

The Idaho Humanist

Humanists of Idaho is a chapter of the American Humanist Association and the Council for Secular Humanism. We are a non-profit corporation organized to promote ethical, democratic, and naturalistic Humanism in the state of Idaho through public awareness, education, and community involvement.

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Humanism is a rational philosophy informed by science, inspired by art, and motivated by compassion. It affirms the dignity of each human being and supports individual liberty consonant with social and planetary responsibility. Humanism advocates participatory democracy, the open society, human rights, and social justice. Free of super-naturalism, it recognizes human beings as part of nature and holds that all values—be they religious, ethical, social, or political—have their source in human nature, experience, and culture. Humanism thus derives the goals of life from human need and interest rather than from theological and ideological abstractions, and asserts that humanity must take responsibility for its own destiny.

—*The Humanist*,

Official publication of the American Humanist Association

Elections

At our May membership meeting, Humanists of Idaho will have its annual officer elections. Four positions are elected, President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. Service is for a one year term. If you would like to nominate someone for a position, please contact Nicolle Foster at 429-1866.

Volunteer Update

On March 4th, John Harms represented Humanists of Idaho answering phones at Idaho Public Television's on air fund drive.

LeAnne Struble dropped off a bag of infant and children's clothes that Nicolle Foster purchased on behalf of HoI for the Women's and Children's Alliance. The WCA sent a letter thanking us for the donation.

Summer Conferences

The Center for Inquiry Institute is holding summer workshops on philosophy and critical inquiry from July 14-28 in Amherst, NY. Weekend seminars including tours of spiritualist and women's suffrage historical sites in the area, and a tour of the Robert Ingersoll museum will be held July 19-20 and 26-27. For information visit www.centerforinquiry.net

The Fourth World Skeptics conference will be held on June 20-23 in Burbank, California. Topics include evolution and intelligent design, urban legends, medical claims, and paranormal beliefs around the world. For more information, visit www.csicop.org.

The American Humanist Association annual conference will be held in Houston, Texas, May 10-12. For more information visit www.americanhumanist.org.

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Humanists responds to Bush call for cloning ban

*from the American Humanist Association
released April 11, 2002*

American Humanist Association (AHA) leaders are disappointed that President Bush continues to see complex issues in dangerously simplistic black and white terms. In Bush's speech yesterday he called for a complete ban on cloning, even for therapeutic purposes, which would extinguish its potential to end suffering for millions.

The development of therapeutic cloning may lead to treatments for such debilitating conditions as diabetes, Parkinson's disease and spinal cord injuries. Therapeutic cloning uniquely benefits existing stem cell research by generating stem cells that are a perfect genetic match for patients, thus avoiding frequent complications. "For humanity's sake, this research must not be blocked," says Edd Doerr, AHA president.

The American Humanist Association is uniquely focused on adding to the greater good of humanity and finds this blanket attack on scientific research to be misguided. In response to Bush's statement that "life is a creation, not a commodity," Tony Hileman, AHA executive director, responds, "This debate isn't about commoditizing procreation, it is about advancing science and helping people in pain. We need to allow science the freedom to research and cure disease."

While Bush supports the creation, and inevitable destruction, of millions of embryos used for infertility treatments, he says it is wrong to use human pre-embryonic cells in research. "Clearly Bush's sectarian agenda is coming through in this illogical pronouncement," adds Hileman.

By saying "no human life should be exploited or extinguished for the benefit of another," Bush is asserting that personhood begins at conception—even in a test tube. The vast

majority of scientists and the general public do not support this clearly sectarian claim.

As reflected in yesterday's statement by dozens of Nobel Laureates, we feel the ban Bush is pushing "would have a chilling effect on all scientific research in the United States." Doerr concludes, "This country should embrace scientific technologies such as therapeutic cloning that can potentially eliminate intractable diseases, ease suffering and improve life for millions and millions of people."

Black history museum

Last week the Idaho Black History Museum in Julia Davis Park in Boise was vandalized. Someone carved a swastika and the word "nigger" into the front door. While the community stepped up immediately to repair the damage and express support, more help is needed.

Normally the museum is only staffed by a single employee, and the museum directors are concerned for her safety should another incident occur. The museum needs funds to hire security personnel during operating hours.

Donations can be sent to Idaho Black History Museum, 502 Julia Davis Dr, Boise ID 83702. Call 433-1107 for more information.

Help us send a message that these kind of hate crimes have no place in Idaho.

