

# 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.

August - October 2002

<http://idaho.humanists.net>

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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

## Reaching out

Its been a busy summer. So busy we haven't had time to produce a newsletter in several months.

One of the things that we have been doing at Humanists of Idaho, though, is continuing to make changes that will improve our ability to reach out and connect with people.

In August we moved our web site and email to a new hosting service. We are now hosting our web page with The Institute for Humanists Studies ([www.humanists.net](http://www.humanists.net)), which provides free web hosting for many humanists and secular groups. Our new web page and email address are listed above.

This change will present visitors to our site with a more friendly experience (no more annoying advertisements). The new addresses are also easier to remember and to associate with our name.

Also in August, Nicolle and Daniel Foster completed design and printing of our new outreach brochure. The new brochure features updated text and graphics, includes our new contact information, and looks great.

At our September meeting, Nancy Hendricks of Pocatello gave a slide presentation on her recent trip to Afghanistan as part of the UN mission there.

Also in September, HoI President Chris Struble got a Reader's View published in the Idaho Statesman. The article was in response to a religious extremist from Nampa who urged his fellow Christians to join in a "civil war" of values.

In October, Struble wrote a letter of sympathy to the Islamic Center of Boise over the recent vandalism of their mosque.

Also in October, Humanists of Idaho sent in its application for federal recognition of our status as a non-profit organization.

See inside for more details on these developments.

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## Member tells of Afghan adventures

On September 4th, Humanists of Idaho was pleased to welcome Nancy Hendricks, an HoI member from Pocatello. Nancy returned to the U.S. in August after spending several months doing humanitarian work in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Nancy's central Asian background began when she was married to a military attache assigned to the U.S. embassy in Kabul from 1976-1979. She learned to speak Dari, a Persian language, and after returning to the United States earned a masters degree in Central Asian studies. She later returned to the area, from 1995-1999 working in Tajikstan for the Organization for Security and Co-operation, where she learned to speak the Tajik language. Nancy speaks seven languages in all, including Dari and Tajik.

Nancy gave a slide presentation on her recent assignment this summer with the UN Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA) helping to rebuild the government there. Nancy was part of a team responsible for organizing and monitoring elections of delegates to the Loya Jirga, or grand council. In the process she had to deal with different customs and the chaos of a country rebuilding itself. Nancy talked about her experiences with insight and lots of humor.

One of the things we learned from Nancy is

that the news media is sloppy about words. The word for the body covering worn by Afghan women is "chaudri", not "burqa" which is an Arabic word used to refer to a similar garment worn by Saudi women. Few Afghans speak Arabic. Nancy brought a chaudri to her talk so that members could experience wearing it.

We also learned how women are reasserting themselves in the new Afghanistan. Nancy told of a warlord who barged into the grand council complete with armed entourage demanding a role in the new government, only to have a woman delegate give him a stern lecture, call him a murderer and pillager, upon which the warlord declared that it was time for prayers and skulked out, never to return.

When asked how she described her religious beliefs to the people she worked with in Afghanistan, she used a phrase translated roughly as "without a book". She found the people there very tolerant and accepting, generally positive towards Americans, and eager to become a normal country again.

Nancy Hendricks will be speaking again at the Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, 6200 N Garrett in Garden City, at 11 AM on Sunday, October 27th. This is part of the regular Sunday service. If you missed Nancy in September, you might want to attend.

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## Humanists of Idaho ready to apply for grants

In October, Humanists of Idaho submitted an application to the IRS for federal recognition of our status as a non-profit organization.

While HoI has been registered with the state as a non-profit since 1992, our application for federal recognition of our status has been held up due to need to get bank records going back four years. We were finally able to get the bank to pull the needed records this summer.

Sometime in the next few months we expect to receive a letter from the IRS confirming

recognition status. This will enable us to receive grants for special projects.

We aren't necessarily waiting for the IRS, however. We are considering preparing a grant application for the Institute for Humanist Studies grant program. We would like to apply for funds to get new banners, and to upgrade our tent and fair booth so we can get into the Hyde Park street fair and other big events next year.

If you have other ideas for special projects, please contact us at [idaho@humanists.net](mailto:idaho@humanists.net)

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# Is the US About to Launch a War of Aggression?

*Speaking Personally by Paul Kurtz*

What is the difference between a preemptive first strike and a war of aggression? The latter is defined in Webster's as "a forceful action... intended to dominate... (an) unprovoked violation by one country of the territorial integrity of another." Is the impending war on Iraq a war of aggression?

