

secular idaho

Free Thought Treasure Valley Coalition of Reason www.tvcor.com.

April 2016 www.tvcor.org

Idaho 2016 Legislature summary Paul Rolig

2016 was not a great year for separation of church and state in Idaho, but it could have been worse.

As reported last month, the Idaho Department of Education science standards have been kicked back to that department to update, get public input, and bring back to the Legislature next year. There was a motion before the House Education Committee to water down Idaho science standards [Docket Number 08-0203-1509, Rules Governing Thoroughness]. In particular, the motion sought to elevate anti-scientific and fundamentalist religious doctrines to the same level as observable, verifiable fact-based science on topics such as: Global warming and human activity, Age of the earth, Origin of the solar system, Big Bang theory, and Evolution of life. Next year, the Department of Education will need to come before this committee and either defend the science standards, or cave in to the fundamentalists. **Public input in defense of science continues to be warranted.**

Sen. Sheryl Nuxoll's bill to "reassure" Idaho public school teachers that they can use the Bible as a reference work in various subjects, originally [S1321](#), was amended to become [S1342aa](#). This passed the House and the Senate by about 4:1 Yea:Nay votes and was delivered to Gov. Otter Mar. 24. The good news is that the 1963 law it replaces directed the Department of Education to select Bible verses to be read aloud in public schools each day. The bad news is that the old law is now totally ignored, but the new one likely will not be. Most secularists really do not object to allowing various religious texts as reference for history, etc. for how else can one expose their contradictions and bloodthirstiness? But this legislation mentions only "religious texts, including the Bible," without explicitly naming others, such as the Quran or The Book of Mormon. Clearly this establishes the Bible as having a special place ahead of others. Gov. Otter's decision date: no later than April 6.

Humanists Of ID, ID Atheists, BUUF Sages, BUUF Humanists, BSU SSA, West Valley Freethinkers, ID Society of Reason, Cosmos Coffee Club, HumanKind, south central Idaho groups

My worst fear, [HJR 1](#), proposing a constitutional amendment to allow taxpayer funding of religious school scholarships, went nowhere. It never even got a hearing, although it did get a public forum one evening, with a panel of major players in education discussing the pros and cons. Whew.

Rep. Eric Redman introduced [House Bill 568](#) "to prohibit the application of foreign laws in Idaho courts in certain instances." Not mentioned in the bill, but made clear by Rep. Redman in his pitch to the committee hearing, was his concern that Muslim Sharia law was coming to Idaho. The House State Affairs Committee actually approved this bill, apparently forgetting that separation of church and state would be sufficient to invalidate any such Sharia Laws in Idaho. The serious issue was that this might have complicated Idaho companies' business dealings with foreign entities, and it might have been problematic for those seeking custody, or seeking to retain custody, of children in or from other countries. Fortunately, the House never brought this bill up for a vote.

A bill drafted to repeal Idaho's Faith-Healing Exemption also did not get a hearing. Idaho children will continue to die from easily treatable medical conditions, and their parents will not be held liable for neglect as long as they claim their religion made them do it. Very sad. The good news here, though, is that the issue got quite a bit of press in the Treasure Valley papers and TV news, so awareness of this horror is increasing. We need to keep pressing this issue.

"Add the Words," [S1196](#), to add "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" to the Idaho Civil Rights Act, also did not get a hearing. Equal rights for Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender people run contrary to the fundamentalist religious views held by most of our legislators. Also not getting hearings were [HJR 2](#), proposing a constitutional amendment to guarantee legal equality for men and women, and [HJR 3](#), proposing to repeal Idaho's constitutional requirement that marriage be between one man and one woman. This is no longer operative because of the U.S. Supreme Court's recent ruling, but it remains in Idaho's constitution, and conservative legislators insist that they must do their constitutional duty and continue to enforce it no matter what.

