

## **Our View: Anti-meth ads could save money, change lives**

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Law enforcement is gaining some ground in its battle with methamphetamine.

In several Western cities, including Boise, the meth market tightened somewhat over the first six months of 2007, according to a December report from the federal National Drug Intelligence Center.

Effective law enforcement can help stem the supply of meth, and drive up the costs of this lethal drug. Fighting the other half of the economic equation - the demand for meth - requires tough talk about a drug that can cause strokes, anorexia, paranoia and depression.

Investing \$1 million of state money into an in-your-face anti-meth campaign could be one of the most compassionate and cost-effective decisions the 2008 Legislature could make.

Public and private donors already have done their part to launch the Idaho Meth Project. This week, the Meth Project began a TV, radio and print ad campaign that illustrates, in graphic detail, meth's devastating health effects. The goal, according to the project's Web site, is to "unsell" the allure of meth to teens and young adults most likely to try this highly addictive drug.

The project has enough money to keep running through June, said Mark Warbis, a spokesman for Gov. Butch Otter. On Monday, the governor asked legislators to put \$1 million into the cause.

The money would come from Idaho's "Millennium Fund," the state's share of a national tobacco settlement. The fund sits at \$64.4 million. Otter wants to spend about \$3.4 million in earnings from the fund, including \$1 million for the Meth Project. The bulk of the \$3.4 million would go into programs to fight substance abuse or smoking.

A purist's argument can be made for using earnings from the Millennium Fund to fight tobacco use. But since 2000, lawmakers have used settlement money for a variety of purposes, including balancing the state budget (since then, Idaho has passed a constitutional amendment placing 80 percent of the tobacco payments into a permanent endowment).

What Millennium Fund money is spent should go to the best possible use. Idaho's tobacco use rate, thankfully, ranks third lowest in the nation. Meanwhile, there's no way to overlook the health effects of meth addiction.

Nor its effects on the state budget.

The Meth Project sums it up with a pair of frightening numbers: 52 percent of Idaho's inmates directly attribute their prison terms to meth use, and the state spends \$66 million a year imprisoning male inmates who are addicted to meth.

Talk about a smart move: spending \$1 million to fight a \$66 million drain on the prisons. The bottom-line argument, compelling as it is, doesn't even factor in the human element.

Meth ruins lives. Let's change some lives by keeping some young people away from this toxin.