The United States is arguably the most awesome superpower in the history of the world, able to transport massive military forces anywhere on the globe to enforce the rule of pax Americana. It is essential that it use its power responsibly and with restraint.

The efforts of the Bush administration--now supported by the Congress--to impose its will unilaterally in its foreign policy raises fears among our allies about our misuse of our great power.

President Bush insists that Iraq is "a threat to the peace" and "security of the United States," for it possesses "weapons of mass destruction," and that thus a preemptive strike is justified. But Iraq is a small impoverished country of 25 million people, virtually landlocked, with limited technological-industrial resources. It is difficult to see what kind of threat it poses realistically to the United States, in spite of the repetition of the mantra designed to raise fears in the American public.

Many countries of the world now possess weapons of mass destruction; and an estimated forty-four countries have the know-how to build nuclear weapons. (In this regard Iran is a far greater threat than Iraq.) This is why so many are skeptical of the intensified war drums now being beaten so loudly by the Bush administration--on the eve of the national elections for control of the Congress! Many wonder whether there are not deeper geo-political-economic interests at stake, such as the control and exploitation of the vast untapped oil

fields of Iraq (also coveted by France and Russia).

To insist that a regime be toppled is a familiar ploy of those who wish to embark on a war of aggression to achieve its national interests, but it is a violation of recognized international law. To threaten the UN that the US will act if it does not undermines the entire concept of collective security introduced to stem wars of aggression after World War II.

The no-first-strike principle has been the centerpiece of the moral case for US wars in the past. There is no imminent threat of a direct attack by Iraq today. If the President barges ahead with his preemptive strike, it would seriously undermine, perhaps irreparably, the international framework of world peace and order so laboriously developed in the last half a century.

The United States should be patient and allow the inspection process administered by the UN to proceed. To do otherwise is to endanger the moral authority that America has had since the Wilsonian era as a stalwart defender of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. To insist that the US has a divine right to invade Iraq, if others do not follow our bidding, would define us in the eyes of the world as an aggressor nation.

*Paul Kurtz is Chairman of the Council for Secular Humanism and Professor Emeritus at SUNY at Buffalo. Secular Humanism and Professor Emeritus at SUNY at Buffalo.*

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## Solstice Party

Paul and Nancy Rolig will be hosting a Winter Solstice Potluck Party on Saturday, December 21 at 6 PM, at 9877 W Ripley St. in Boise. Mark your calendars and prepare to bring a dish, socialize, and have fun.

A map and directions will be included in a future newsletter.

# Ending the American Century

by Chris Struble

Recently my wife LeAnne and I set the BBC web site as our homepage for the Internet. We felt it was important to get a foreign perspective on the news so we can understand how the world views the United States and hear about events overseas the American press does not cover.

A recent interview with a British author on NPR made me realize how great the gap may be between Americans' perception of ourselves and how the world sees us. The author talked about President Bush, and how his "go it alone" approach on issues is causing people in the world to look away from America for leadership. Bush is bringing the American Century to an end.

The 20th century is sometimes referred to as the American Century by historians because it saw America's rise to dominance as a global power. It was also a period where much of the world saw America as a model to be emulated.

Many have never accepted that view, particularly in Muslim countries, but more significant is that many Westerners are starting to look away from America as well. It may be some time before a new power fills the vacuum Bush is leaving in his wake, but when it does it may be in the unlikeliest of places: Flanders.

Brussels, Belgium is of course the capital of the new European Union. And The Hague, Netherlands is the home of the world court.

Consider the fact that America is the only country with an antiquated winner take all election system that is the laughing stock of the free world, and not just because of hanging chads in Florida. Almost every new democracy in the past fifty years has adopted a parliamentary system or one with proportional representation to allow minority views to be represented, like those of European countries, not like ours.

Or consider the passage of the Kyoto treaty on global warming. Thanks to ratification by the EU and Russia, the treaty passed even without American support.

Or the International Criminal Court, newly created to provide a permanent place to try war crimes cases, which came into existence despite American threats to pull out of Bosnia if its troops weren't granted permanent immunity from prosecution for war crimes.

Or the refusal of many European countries to extradite suspected terrorists to America because of the death penalty here. Turkey, known for its harsh criminal justice system, was willing to drop the death penalty to gain EU membership, but is unwilling to cooperate with an attack on Iraq without U.N. approval.

