

# The Aryan Nations state cuts civil rights cops

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As thousands of Idahoans observed Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Gov. C. L. (Butch) Otter was poised to take civil rights in their state down a notch or two.

Otter says he won't dismantle the Idaho Commission on Human Rights, but his plan to strip the agency of state support would have that effect. Created in 1969, at the behest of former Gov. Phil Batt, who then was serving in the state Senate, the Human Rights Commission is responsible for enforcing Idaho's civil rights laws.

Idaho's commission is a portal for people who suspect they've suffered discrimination on the job, in school, in housing or in public accommodations. If the law has been violated, the commission's staff can investigate. If not, the agency can direct the citizen to other entities that might help, such as legal aid or the Better Business Bureau.

Compared to other states, Idaho's commission is relatively weak. It lacks subpoena powers and robust resources. In the midst of a budget crunch, the governor has proposed weaning the Human Rights Commission of general fund support during the next four years. Not a great deal of money is involved. Last year, the state allocated \$596,400 to enforce its civil rights laws. The feds kicked in another \$276,000.

In the first year, Otter's plan would withhold \$165,000.

"The governor further recommends that the commission pursue alternative funding options to offset the proposed reduction over the next four years," Otter's budget office says.

Setting aside the idea that someone should not have to pay the state to enforce his civil rights, how much money could user fees generate? Not much. Generally the people who turn to the Human Rights Commission have lost their jobs, so they don't have many resources.

How about seeking out corporate grants? Today, the commission takes a corporate check. Tomorrow, the commission may have to investigate that same company for allegedly violating the rights of its workers.

If federal authorities fill more of the void, both accuser and accused must deal with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's regional office in Seattle.

Some matters are exclusively the domain of the state commission, however, and if it is weakened or disappears entirely, those concerns will not be addressed.

Why is Otter trifling with this issue?

Idaho may never overcome the damage Richard Butler and the Aryan Nations inflicted on the state's reputation. Butler's gone. Thanks to the efforts of people such as Idaho native Greg Carr, the Hayden

compound has been demolished and replaced with a peace park. Carr also contributed \$500,000 toward the Human Rights Center in Boise to open the Anne Frank Museum.

But Idaho's struggle with the agents of intolerance persists.

Speaking to a Moscow audience Saturday, Rachel Dolezal, director of the Human Rights Education Institute of Coeur d'Alene, warned of a resurgence of neo-Nazism in northern Idaho. A group of "skinhead" types harassed Dolezal at her office. After being burglarized, she has moved from house to house. A racial epithet was painted outside her home. Later, a noose was left nearby.

"To be truthful, it's only worth the risk if you're backed up by lots of people. And I'm not so sure that's the case right now," Dolezal said.

If Otter has his way, what other conclusion could Dolezal draw? - M.T.