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House of Representatives

FY2008 TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT APPROPRIATIONS BILL

SPEECH OF

HON. MICHAEL K. SIMPSON
OF IDAHO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 24, 2007

MR. SIMPSON: Mr. Chairman, in accordance with House earmark reforms, I would like to place into the record a listing of Congressionally-directed projects in my home state of Idaho that are contained within the report to the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Subcommittee. I am grateful for their inclusion in this bill.

I'd like to take just a few minutes to describe why I supported these projects and why they are valuable to the nation and its taxpayers.

The bill contains \$900,000 for the City of Rocks Back Country Byway in my Congressional District. This 16.7 mile long project is located on the popular City of Rocks Back Country Byway in Cassia County, Idaho and provides the only direct access to the City of Rocks National Reserve. When fully completed, the project will pave a 1.0 mile gravel segment, reconstruct 15.7 miles of deficient roadway, correct deteriorated road and slope conditions, provide a wider road with shoulders and guardrail, and improve the road's alignment by reducing the number and severity of sharp curves and steep grades. These improvements will increase safety for the driving public and provide safer access for bicycle and pedestrian traffic. These improvements will also significantly reduce the amount of on-going maintenance required to keep the route usable. This project has received federal funding in previous years.

This project was requested by the Idaho Transportation Department.

The report contains \$300,000 for the I-84, Curtis Road to Broadway IC Widening. This project would widen I-84 through east Boise, adding eastbound and westbound fourth lanes. This widening is needed to alleviate congestion and safety issues caused by the continued fast growth in the Treasure Valley.

This project was requested by the Idaho Transportation Department.

The report contains \$500,000 for the Idaho Transit Coalition's program to improve bus and bus facilities all across the state of Idaho. The funding will assist Ada County Highway District's Commuteride, Boise State University, the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, the City of Ketchum, the Ketchum/Sun Valley Transit Authority (KART), the City of Moscow, the City of Pocatello, the University of Idaho, and Valley Regional Transit. The majority of these projects are identified in the "Idaho Statewide Public Transportation Needs and Benefits Study" compiled by the Idaho Transportation Department in 1996 and subsequent local studies and plans. All projects are identified in the Transportation Improvement and the Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan. The current request represents only a small amount of what will be needed to maintain and expand Idaho's public transportation capital system to meet the demands of the State's rapidly growing population. This project has received federal funding in previous years.

The funding was requested by the Idaho Transit Coalition.

The report contains \$150,000 for the Historic Wilson Theater Restoration Project in Rupert, Idaho. The Wilson Theater was built in 1920 and is on the National Register of Historic Places. The Theater is also part of Rupert's Historic Business District. Rupert is a predominantly rural community that recently experienced the closure of its largest employer, Kraft Cheese. The restoration of this theater is one aspect of the community's effort to revitalize itself, attract new employers and generate interest in the community. The community thus far has raised over \$1 million in private donations to restore the building, and federal funds will be only a small part of overall expenses.

This project was requested by the non-profit Renaissance Art Center, Inc. in Rupert, Idaho.

The report contains \$50,000 for the Custer County Economic Development Initiative in Custer County, Idaho. The vast size of Custer County presents enormous financial challenges for a county that is overwhelmingly owned by the federal government. Custer County has a very small tax base with very large costs for maintaining roads and service over a very large area. This funding will permit the County to purchase and renovate an old middle school in Challis that would become a government and business center housing the offices of the City, County, and Economic Development offices and making them ADA compliant. Additionally, funding would help to provide for improvements to a multi-government complex in the City of Stanley and the rodeo grounds in the City of Mackay. This project would relieve an enormous strain on the limited yearly budget of Custer County and allow it to more efficiently deliver services to residents and visitors alike.

This project was requested by Custer County, Idaho.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide a list of Congressionally-directed projects in my region and an explanation of my support for them.

- 1.) \$150,000 for Historic Wilson Theater Restoration Project; Rexburg, Idaho**
- 2.) \$50,000 for Custer County Economic Development Initiative; Custer County, Idaho**
- 3.) \$900,000 for City of Rocks Back Country Byway, Idaho**
- 4.) \$500,000 for Idaho Transit Coalition Buses and Bus Facilities**
- 5.) \$300,000 for I-84, Curtis Road to Broadway IC Widening, Boise, Idaho**