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Otters say Meth Project is working

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By JOHN MARKON

If the campaign against methamphetamine abuse can be compared to an athletic event, it's becoming clear which team has the momentum.

According to Megan Ronk of the Idaho Meth Project, almost all measurable factors on meth abuse are down. The state is experiencing fewer arrests for meth use and production, fewer drug users are being seen by doctors, and fewer former users are being enrolled in substance-abuse programs.

"The trends are really favorable," Ronk said. "If they stay the way they are, we'll be able to say meth use peaked in Idaho somewhere around 2004 or 2005."

Which isn't to say the "game" is over, or even ending.

"We're winning, but we have to keep on winning and winning with every new generation," Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter said. "It's a game where the 'quarters' never really end."

Otter and his wife, Lori, are both strongly identified with the Meth Project and, along with U.S. Rep. Mike Simpson, made time Saturday to participate in a fundraiser at the Idaho Falls Country Club.

"We'll have 68 people out here playing golf, and we expect to raise somewhere around $60,000," said Josh Talman, a spokesman for the sponsoring Mountain View Hospital.

"When the Meth Project calls," said Lori Otter, "it's usually a done deal that we're there."

Both Otter and Simpson said they approved of the Meth Project's latest round of public-service advertisements. The "Not even once" theme is one that proved effective for a similar anti-meth effort in Montana.

"As a former dentist who knew a little about drugs and medicines, I was initially very skeptical that a first-time meth user could become almost instantly addicted," Simpson said.

"I've learned since then that it's totally true. The ads are very direct and blunt, and I think they should be."

Otter said he views a decline in meth use as a key component in lowering crime rates and prison populations throughout Idaho.

"We have roughly 700 fewer prisoners in Idaho than we had a few years ago," Otter said. "I think we can attribute that to better drug education among the general public and better drug-aversion programs among people exiting the prison system.

"The numbers of people involved with our criminal justice system are still very high, but we're making progress and this is a big part of it."

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