Member seeks office

HoI member Rick Boyd is running for Idaho State Representative as an Independent for District 17, Seat B. Rick has the support of the Idaho Green Party.

Rick invites HoI members to learn more by attending a meeting of the Idaho Greens, held each Wednesday night at 5:30 at the Kulture Klatsch in the 8th Street Marketplace in Boise.

New poll finds mixed views on role of religion

While most Americans believe in tolerance of other religious beliefs, they acknowledge that religion is responsible for much of the violence in the world, yet at the same time express strong disapproval of the non-religious, and believe that more religion, not less is needed to bring peace to the world.

Those are the general findings of a new poll by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. Some of the specific responses included:

- * 75% say that many religions can lead to eternal life, compared with only 18% who regard their own religion as the "one true faith."
- * 84% of the people surveyed answered that a person does not have to have religious faith to be a good American.
- * Only 47% of respondents thought that one could be moral without a belief in God.
- * Only 35% thought that children raised without religion could become moral adults.

* 34% responded favorably about "atheists", while 54% responded unfavorably.

* 51% responded favorably toward "non religious", while 30% responded unfavorably.

* 67% agreed that America is a "Christian nation".

* Only 5% agreed with the view (promoted by Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and other extremists) that "Sept. 11 was a sign that God no longer protects the United States."

If this survey proves anything, it may be that while religious bigotry against other faiths is declining in America, bigotry towards the non-religious is alive and well. It also proves that how people answer a question depends strongly on the exact words used.

To read the complete survey, visit <http://people-press.org/reports/> . Look for the March 20 survey on religion.

Saudi Arabia: Fifteen schoolgirls killed by fire, religious police

from Rationalist International Bulletin, March 30

Fifteen schoolgirls died in a burning school building in Mecca on March 11, because they did not wear correct Islamic dress. Saudi Arabia's religious mutaween police, the so-called "Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice", stopped them from leaving the blazing building, because they were without headscarves and abayas (black robes), reported BBC News.

A policeman was seen beating a girl, who escaped, and forcing her back into the flames, reported the Saudi Arabian daily al-Eqtisadiyah. Police also stopped firemen and other helpers, who tried to rescue the girls, warning it was "sinful" to come near them. A school guard refused despite the pleas of a girl's father to

open the gates, when the fire broke out. The authorities had kept the school locked to make sure that boys and girls remained strictly apart.

In a rare event, some of the Saudi Arabian newspapers reflected outrage and fury of the victims' relatives and the public against the police, who were held responsible for the girls' death. The mutaween are all-powerful in Saudi Arabia and normally nobody dares to criticize them. They routinely beat up or arrest and jail anybody who doesn't obey their orders, when they patrol the streets to enforce the strict Islamic dress code and the practicing of prescribed prayers, and harass those who indulge in forbidden contact between men and women.

Direction and Energy

by Chris Struble

President, Humanists of Idaho

Recently I've noticed an increase in the number of new people attending our meetings. This is encouraging, especially considering that we haven't had an active outreach program for some time. People have been looking for and finding us.

At a time when "God bless America" is everywhere and war fever is in full swing, it's understandable that rational people crave more contact with others like themselves, if only to remind them that they are not alone.

But what kind of organization should we be? Here newcomers have different ideas. Some would like to join a politically active group that gets "in the face" of the religious hypocrites and busybodies who are trying to turn our state and nation back to the Middle Ages. Others seem to want a philosophy discussion group, to explore the fine points of counter-theology argument. Still others seem more attracted to our focus on service and community, and less interested in what they see as "religion-bashing" that only stirs up the hornets and gets us stung.

My answer to all these ideas is "yes". And no.

Yes, Humanists of Idaho must be politically active. We must speak out individually and as a group on issues that concern us, in particular where our rights as a secular community are threatened. We cannot endorse candidates, but we should invite them to speak to us about issues that interest us (and to prepare to be cross-examined). And we should march and protest where appropriate.

Yes, we should include more time for ideas, for discussing the foundations of the humanist life stance, and why we believe what we do and our positions on various questions. Personally, I'm not convinced of the benefit of public debates with other groups, especially members of the theological community. We are more

likely to be used for their purposes than the reverse. As for internal debates, I believe they are essential, but only when there is actual disagreement in the group about some course of action. Anyone should feel free to bring up any issue for the group to consider. But we shouldn't debate just for the sake of debating.

And yes, we must continue our focus on service and community. The wedding services that Nicolle provides under our auspices, and the volunteer and charitable work that we do, are the most tangible impact we have as a group on the world around us, far more enduring than anything we say or write.