[HB 481](#), the so-called "Right to Try" act, passed both houses nearly unanimously (just one vote against in each house) and was signed by the Governor. This allows consenting terminally ill patients to try treatments that may not have yet achieved normal regulatory approval. *Continued page 2*

West Valley Freethinkers, Nampa Contact Charlie B deep-bluesigh@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 v begins at 6:30pm 1st & 3rd Mondays at Papa Joe's. Contact Sander Karas at <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 part of Treasure Valley Coalition of Reason. <http://meetup.com/nontheist/events>

Local Objectivists meet monthly, last Wed 6pm at varying restaurants. Ask Tim Scharff at scharffdesignworks@icloud.com

Meet An Atheist or several, socialize 2nd Tuesdays, typically at The Reef. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/IdahoAtheist/>

Human KIND project <http://www.human-kind-project.com/>, Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/humankindproject2014>

"The Oldest Living Things in the World"

By Rachael Sussman review by Wally Keltner

Rachael Sussman is an award winning photographer who began a multi-media project early this century to photograph continuously living organisms older than 2,000 years. Her education, formal credentials, her personality and temperament all facilitate this endeavor. She is an atheist with strong sensitivity for the welfare of the environment and the inestimable value of her subject matter. She further developed her skills, learning to scuba dive, operate a new type of camera. She explored hostile and remote places, enduring physical stress and injury. Sussman first attracted attention to her project with a 2010 quarter hour talk with some of her project photos on the ted.com web site. In 2014, she published this book.

"The Oldest Living Things in the World" is filled with stunning photographs of 32 organisms ranging in size from tiny micro-organisms to enormous trees ranging in age from 2,000 years to over 100,000 years. The subjects include both plants and animals, terrestrial and aquatic, from seven different continents. Many of the subjects are endangered and a few could go extinct soon without protection. The longest lived examples are plants. The very oldest endure due to their structure of which the Pando quaking aspen of Utah is a prime example. The organism consists of a root system covering over 100 acres with 47,000 "trees" above ground. Botanists have extensively studied this aspen stand and admit that their estimate of its age could be far too low. The few animal examples in the book are simple organisms such as the marine brain coral and the oldest of the animals is about 2,000 years.

The few pages of text accompanying Sussman's photos are significant in the messages they contain. The reader learns of the impacts of the encroachment by man into the habitats of Sussman's subjects. Then there are the effects of pollution and climate change on the very precious organisms captured by her cameras. Sussman and her co-writers emphasize the value of her subjects and exhort readers to appreciate and protect these living rarities and not let them fade into extinction. The book's words provide an ominous bellwether and a plea to preserve more of nature for our generation and its progeny. Anyone giving Rachael Sussman's book a couple of hours will be recruited or reenergized as an amateur environmentalist and a promoter of earth first.

... continued from page 1 **Legislative wrap-up**
from Paul Rolig

I focused on those issues most closely related to the separation of church and state. Many other subjects of interest to humanists were addressed by various bills this session: some results were good, and some were bad. Secularists and humanists may even disagree on some of the issues, and whether or not the legislation proposed was the best way to address the issue. The quick list that comes to mind is: Two out of three anti-abortion bills passed, always a favorite of religious fundamentalists. Nothing whatever was accomplished to help provide medical insurance or other help for people who fall into the "Medicaid Gap;" these folks make too little money to qualify for Medicaid, but too much to qualify for Obamacare subsidies.

Two new laws to help rape victims passed – one repealing the requirement that the victim must resist forcefully, even when threatened with deadly force, and one requiring that rape kits actually be processed. (Bingham County's Sheriff gained internet fame by declaring that most rape reports were actually after consensual sex. He later apologized, but what message was sent to rape victims about the usefulness of reporting to the police?)

Idahoans can now carry concealed handguns in incorporated cities (as well as unincorporated areas) with no license, and no training required. Idaho theaters like the Flicks and the Village Cinema may now serve alcohol **AND** show (non-pornographic) movies with nudity in them.



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 3rd Mondays, Jan-Nov, in upper room of the Flicks, Boise. Open discussion and dining at 6:30pm; business 7pm; program 7:30pm We next meet April 18. *Find more at our meetup page, address below.*

