

# U.S. & WORLD

## Idaho eyes restart of death row executions as firing squad draws near

BY KEVIN FIXLER  
The Idaho Statesman  
(TNS)

BOISE, Idaho — Idaho's prison system has nearly completed execution chamber upgrades to carry out the death penalty by firing squad as the state's lead method and will have a team of riflemen ready to go by the time a state law takes effect this summer.

As part of the transition, the Idaho Department of Correction hopes to limit the amount of participation by its officers as shooting of condemned prisoners to death is prioritized over lethal injection. Toward that effort, prisoner leadership sought to implement a push-button technology to avoid needing IDOC workers to pull the triggers.

But — at least so far — those pursuits have been unsuccessful, an agency spokesperson told the Idaho Statesman. Instead, IDOC will move forward with the "manual process" for its firing squad.

"The facility will be completed with sufficient time for the execution team to train," Ryan Mortensen, the spokesperson, said in an emailed statement. "IDOC will be prepared with a manual process in place by July 1, utilizing outside law enforcement as needed, and will continue to explore remote-operated system options."

He did not specify when construction of the chamber at the maximum security prison south of Boise will be finished. The price tag for the renovation still hovers at its more than \$900,000 estimate, Mortensen said.

The updates come just days after the U.S. Justice Department announced it aims to streamline the federal death penalty by reinstating lethal injections and also adding other methods, including a firing squad. The changes were branded an effort by Republican President Donald Trump to reverse death penalty policies enforced by his predecessor, former President Joe Biden, a Democrat.

"The prior administration failed in its duty to protect the American people by refusing to pursue and carry out the ultimate punishment against the most dangerous criminals, including terrorists, child murderers, and cop killers," Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche said in a statement. "Under President Trump's leadership, the Department of Justice is once again



People against the death penalty gather outside of Cator Ruma and Associates, March 31, 2026. Cator Ruma and Associates is a Boise engineering firm contracted to design Idaho's new firing squad execution chamber. (Sarah A. Miller/Idaho Statesman/TNS)

enforcing the law and standing with victims."

Law enforcement assistance Idaho Attorney General Raúl Labrador on Friday applauded the Trump administration's push to carry out federal executions by firing squad.

"Terrorists, pedophiles, and child murderers deserve swift justice," Labrador said in a post on X. "Idaho already made the firing squad our primary execution method. The federal government is catching up!"

Labrador helped author a bill in 2023 that brought back the firing squad as a backup method in Idaho, before the Legislature made it the primary method in a bill in 2025 that doesn't take effect until July 1. That gave IDOC the time needed to rebuild its execution chamber.

Idaho has not carried out the death penalty in nearly 14 years. A failed lethal injection in 2024 helped inspire the Legislature to prioritize the firing squad.

Gov. Brad Little signed each firing squad bill into law, in 2023 and 2025.

"I have long made clear my support of capital punishment," he said in a statement after signing the law in 2025. "As governor, my job is to follow the law and ensure that lawful criminal sentences are carried out as ordered by the

courts."

Little in the past acknowledged his preference for lethal injection between the two methods, sharing concerns over the impacts on corrections officials from participating in a firing squad execution. IDOC Director Bree Derrick last year echoed similar sentiments about prison staffers taking to the rifles.

"If direct staff involvement in the process becomes necessary, we would seek assistance from law enforcement personnel who are specifically trained and psychologically equipped for such responsibilities," she said in a statement to the Statesman.

Idaho is under a moratorium against executions issued by a U.S. magistrate judge in the state until IDOC makes changes that allow members of the press to view more of the process during lethal injection executions. That decision is on appeal and awaits a ruling by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

But until the upgrades for a firing squad are wrapped up on the execution chamber, IDOC also paused pursuit in April 2025 of carrying out the death penalty. The prison system is expected to withdraw that stoppage once the renovation is complete and the firing squad is implemented on July 1, making Idaho the only U.S. state using it as its lead execution method.

