



## IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION

*"Protecting Idaho through Safety, Accountability,  
Partnerships And Opportunities for Offender Change"*

C.L. "Butch" Otter  
Governor

Brent D. Reinke  
Director

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**Reader's View Submission**  
**By Director Brent D. Reinke, Idaho Department of Correction**  
**December 22, 2010**  
**526 words**

Here at the Idaho Department of Correction we've dubbed ourselves the Black Hat Team. The hat is a symbol of our commitment to the core values of our mission – safety, accountability, partnerships and opportunities for offender change. We chose black because we know we're not very popular around the Statehouse at budget time. People would rather spend money on the white hats, schools and universities, than on prisons. In a perfect world, I would, too. But the world is not perfect, and it doesn't appear it's going to be anytime soon.

In recent years the Black Hat Team has quietly become a leader in the corrections field. Here are just a few examples our success:

- The rate at which Idaho offenders return to prison after they've been released is among the lowest in the nation. In fact, Idaho's success rate is almost as high as California's failure rate. In Idaho, 62 percent of all released offenders *stay out* of prison for at least three years. In California, 67.5 percent of all offenders are *back in* prison within three years.
- Idaho is emerging as a national leader in the implementation of innovative, evidence-based substance abuse treatment programs. We're getting more offenders better treatment faster. As a result, they're spending less time locked up in prison at taxpayer expense, and succeeding as law-abiding citizens at a higher rate when they're released.
- Idaho has managed to put the brakes on explosive growth in the size of the state's prison population. In fact, for the past two years the population has actually gone down.

What makes this success story even more impressive is that it's been done in a time of declining resources. In FY09, IDOC's general fund budget was \$173.4 million. In FY11, it was \$145.7 million. That's a 16 percent drop. We have asked the men and women of IDOC to do more with less, and they have come through with more than any of us dreamed.

While I am proud of the Black Hat Team, I am also worried about the future. For three years IDOC has required employees to take time off without pay. Even as the furloughs started, independent legislative auditors were warning that the department's prisons were dangerously understaffed. Now, because of this additional constraint, we are having to leave more important work stations unstaffed for periods of time.

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The furloughs are also impacting employee retention. After declining for several years, the rate at which employees leave the department is on the rise. We're losing the correctional professionals who are responsible for our success. If present trends continue, we'll see a 24 percent turnover in our correctional officer ranks this fiscal year alone.

I know that Idahoans will never cheer on their Black Hat Team like they do the Broncos, the Vandals or the Bengals. But as we gear up for a new legislative session, I hope people will understand they have a stake in the team's success. If we stay on course, more offenders will be held accountable and given opportunities to change. If we are weakened, Idaho will pay more in the form of taxpayers' dollars and crime victims' tears.