President's Message

The featured speakers at HOI's March meeting were a Public defender from Canyon County and a former inmate, both talking about the need for criminal justice reform in Idaho. The former inmate detailed his experience in being tagged with multiple charges, many of crimes he didn't commit, and then being pressured to accept a plea deal on at least some of the charges, to get a break. The public defender talked about how common this practice – piling on charges – is in Idaho, resulting in prison overcrowding, as minor offenders are often pushed into the prison system. After prison, the probation/parole system is designed to often hinder any sense of rehabilitation and reintegration, resulting in repeat incarcerations, which are too often for mere technical violations. Also after prison, former inmates become burdened with insurmountable debt, as they must pay for the supervision, and for any court required, tests, classes, or other legal requirements. Unnecessary felony charges attached to minor, non-violent offenses further diminish a former inmates chances of settling into a productive life. Public defenders do what they can to advocate, but unfortunately they are under-funded and understaffed – another common problem in Idaho. As a result, those who cannot afford a private attorney are far more likely to end up with a felony conviction and a prison sentence for a minor, nonviolent crime. Idaho needs to start looking at ways to help minor offenders stay out of prison, rather than creating rules and practices that fill jails and prisons to capacity.

Partly to blame is the concept of for-profit prisons, like what Idaho had until just recently, because a for-profit system needs inmates as their means of generating profit. Each inmate is money in the bank. Minor offenders and taxpayers both pay dearly for this type of Justice system. Instead, Idaho should pursue a model that reduces prison population, lowers the tax burden, and doesn't encourage a hopeless cycle of re-incarceration.

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Secular Idaho News is published monthly by HOI. Individual yearly membership (\$25) and family memberships (\$45) include SI News, paper or e copies. Contact Paul Rolig roligpd@spro.net Newsletter subscriptions \$15/year by post. humanistsofidoaho.org PO Box 44913 Boise ID 83711-0913. No charge for electronic copies; contact roligpd@spro.net

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Family Advocates, a group that works to strengthen families and keep kids safe, will be our April featured program - April 18th, 7:30 PM at the Flicks Loft Conference room. Should be interesting. Hope to see you all there.

HOI officer elections are coming up. Nominations were opened at the March meeting and will remain open until April 18th. The election process will run until May 16th, at which time ballots will be counted and the election certified. The results of the election will be posted soon after HOI's May meeting. Anyone interested in taking part in shaping HOI's future should contact Co-Vice President Aria at drf.oleander@hotmail.com.

Time is fast approaching to dust off the HOI booth and get ready for outdoor events. First up is the National Day of Reason on Thursday, May 5th. The tentative plans are to again place the booth in the park across the street from the Capitol steps. Details will be posted on HOI's meetup and facebook pages sometime in April.

D G Van Curen President, Humanists of Idaho



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Insider's Perspective on Criminal Justice

Robin Crisler

Criminal Justice is like a lot of things in life. It's just not a very interesting topic until you, or someone you love is directly affected by it! Increasingly, this is a larger and larger portion of the population. I had been involved in the courts as a juvenile, for curfews and property crimes, i had (and still have) problems wanting to be a productive member of a society, a society that I often feel doesn't want me to participate, as a young black male. As a youth, I figured crime was a part of my heritage, and a felony was a right of passage. Looking back, I see how strong a force the media is in forming (mine and other) young people's identity. I'm a proud member of the first "Hip Hop" generation, just like the baby-boomers have their rock and roll! Sagging pants and gang colors made us easily identifiable to local law enforcement, as another "Out Group" to target.

No war lasts forever unless its a war over religious ideology (it seems). So it's time to say goodbye to the Drug War. It was, in the end- a war on PEOPLE. For every year they increased funding against drugs and the groups that distributed them , the problem got worse. In the end, millions lost their lives for another failed attempt at prohibition, here and abroad. In the name of Public Safety, the poor and minorities have been criminalized to the point that the cost of warehousing them is no longer economically feasible, a SMART (rather than tough) solution has to be sought.

As I do my daily Criminal Justice Reform research I see how legislators fight to block Justice Reform measures by pushing the fear that violent offenders will flood the streets,

raping, pillaging and plundering. They say their protecting public safety, but sometimes I feel like their protecting Pharmaceutical interests, the prison system, and the power of the prosecutors. The prosecutors are the gatekeepers for the prison. I feel that Overly aggressive prosecutors are not always protecting society, they are marginalizing groups of people who they, for the most part, simply don't identify with. They have little sympathy because they don't generally share the same background or ideology.

Well the intolerant prosecutors and "Tough On Crime" judges have backed lawmakers into a corner in some states. It has recently come to light that a finger has been on the scale of justice, and now we have to reform the system to protect people from the same system that is supposed to be keeping us safe. The blindfold has slipped off lady justice, when the Department Of Justice looks at the numbers.

