

**Reader's View: IDOC's Population Decline Submission**  
**By Brent D. Reinke, Director, Idaho Department of Correction**  
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The dog days of summer are here, and it's easy to get down in the dumps about the state of our economy and the prospects for Idaho's budget. But it's not all doom and gloom. There are many things to celebrate. One of them is what's happening quietly, behind the scenes, at the Idaho Department of Correction.

Just two years ago forecasters said by the year 2017 Idaho would need 5,560 new prison beds at a cost of more than \$1 billion. So we did what we thought we had to do. We went right to work and drew up plans to build a new 2,000-bed prison. But at the same time, we went back to the basics. We challenged the fundamentals about the way our criminal justice system works. The results have been spectacular.

Not only have we stopped what appeared inevitable - we have reversed the trend. At the start of the new fiscal year (July 1, 2009), the department had 55 fewer inmates in prison than on the same day the year before. This is unprecedented in Idaho. The inmate population is actually going down. Instead of spending more and more, IDOC has been able to return millions of dollars to Idaho's general fund.

How have we been able to do it? Idaho's criminal justice system is now working as a system. IDOC now works hand in hand with judges, parole commissioners, sister agencies and treatment providers. Correctional professionals at all levels are coming together to share a new level of partnership and collaboration. Their focus has been on making sure the right inmate is in the right bed at the right time. As a result, we have been able to slow the flow of offenders coming in the front door of our prison system while speeding up the flow of those who are being released out the back door.

At the same time, we've increased the size and the effectiveness of treatment programs. In the months and years to come we'll be doing even more. Crews are almost finished converting a building at Idaho Correctional Center south of Boise into a 304-bed treatment facility. And next summer just down the road, we'll have the 400-bed Correctional Alternative Placement Program opening up. CAPP, as it's called, will provide intensive, inpatient drug and alcohol treatment to inmates who are about to be paroled and to probationers and parolees who are on the edge of being sent to prison.

None of this would be possible without the hard work of the men and women of the Department of Correction. These dedicated public servants have been asked to do more with less and they've delivered. They're correctional officers, probation and parole officers, pre-sentence investigators and drug and alcohol rehabilitation specialists. They're Idaho's unknown protectors. They perform a difficult job, around the clock in every corner of this state with no expectation of public acclaim. We owe them our gratitude for making sacrifices every day that allow the rest of us to be safe.

I'm not suggesting we've fixed everything. There are already signs that our inmate population has started growing again. As it does our focus will be on controlling that growth at a rate proportionate to the state's overall population.

But for now, we should celebrate. By reversing an "inevitable" trend, all of the people who have a hand in Idaho's criminal justice community have shown just what's possible when you go back to the basics, challenge assumptions and work together.