But no, we can't do everything, precisely because people prefer some activities more than others. One thing I've learned in leading this organization for the past few years, and in politics before that, is that volunteer activities are Darwinian. I mean that an organization will ultimately only be able to sustain those activities or projects that its members stay excited about doing or supporting, year after year. All others will go extinct. It's a question of interest.

It's also a question of energy. How much energy do you have, and how do you want to use it? More importantly, what affect does your activity have on the energy level of the people in your organization. Does it attract people who want to do more, or burn them out?

People who come to humanism also do so by different paths. Some of us grew up in secular homes, others deconverted many years ago, others only recently. Our perspective on what a humanist organization should be, is shaped by our experience.

As we grow, we will be able to accommodate more activities and interests. I would like to encourage everyone interested in humanism to join HoI and get involved. If you want to see us do less of something, let us know. And if you want us to do more of something, don't forget to volunteer to help make it happen.

Last meeting

At our April 4th meeting, Judy LaDuke of St. Lukes Hospital came to talk about the hospital's pastoral care program, and to give a presentation on living wills.

The pastors at the hospital invited Nicolle Foster, our celebrant, to come in February to talk about humanist beliefs, especially about death and dying. They were very impressed with how Nicolle presented herself, which prompted this visit.

Nicolle has also been listed with the hospital as the person to contact for humanist patients who desire special comforting.

One of the questions that came up was the role of religion in hospital health-care policies. Other than the Episcopal bishop sitting on the hospital board, religion plays no role, and proselytizing is not allowed, unlike in many Catholic hospitals. The pastoral program is also committed to diversity, having invited people from a wide variety of beliefs to their forums.

We also learned how to exercise living wills. They can be a powerful instrument for having your health care wishes carried out in the event that you are unable to express them due to medical condition.

The meeting was quite friendly and the exchange of information was very productive.

Next Meeting

The next membership meeting will be on Thursday, May 2 at 7:30 PM, at the Flicks Theater, 646 Fulton, Boise.

On the agenda will be officer reports, officer elections, building fund, outreach, and speakers for upcoming meetings.

Boy Scouts

On February 6, the National Executive Board of Boy Scouts of America passed resolutions denying gays and atheists the right to be scoutmasters or to associate with BSA, stating that neither can "serve as a role model for the traditional moral values espoused in the Scout Oath and Law and that these values cannot be subject to local option choices."

While BSA's discriminatory policies against gays and atheists have been well known, this is apparently the first time that BSA has formally adopted a resolution enforcing these policies nationwide, and denying local groups the right to opt out.

HoI members are urged to contact the United Way and other charities that support Boy Scout chapters and tell them to drop the Boy Scouts from the list of organizations they support, and that you will withhold your support of United Way until they do.

Member News

HoI officers Chris and LeAnne Struble are finally settled into their new house in west Boise. They are planning a housewarming to which humanists will be invited, probably in May. Stay tuned.

Nicolle Foster has moved into a new location for her salon and wedding services business. Called Unity, it's located at Overland and Orchard in Boise. Stop by and say hello.

John Harms continues to be active in human rights causes. On March 6, he organized a pacifist meeting at the Unitarian fellowship. Each Wednesday at noon, he can be found at a rally to abolish capital punishment, northwest grounds at the statehouse.

Rick Boyd is running for state representative in the 17th district in Boise. See the article on Page 2 for more information.

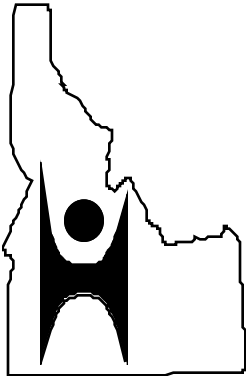
Nancy Hendricks of Pocatello met with the Strubles during a recent visit to Boise.

Until just a few years ago, Nancy was working as a volunteer for United Nations relief agencies in Tajikstan and northern Afghanistan (in what was then Northern Alliance territory).

Nancy has a presentation on her time in central Asia, some of the people she met and whose lives she helped save. We have asked her to come speak to us at one of our membership meetings very soon.

Upcoming Events

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| April 22, 2002 | Earth Day |
| May 2, 2002 | General Membership Meeting
7:30 PM at the Flicks Theater, 646 Fulton
Officer Elections |
| May 28, 2002 | Primary elections for Idaho state and
federal political offices |
| June 6, 2002 | General Membership Meeting
7:30 PM at the Flicks Theater, 646 Fulton |



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