There wasn't much outcry before the incarceration rates became unsustainable. How can you ever balance a budget with such a large segment of the population kicked out of the American Dream? The collateral damage of Non-minorities being swept into the courts, and Drug Abuse levels growing exponentially along with Drug War spending, there's no way to avoid this demon. Things will have to change, we have to find a new way forward.

One thing I have confidence in is that Idaho will sit on the sidelines and wait for all the other states to figure it out first. Call it procrastination, Idaho will wait as long as possible to attempt Criminal Justice Reform. Being one of the lowest paying states, a permanent underclass of felons is needed to work the jobs nobody else wants to do. Transitional housing at halfway houses, and seedy local motels is another market requiring a steady stream on new offenders. Fear of criminals will keep the NRA and Pharmaceutical companies in charge of our lawmakers.

...continued on page 8

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Boise State

SECULAR STUDENT ALLIANCE

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advisor Robin W Allen

BSU SSA is a home for secular students., encouraging critical thought, 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 various -isms and non-religious worldviews through debates, workshops, speakers, movies, book club, discussion, and social gatherings.

Fall 2015 officers

Lindee Neumeier - President, Colin Fenello - Treasurer

Kendra Sanford - Secretary

Before Christianity ruled by the Book J Ross

Some of you know that I had a rather good introduction to basics of Christian faith, two semesters in a small Bible college. One of the best books I've read as follow-up is Pagans and Christians by British historian Robin Lane Fox.

Fox maps the territory now burdened with conflicting claims and hostilities. The land: Cyprus and western Mediterranean inward, Turkey to Syria, Palestine, Israel, through Iraq. He combed records and artifacts to capture the times from the earliest beginnings of Christianity to the shift that followed Emperor Constantine's militarily-enforced conversion.

To understand these several centuries, adjust your definition of cult. Many and varied were the religious temples and their followers. These were not crazy-haired outsiders; they were devotees, some following a community's tradition of a thousand years, living and practicing near each other peacefully. I can only select out instances from multitudes. In Egypt, the number of special days of observances were so many that the crocodile god had his own professional priests. Greek heroes became godlike and had their followers.

To be a pagan meant something else, also. Pagans were civilians, citizens of cities with agreed-upon relationships with each other. They shared space and market days and often joined the marches to major temple holidays of other cults. To be a pagan meant that you did not label followers of another temple as wrong; only the Christians did that (and were called atheists for denying the gods of others). Pagans accepted many stories of their traditions as symbolic or in reference to some ethical or spiritual truth. They were not literalists. Like Greeks they treated faith as a sign of an unsophisticated attitude. Fith led to radical acts. Better was homodoxy, a willingness to find commonality.

Rule by Moral Outrage J Ross

Those of us who look around with wonder at those who are generous, caring individuals who elect leaders with feet solidly planted in the mythical past can at least gain understanding from social science research.

A recent paper in the journal Nature places the problem squarely in the human brain. Jillian Jordan and her partners compared those who are ready to follow a bully and those impervious to the bully call.

Philip Zuckerman has already demonstrated that secularists are "markedly less nationalistic, less prejudiced, less anti-Semitic, less racist, less dogmatic, less ethnocentric, less close-minded, and less authoritarian' than those who identify themselves as religious.

There, don't you feel better about yourself? So if we are so clever, reasonable and kind, are we not valued as leaders? Why don't voters say, 'Give Us one of those civilized Atheists, if you please?'

Because of how we are wired to respond in the face of what we believe to be a great danger. If we think catastrophe looms, a great many will look for a leader who identifies the causes of the danger and promises to take whatever extreme action is needed to defeat the perpetrators. The simpler the explanation, the more intense the delivery, the better.

As the researchers report, promising to punish a wrongdoer increases the trust of the followers. This can explain, for instance, why supporters of a political candidate can say that yes, some of the things their candidate says are extreme, but they trust him to change everything that is wrong. Every thing. Religious belief promotes global, improbable solutions BECAUSE of, not despite their potential damage to innumerable others.



BUUF Humanists meet 3rd Sunday, 11:15:am, Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship library, April 17. Sages meet April 14 and 28, 9:30am, at Kopper Kitchen, near the Boise airport.

