policy.

Wolford’s perspective is hopeful, looking toward a time when scientifically derived knowledge is reflected in law and governance.

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Puritans, We Hardly Know Ye

Jeanette Ross

If you bought the story of hyper-Christian Puritan colonists, consider a study published in The American Historical Review, journal of the American Historical Association, in February 1977.

Our preconceptions are based on the writings of a few hell-fire stoking community leaders. We have misread the evidence in front of us. We should have looked more closely at the belief in the power of witches, not just in Salem and Boston. They remind us of common beliefs in (and practice of) calling down spirits for good or ill, still found in pagan and folk practices today. New age mysticism is probably old age belief that was still mixed in with medicine, botany and religion carried here from England and northern Europe.

Scholar Jon Butler considers a variety of documents exploring the lives of Puritan colonists from 1600 to 1760 and finds an amazing variety of beliefs and practices. New England church records show that about a third of all adults were members and a far lower percentage (maybe 15%) in middle and southern colonies. Church attendance was low, Biblical knowledge was rarer (consider low literacy rates). Text-quoting Biblical literalism is a modern phenomenon, remember.

Quaker George Fox used his book of miracles to perform faith cures. ‘Other Wise men’ with their books of spells were called to homes to find lost objects, cast horoscopes; others advertised their knowledge of phrenology, palm reading, the Jewish cabala. Medical doctors were expected to understand the influence of stars and planets; the writings of one Dr. John Dee are still in print (I have a copy, cagily titled Angel Magic.) The perplexing utterances of an Egyptian priest, Hermes Trismegistus, were consulted (and still are.) Even Isaac Newton conducted experiments in alchemy. We inherited the lot.



SAGES ON SATURN

TOM VON ALTEN

The jewel of our beautiful solar system has had an alien spacecraft eyeing it close-up for almost 10 years now. Cassini/Huygens left Earth in 1997, took two turns by Venus and a slingshot around Jupiter, arrived at Saturn in June, 2004.

Join the BUUF Sages for an out-of-this-world travelogue at our one meeting this month, Thursday, December 12th, 9:30am at the Kopper Kitchen, 2661 Airport Way. All are welcome! Contact Tom von Alten (378-1217 or tva@fortboise.org) for more information.

Huumanists consider “the Good Life” Jeanette Ross

Our pictures of a good life may be a reflection of our age and circumstances. Excerpts: It is solving problems to an experienced engineer, being creative, designing and repairing jewelry (and by extension, so much more!) to someone else. It is having the patience and capacity to listen and fully understand. It is, most simply, having grandchildren. It is what we have rather than something distantly desired: good food readily available, good music at hand, appreciation for beauty that makes the skies overhead a daily pleasure. It is the colt who steps in to greet one of us mucking out the barn; it is leading school children through the Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial. It surely is the company of like-minded friends and, through all life's challenges, it is letting go of what we can't change.

We meet again Sunday December 15 for holiday reflections, in the BUUF library, 11:15am.

Huumanists meet 3rd Sundays, 11:15am, at Boise Unitarian Universalist fellowship library. Next: December 15 11:15 BUUF library. Sages meet once, December 12.

When Unitarian Missionaries Came to Boise

Jeanette Ross

We Unitarians are a blend of influences; in Boise we are children of the missionary spirit blended with the 19th century social reform movements.

Those who have read the first Humanist Manifesto may have noticed its militantly progressive tone and then remarked that it was written by a collection of Unitarian ministers from the western United States. They were part of the call for reforms that swept through the previous century also. One Massachusetts Unitarian, Horace Mann, initiated what's become the public school support by state and local governments. The youngest of 23 children came over from England to start the missionary movement that became the Methodist church, which encouraged each community church to run its own affairs.

We added a concern for civil rights that was first manifest in calls for abolition of slavery, then extended this to incorporate protections of the rights of adult females. With rigorous scholarship and admiration for the contributions of science we shifted our first college, now Harvard University, in a secular direction. The benefits of a secular Constitution, based in human rights rather than divine rights, made us all humanists in practice if not doctrine.

In 1899 the American Unitarian Association sent the first of several missionary missionaries to Boise to organize and serve Unitarians here. Membership was 100 a hundred years ago; their sermons and lectures were reported in the Idaho Daily Statesman.

Then a scandal, a war, a recession, another war. The UUA initiated another mission-building project, funding Fellowships wherever ten persons would declare themselves to be Unitarians. Boise found its ten brave individuals in 1955, when social and religious progressives were suspect. And Boise was persecuting and prosecuting its adult gays. Our welcoming, independent spirit remains in our name.

