



Idaho considers war on meth Governor proposes \$1 million to battle drug use

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Idaho has a growing meth problem, and its governor wants to fight it.

Idaho Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter last week in his State of the State Address announced the launch of a statewide campaign aimed at reducing first-time methamphetamine use.

During the address, the governor requested that the Legislature appropriate \$1 million in tobacco settlement money from the Millennium Fund to fund the Idaho Meth Project.

"I think it's a good idea," said House Minority Leader Wendy Jaquet, D-Ketchum. "This is really important just because of the number of people we have going into prison because of meth and related drug problems, and because it hurts families and what it does to the job force."

Jaquet said she believes the Legislature will fund the program.

The Idaho Meth Project has adopted the Meth Project model—combining an aggressive, saturation-level media campaign with community action programs—designed to prevent meth use by raising awareness of the drug's dangers.

Idaho is the fourth state to implement the Meth Project's large-scale prevention campaign. The program was first established two years ago in Montana, where it is credited with a 45 percent decline in teen meth use. Programs were subsequently launched in Illinois in 2006 and Arizona in 2007.

Closer to home, the Blaine County Sheriff's Office estimates that one out of every 20 Wood River High School students claims to have used the drug, but high school officials contend that "the real number is closer to one out of seven students."

"The popularity of meth among high school and middle school students is a particular concern in Blaine County," according to an informational brochure issued by the sheriff's office. "One out of six county juveniles on probation admit to using meth and 60 percent of those consider themselves addicted."

According to the National Methamphetamine Awareness Campaign, 99 percent of the people who try meth are hooked after using it the first time.

"Meth is highly addictive, and its crippling effects have brought our citizens to their knees," said state Office of Drug Policy Director Debbie Field in a press release. "In preparation for this awareness campaign people throughout the state have been at the table to help make a difference. The Meth Project's success in reducing use in Montana is a clear indicator that this effort can have an enormous impact in Idaho."

Jaquet added that while the Idaho Meth Project is a worthwhile endeavor, she would like to see additional money diverted to prevention and treatment programs and facilities.

"The governor seems to be investing more money in prison drug- and substance-abuse treatment, rather than trying to do something in the communities," Jaquet said. "This (Idaho Meth Project) is definitely an effort in the community. He's expanding the drug court a bit. But we would like to see some regional drug-treatment facilities."

She said that rather than spend \$54 million on prison improvements as the governor proposed, that money would be more wisely spent on treatment facilities and prevention.

Nonetheless, Otter's proposal to spend \$1 million on prevention was well received. In his speech, Otter cited the severe impact methamphetamine use has had in Idaho and the success the Meth Project model has had in reducing meth use in other states.

"The Idaho Meth Project was brought to our state by Idahoans who saw the tremendous burden meth use has put on our social-service, law-enforcement and prison systems," Otter said. "This year the First Lady and I have visited with hundreds of citizens in the state that want to be a part of the solution. The result truly is a collaborative effort. People across the state have donated their time, talents and financial resources. Thanks to their efforts we can implement the Meth Project model in Idaho and dramatically reduce meth use in our state."

Since its inception in 2005 the Meth Project program in Montana has demonstrated significant results in changing attitudes and behaviors toward the drug.

When the program was launched, Montana ranked fifth among states for per-capita meth abuse. After two years the state now ranks 39th, Jaquet said.

The Montana Meth Project is credited with reducing adult meth use in the state by 70 percent, and causing a 53 percent decline in meth-related crimes and a 50 percent decline in meth-related foster care admissions.

According to the Idaho Meth Project:

- Eighty percent of child placements by the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare are directly related to drug abuse, with methamphetamine being the most prevalent.
- Fifty-two percent of Idaho inmates directly attribute meth use to their incarceration.
- A 2005 survey ranked Idaho among the states reporting the highest increase in arrests due to methamphetamine, up 90 percent from the prior year.
- Idaho spends \$66 million annually to house adult male inmates who admit to having a meth problem.
- Sixty-three percent of Idaho felony drug court participants indicate that meth is their drug of choice.