SAGE-EN-SCÈNE

This month, the BUUF Sages consider two disparate theatrical angles. On Thursday, April 14, theater professor Charles Lauterbach and we will discuss all the things (other than actors) that make magic: lighting, stage design, costumes, and what-not. On April 28, Dario Bollacasa will take us on tour of Antoni Gaudi's incomparable architecture in Barcelona. Join us for (virtual) backstage tours and a no-host breakfast, 9:30 am at the Kopper Kitchen (2661 Airport Way). Newcomers are always welcome! Contact Tom von Alten at 208 378-1217 or tva@fortboise.org for more information.

Humanists will consider culture and aging in the library of BUUF, 11:15 Sunday April 17.

March 28 Coalition of Reason board Attendees

included guests Karen Sesek and Dave Websten, both on the board of Sunday Assembly Boise. They are still in starter mode, building toward the London format, open to all sources of knowledge, open, emphasizing social style, with mini-talks (right now, TED talks), poetry, readings, music (especially pop songs). They emphasize volunteer involvement in community: "Wonder often, do more." They are joining forces with Oasis, which began as a safe place for ex-Mormons. Dustin has interviewed founder Mike Aus on his radio show.. Aus established Oasis in Huston, has expanded to two Utah units, plus one in Toronto, as well as the new one in Boise. Oasis Boise just decided to join with S.A. and meet twice monthly on a day that allows 'doing other things,' like attending Soc of Reason, which meets Sunday afternoons, or BUUF Humanists meeting third Sunday morning each month.

Charlie Nitro represented West Valley Freethinkers. They are planning *Heathens in the Woods* for June 22/23 at Horsethief reservoir. Just what it sounds like. Sandor introduced Dave and Karen to Humankind project of Dan Kinikini, saying it would benefit from new energy since Dan's taken full time employment.

Pat told us where and when to find Society of Reason meetings: starting Sunday noon 2nd Sunday of the month at Pat and Andys and alternately 4th Sunday at 3pm at Dan's in Nampa. They are talking about joining adopt-a-greenbelt, taking responsibility for cleanup on a section of the Greenbelt from under Americana boulevard to the Connector, path to water's edge.

Paul spoke of his primary concerns with the Idaho legislature passing a bill emphasizing the right to use religious texts appropriate to existing curricula in public schools. This replaces the law, mostly ignored, instituting a bible passage a day in schools., but mentions only the Bible by name.

Cosmos meets first and third Mondays, at Papa Joes. They have programs booked into August. Activities: Lauren won the second annual trivia contest, won a 'sensitive' houseplant. Sandor would like to help sponsor a Conference of Reason (we discussed possible joining with BSU SSA and have access to speaker funds, SUB meeting space.. He has forms for but hasn't completed application for 501C3 status. They have attendance similar to BUUF humanists, up to 35 depending on speaker and topic. It's 'geeky,' emphasizing science/tech topics. They don't talk about religion because they vary in attachment to it..

Van leads HOI. They generally have a speaker; next will be from Family Advocates. He stays in contact with BSU's SSA, which is again sponsored JT Eberhardt at BSU. Jeanette spoke of the style of the BUUF Humanist group—informal, determining by shared interest the topic each month, with more personal sharing and less quoting of authoritative sources.

SCHEDULE: May 5 is the day of prayer and reason; we will hold an informal alternative perspective, no bullhorns. (I could set up a card table, offer to answer any question for 5 cents. May 21 is the Community Progressive booth \$150; pricey for small public interest. Anyone? Contact Adrian Evans. June 18 is Pride fest, \$125 for a booth, \$50 to bring a parade entry rather than just walk. We will borrow Charlie's pickup, if Sandor can get a trailer to decorate (with hitch)\. Lore: a regular car can pull a single axle trailer..

July 4 is our big parade, for both Ada and Canyon counties. Idaho Atheists rented the booth last year.

Dave reminded us that August 13 is Tour de Fat: He is a parade marshal, says they had 10,000 entries last year. Sept 16-18 for Hyde Park HOI takes the lead, rents space. October 6 is Light the Night walk for cancer—Erica Abbot can organize this. Foundation Beyond Belief no longer has a matching grant, but it is a worthy cause anyway. Paul is our model— he solicits from family and friends who agree to donate to each other's causes.