December 2013

Humanist Perspective 6:30pm Tues, 8:30am Thurs, 12:30 Fridays

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6 H Perspective	7
8	9	10 H Perspective Meet Atheist	11	12 H Perspective BUUF Sages	13 H Perspective	14
15 BUUF Huumanists	16	17 H Perspective	18	19 H Perspective	20 H Perspective	21 Solstice Pot-luck
22	23 HOI meeting	24 H Perspective	25 Holiday	26 H Perspective	27 H Perspective	28
29	30	31 prepare for a new year				

“Countdown – Our Last, Best hope for a Future on Earth?” By Alan Weisman

There are a number of informative books recently published that deal with the existential threats we face. Some take a broad view as typified by Al Gore’s “The Future” or Fred Gueterl’s “The Fate of the Species”, and they address a wide variety of our challenges. Others, such as Bryan Fagan’s “The Attacking Ocean” focus upon a single problem among those that portend future trials. A common deficiency among all of these books is the authors’ failure to address the root cause of virtually all of the risks for apocalypse – human overpopulation. While some of the books mention the issue, others ignore it completely. This fear of touching the “third rail” is significant. “Root cause”, by definition, is that factor which can be eliminated, and when eliminated, will prevent recurrence of the problem at hand. Human over population can be eliminated, and if eliminated, will solve, or allow to be solved, all of the attendant threats to Homo sapiens and its fellow biota.

Alan Weisman has given us “Countdown” as his description of the overpopulation issue and he deftly relates it to systemic existential threats such as climate change, agricultural breakdown, loss of ground water, disease, energy supply, famine, genocidal violence, and extinction, to name a few. Our intrepid author is well suited to his task. He is an internationally recognized author within the field of science with a number of books to his credit and also honored by awards and on best seller lists. This book is so well written and includes enough detail to place it at the head of all books of its genre. .

Weisman visited two dozen or more nations worldwide, and

Weisman visited two dozen or more nations worldwide, and interviewed political leaders, scientists, activists, and common citizens. He used this information to give “Countdown” its gripping, practical, rational quality. His extensive research into mountainous amounts of printed material – books, technical reports, speeches, etc. –all well-chosen and captured in a comprehensive bibliography – underpin “Countdown” with rock-solid credibility.

The book summarizes the unique set of crises occurring within each sampled country and region. Weisman objectively describes and links them to their root cause – overpopulation – and secondary causes where applicable. Some examples are Gordian knots set in the concrete of intractable religious or cultural practices. Others appear resolvable by eliminating the root cause, i.e. applying liberal doses of education of the population through the high school level or funding family planning services with affordable contraception. Man can concurrently mitigate the symptoms such as famine, genocide, or loss of ground water .

Weisman has success stories. Birthrates are at or below the sustainable level of 2.1 children per First World family or 2.5 for some Third World countries. Some countries attain this through a high quality of life, including economic prosperity, high levels of education, and near full employment. Others induce low birthrates because of the opposite – lower, less secure quality of life with a faltering economy and broad unemployment. China is the sole example of a draconian government policy to drive a low birthrate. A void in the book: population reduction. How does the earth attain a low-impact economic system as its human population shrinks? Today’s economies are based upon perpetual economic growth fueled by unsustainable practices and an exploding population. The author has no roadmap to offer us.

Editor's Note: At our November CoR meeting we considered holding a group planning workshop to help us shape a dynamic future for ourselves. **Appreciative Inquiry** is one that seems well suited to us. It begins with shared values and what already works, then puts that to work. It can be summarized as, "We could do _____ if we ___ and then _____. An important part of the field of Organizational Development, it is especially effective in programs that already work reasonably well.

Workshops can shift conversation from what each individual values to "How do we serve those who need us— our community and each other? What energizes us to do this?" When opportunity is anticipated it is a good time to shift from problem solving (and dwelling on past roadblocks) to identifying individual and group strengths, successes and potential. It is especially suited to us; it is egalitarian, honoring all contributions and encouraging a new way of understanding responsibilities toward a shared end. It benefits from a metaphor that encourages future inquiry, rewards for discovery and re-invention within the organization.

Personal rewards for participants: an interview approach encourages individuals to practice asking good questions of each other. As they listen and record the experiences of those with very different experiences and skills we get a bigger picture of who we are and start to imagine the rewards and challenges that are part of a dynamic whole.

Many in our community still feel isolated, unaware of the support available to them. It's time to look out, speak out, do more.

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