Or consider the pushback from other EU members on Bush's war plans. Germany's chancellor won re-election largely because of his opposition to Bush's plans to invade Iraq. Bush may have won Congressional approval for his war, but approval of the U.N. Security Council is far from certain, even with the Bush administration openly promising billions of dollars in Iraqi oil money to buy votes of permanent member countries like Russia and France.

I believe that some Democrats in Congress who supported the Iraq resolution did so secretly hoping that Bush will fail to get U.N. Security Council authorization, but will invade Iraq anyway with only Britain and Israel as allies.

With estimates of the cost of an Iraq invasion and occupation in the hundreds of billions of dollars, with no allies to help foot the bill as in the Gulf War, and the likelihood of worldwide protests, terrorist reprisals, and disruption of oil supplies, America may experience economic irrelevance, like the kind Japan has been experiencing for the past decade.

While Bush declares that the U.N. must act or become irrelevant, it is America that risks irrelevance if it acts alone. By acting as emperor, Bush may finally learn what others have long known, that the emperor has no clothes.

## Last meeting

On October 2nd, five members of HoI met at our regular membership meeting.

Paul Rolig volunteered to follow up with Nancy Hendricks about coming to Boise again. Nicolle Foster agreed to check into getting Nancy a venue on the BSU campus.

Paul also volunteered to host a solstice party on December 21. There was also discussion of HumanLight, a new humanist holiday. More information is available at <http://www.humanlight.org/>

## Member News

Nicolle Foster's salon and wedding services business is growing. She is looking for a new location to buy rather than rent, ideally with its own wedding facility.

Paul Rolig had surgery for thyroid cancer last summer. A malignant tumor was found that had to be removed. Paul has recovered and is doing well.

Paul Verhage gave a presentation on his Near Earth Space Project at the Boise Astronomical Society's Star Party in September. He also did a balloon launch.

Chris Struble was awarded his first patent, No. 6443685, an invention using wireless technology to retrieve lost or stolen articles.

If you have any member news, please contact LeAnne Struble at 229-6427.

## Next meeting: Elections and War

The next membership meeting will be on Wednesday, November 6th at 7:30 PM, at the Flicks Theater, 646 Fulton, Boise.

Since this is the day after the elections, we will have a discussion about the elections and political issues of the day. Were there any surprises? How will the

results impact human rights and other issues humanists care about?

The Iraq war will also be discussed. How do we feel about it? Should humanists be more active in the peace movement?

If you there is a book or topic you would like to discuss, please let us know.

## News from the religious wars

The past two weeks brings a flood of news about the ongoing war of the world's religious against secularism... and against each other.

In Washington, the House said no to a bill that would give churches the ability to spend on political campaigns without risking their tax exempt status, and a week later voted 401-5 for a non-binding resolution endorsing the words "Under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance.

The same week, the Bush administration gave a "faith-based" grant to Operation Blessing, a project run by Rev. Pat Robertson, ironically a leading critic of Bush's faith based initiative when it was first proposed last year. Not only is this a blatant violation of the separation of church and state, but blatant hypocrisy.

Meanwhile, Robertson's partner in hate, Rev. Jerry Falwell has outraged Muslims

around the world by calling the prophet Mohammed a "terrorist" in a 60 Minutes interview .

A rally in India that started as a protest over Falwell's remarks sparked Hindu-Muslim riots that left five people dead.

Meanwhile, Sudanese-American black feminist author Kola Boof has been issued a "fatwa" death decree. It is a call for any Muslim to kill her on site. She was later fired from a movie role as "uninsurable" after several gunmen tried to do just that.

And in Boise, religious bigots vandalize a mosque and threaten its members, and a Muslim woman Angie Abdullah is murdered, and her house set afire. Her four children escaped unharmed, but the Muslim community is on edge. At least so far this violence has brought the community together rather than tearing it apart.

# Upcoming Events

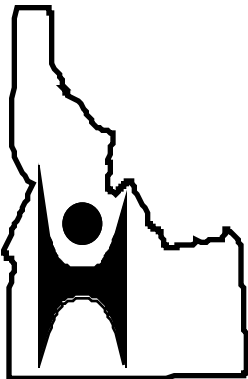
Oct 27, 2002 Nancy Hendricks speaking at Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, 11 AM.

Nov 2, 2002 Godless Americans March on Washington.

Nov 6, 2002 Meeting at the Flicks Theater, 646 Fulton, 7:30 PM.

Nov 24, 2002 Church State Separation Week

Dec 21, 2002 Solstice Potluck Party, Paul and Nancy Rolig's, 6 PM. Mark your calendars.



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