April 2016

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1			1	2
3 ISOR	4 Cosmos Club	5 meet an atheist	6	7	8	9
10 ISOR	11	12	13	14 Sages	15	16
17 ISOR BUUF Human- ists	18 Cosmos Club HOI	19	20	21 Sages	22	23
24 ISOR Easter	25	26	27 Objectivists	28 Sages	29	30

more legislative results

Cherie Buckner Webb

Following three years of research, development and collaboration, we have completed a robust rework of Criminal Justice and Public Defense systems. [HB 528](#) ensures forensic evidence collected from sexual assault victims is tested in a timely manner.

[HB 429](#) adds incentive for certain low-level offenders to enter and complete problem-solving court programs, thereby saving money and helping to reduce recidivism, [HB 504](#) authorizes the Public Defense Commission to adopt and require compliance with new indigent defense standards and supported [SB 1373](#), anti-stalking legislation which allows victims of stalking and harassment to obtain civil protection orders.

[HB 458a](#) further streamlines and simplifies the process by which Idaho high school students earn college credit. [SB 1333](#), which creates the Broadband Infrastructure Investment Grant Fund, and supports investment to school districts that are desperately in need of expanding internet access.

This session we championed the approval of two new mental health crisis centers to be located in the Boise area and Magic Valley. The Joint Finance and Appropriations Committee (JFAC) also approved funding to expand Idaho's suicide prevention program.

We failed to Add the Words to the Human Rights Act to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Moving forward, we will continue to stand up for policies that strengthen our communities, improve our quality of life and honor our people.

Our priorities: to make access to post-high school education affordable; increase the minimum wage to help hard-working Idahoans reach economic security; ensure women earn equal pay for doing the same work as men; guarantee that every Idahoan has access to quality, affordable healthcare.

[More from Robin Crisler on page 2.] *As I do my daily Criminal Justice Reform research I see how legislators fight to block Justice Reform measures by pushing the fear that violent offenders will flood the streets, raping, pillaging and plundering. They say their protecting public safety, but sometimes I feel like their protecting Pharmaceutical interests, the prison system, and the power of the prosecutors. The prosecutors are the gatekeepers for the prison. I feel that Overly aggressive prosecutors are not always protecting society, they are marginalizing groups of people who they, for the most part, simply don't identify with. They have little sympathy because they don't generally share the same background or ideology.*

Intolerant prosecutors and "Tough On Crime" judges have backed lawmakers into a corner in some states. It has recently come to light that a finger has been on the scale of justice, and now we have to reform the system to protect people from the same system that is supposed to be keeping us safe. The blindfold has slipped off lady justice, when the Department Of Justice looks at the numbers. There wasn't much outcry before the incarceration rates became unsustainable. How can you ever balance a budget with such a large segment of the population kicked out of the American Dream? The collateral damage of Non-minorities being swept into the courts, and Drug Abuse levels growing exponentially along with Drug War spending, Idaho will wait as long as possible to attempt Criminal Justice Reform. Being one of the lowest paying states, a permanent underclass of felons work the jobs nobody else wants to do. Fear of criminals will keep the NRA and Pharmaceutical companies in charge of our lawmakers.

Humanists of Idaho

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Among Robin Crisler's provocative questions:

How will law enforcement continue to profit from the military Industrial complex without being able to violate your 4th amendment rights and seize people's property for anything they can loosely tie to narcotics activity? Is protecting public safety holding people hostage until they come up with cash, or plead guilty to speculative allegations?

It's not likely Idaho will do anything that could be loosely construed as progressive, why should it? Idaho sees itself as a bastion of morality, not able to be tainted by corruption, racism, or classism. Nothing is wrong if we don't admit it seems to be the story here. The monotheistic ideologues that control our political process may have to learn to have tolerance toward Drug Offenders and other non-violent criminals. Reform is a dangerous topic because it implies that something wasn't working, and that somebody may have been wrong. This is apparently a hard pill to swallow for people with a holy book that makes them entitled to being "RIGHT" (no matter what the facts say). But as the scales of justice start to swing from throwing people away, to helping them out, we will start to phase out The Drug War, and black eye it has given our image, as the biggest paradox of freedom this world has ever seen."