### • Sparklight awards

Con't from Page 1

"Projects like this give students the opportunity to take ideas beyond the concept stage and turn them into something tangible," said Travis Harr, Sparklight Senior Regional Director, North Central. "Sparklight is proud to support hands-on learning experiences that build problem-solving skills, encourage innovation and help prepare students for future academic and career pathways in STEM."

Since its launch in 2019, Sparklight's "Dream Bigger" initiative has awarded more than \$200,000 in grants to support STEM education and expand access to innovative learning opportunities for K-12 students. In 2026, 12 schools and organizations across Sparklight's 24-state footprint were selected to receive funding for impactful, student-focused projects.

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### • Wichita will keep

Con't from Page 3

not support the change.

- First-time offenders will now receive a warning instead of an immediate fine, and more signs will be posted to educate visitors about the rule.

- Citations for backing in can carry at least a \$25 fine. All 281 drivers ticketed had already paid for parking.

- The Car Park, the vendor enforcing paid parking, scans license plates as employees drive by. Backed-in cars block that automated process, requiring workers to exit their vehicles.

- Hoheisel called back-in parking "a cultural thing here in Wichita," arguing some consider it safer because drivers can see in front of them when leaving.

### • Independence Tree Board

Con't from Page 1

tall when mature, and the fruit is typically about six inches in length. In the forest, pawpaws are an understory tree — meaning that they like the protection of the partial shade provided by other trees. Because pawpaws cross-pollinate, it is best to have two or three pawpaw trees in order to produce fruit.

Event attendees were given a free pawpaw tree and planting information. This effort is part of the Tree Board's annual goals to distribute native trees throughout Independence for renewal of green spaces, promotion of habitat and addition of resources for the community. The Independence Tree Board plans to nurture several of these small trees to plant in the community orchard on the corner of South 17th and Walnut Street. The orchard suffered the loss of most, if not all, of its apple trees during the unforgiving drought conditions of the last several years. A native tree will endure better in this climate. The pear trees in the orchard continue to thrive with the care and maintenance of the Tree Board and the Riverside Park and Ralph Mitchell Zoo's staff.

The Independence Tree Board grieves the loss of the downtown trees. Over the last eight years, the board members volunteered time out of their lives to water, mulch and prune those very trees with their own hands. Although none of the downtown trees are native, members of the Tree Board advocated for having the trees which were so costly in time, effort and money relocated to Riverside Park, which is in need of more trees of more varieties. Removing the downtown trees was not a project initiated by nor executed by the Tree Board. Rather, the Riverside Park and Ralph Mitchell Zoo came to the Tree Board for recommendations on tree varieties for their plan.

The board met with Riverside Park Director Scott Patton and a room filled with downtown shop keepers to discuss the issue. Many shop keepers passionately expressed their displeasure with the trees; citing birds, shop signage issues and leaf litter. They overwhelmingly demanded that the trees be removed permanently and not be replaced. The Tree Board members fought to at least keep some sort of living greenery in the downtown wells to break up the heat bubble effect of the concrete. The tree varieties selected for the plan are columnar, such that they will not branch out in front of signage or over cars. The Tree Board chair and the Riverside Park director then met with the members of the City Administration to receive further direction regarding Independence's downtown trees. Together, a plan of compromise was made.

Follow the Independence Tree Board on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/IndyKSTreeBoard/> and visit their city page at <https://www.independencems.gov/350/Tree-Board>.

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### 104 Notices

AA MEETINGS; 213 W. Oak; Independence; Noon Wednesday, Saturday & Sunday; Wednesday at 7pm. Thursday at 7pm; Sunday at 6pm. Alanon meetings; Tuesday at 7pm

### 132 Rummage Sale

HUGE YARD sale, 1101 N. 19th Place, Independence. Saturday 5/2, 8am-1pm. MAY01

ESTATE YARD sale- Saturday only, 8-4. New & used small kitchen appliances & decorative items, bedroom set, & misc. 3603 W. 6th, Coffeyville. MAY01

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RUMMAGE SALE- Lots of sewing items, craft stuff new & old, 100 yards of new lacing, 100s of craft books. 903 E. 3rd St, Cherryvale. MAY2

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