

# For Idaho, federal spending is mind-altering

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

These days, Idaho's politicians are afflicted with legislation selection disorder.

You know.

LSD.

It works like this: Act as if the people of the Gem State are a self-reliant bunch of up-from-the-bootstraps, rugged individualists who are beaten down by an oppressive federal government.

Ignore the reality: The benevolent U.S. taxpayer is all that stands between them and financial oblivion. John S. Kiernan, a senior analyst with the personal finance social network [Wallethub.com](http://Wallethub.com), worked over the numbers and here's what he found:

- For every dollar Idahoans pay in federal taxes, they get \$1.40 back. That tracks with earlier studies by such groups as the Tax Foundation. Idaho's poorly compensated workers don't generate a lot of income tax, but they require an awful lot of help from Uncle Sam in terms of Medicaid, food stamps, Social Security and Medicare.
- State government would be 35 percent smaller - or state taxes would be 35 percent higher - if the feds weren't propping up Idaho's budget.
- Out of every 1,000 people, nearly eight work for the federal government - whether that's Idaho National Laboratory near Idaho Falls, Mountain Home Air Force Base, the U.S. Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management.

Overall, Kiernan says, that makes Idaho one of the states most dependent on the federal government - as opposed to those liberal bastions such as California, New York or Illinois that send more money to Washington, D.C., than they ever get back.

And yet, Sens. Jim Risch and Mike Crapo, both R-Idaho, were among only 19 votes against the 2012 transportation bill. Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho, was among only 52 no votes in the House. How does that square with a state that gets about \$1.70 back in highway funding for every \$1 in fuel taxes it pays?

It must be an overdose of LSD.

Likewise all three opposed most versions of the farm bill - until a conference package settled the matter.

Sounds like LSD, doesn't it?

In the House, Labrador was among 106 supporters of the 2012 McClintock Amendment, which, had it passed, would have virtually shut down the INL and taken eastern Idaho's economy off the

cliff. That same year, Risch and Crapo were among 16 votes for Sen. Rand Paul's draconian budget cuts, which would have put the INL into a death spiral.

Too much LSD. Got to be.

Considering \$24 billion of federal money flows through Idaho's economy every year, why would any member of its congressional delegation vote to shut off the spigot? Yet Risch and Crapo were among 36 Senate votes to block the Murray-Ryan budget deal that spared the nation another government shutdown and debt ceiling crisis. In the House, Labrador was among only 94 votes to oppose the measure.

Not everybody is indulging in LSD.

Not 2nd District Congressman Mike Simpson, R-Idaho.

Not Washington Reps. Cathy McMorris Rodgers or Doc Hastings.

Not Sens. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, Dean Heller, R-Nev., Jon Tester, D-Mont., or Patty Murray, D-Wash.

Because they're willing to take the tough votes, Idahoans continue to rely on the dollars coming from wealthier states.

But there's a funny thing about LSD.

It's pulled a mind-altering trick on Idaho voters.

Risch, Crapo and Labrador pay no price for posturing and preening. All are assured of their party's renomination and probable re-election.

It's Simpson who is in the fight of his political life. The right wing of his party says Simpson isn't conservative enough. It wants to replace him in next month's GOP primary with someone who will vote to shut down the INL, fire Idaho's federal employees and puncture the federal pipeline feeding the state's economy.

Idaho is already 50th in per capita income, 50th in the amount of money it devotes to each child's education and second only to Tennessee in the share of its workers earning the minimum wage. Why would voters want to make Idaho's economy even worse?

It can only be one thing: Somehow, this LSD got in the water. - M.T.