

Say no; take dough

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to U.S. Sens. Mike Crapo and Jim Risch, and Congressman Raul Labrador, all R-Idaho. All three voted against the five-year, \$305 billion federal transportation package.

The fourth member of the state's congressional delegation, Republican Congressman Mike Simpson joined the massive majorities that passed the measure - and thereby ensured the flow of money toward Idaho's sprawling network of highways and bridges will continue.

"Funding for highways is some of the most important money appropriated on the federal level," Simpson said. "Idaho's economy depends on an efficient and affordable transportation system to move people and products across the country."

Isn't it stunning to think Simpson might have to defend his vote?

For a sparsely populated Western state, this money is an economic lifeline. During the past decade, Idaho has allocated \$5.1 billion toward transportation projects. The federal government has provided 52 percent of those dollars.

In other words, the people of New York, New Jersey, Illinois and California are subsidizing Idaho's highways. For every dollar Idahoans pay in federal fuel taxes, they get back \$1.94.

Can you imagine what those people must be thinking when they see the following:

- Crapo and Risch were among only 16 senators to oppose this must-pass package. And Idaho was the only state in which both of its U.S. senators voted no.
- In the House, 359 members voted yes. Only 65 House Republicans, including Labrador, said no.
- Among its neighbors, only Idaho saw a majority of its delegation oppose this package.

The delegations of Montana, Oregon, Washington and Wyoming voted unanimously for it.

Utah's six-member delegation split, half for, half against.

Only one of Nevada's four House members voted no. Both of its senators voted yes.

Crapo argues the package is financed on a rickety foundation that draws on sales from the strategic petroleum reserve, surplus Federal Reserve accounts and uncertain debt collections.

Crapo, Risch and Labrador can afford to take the political high road as long as others are willing to do the legislative heavy lifting. This is becoming a pattern among Idaho's delegation.

Traditionally, this behavior is dubbed "voting no and taking the dough."

Have you ever stopped to wonder what would happen if the rest of the country took them up on it and withheld Idaho's highway funding?

CHEERS ... to Clarkston Public Works Director Jim Martin. He's trying to get ahead of the curve.

Come January's switch-over, a majority of newly elected councilors is expected to end their predecessors' ban on legal marijuana retail operations within the city.

When they enacted their ban a year ago, the current council members also short-circuited the planning commission's retail zoning matrix.

Left unchecked, that blunder not only leaves the location of any pot stores entirely to the vagaries of state law, but there's a school of legal thought that says the council cast a cloud over the entire zoning ordinance.

Martin jump-started the process by directing the zoning panel to draft a proposal that incorporates recent changes in laws governing retail and medicinal marijuana outlets. It also sets in motion a series of procedures culminating in the new council adopting the measure at its Jan. 25 hearing.

That's taking initiative. Martin is not delaying the inevitable - an idea that so far has eluded the lame ducks at city hall.

JEERS ... to Lewiston Police Chief Chris Ankeny. For the second consecutive time, the city has declined this newspaper's request to learn the names of two cops who got wounded in an Oct. 21 shooting accident.

It occurred during a training exercise at the police department when one officer failed to properly use an indoor bullet trap. His handgun accidentally discharged, wounding him in the hand. A ricocheting bullet struck the second officer, also in the hand.

Ankeny has already conceded any private citizen wounded in a similar fashion at a shooting range would be identified.

And how's this for inconsistency? The department identified School Resource Officer David Gobbi in last month's shooting of a bull terrier named Mr. Chang at Sacajawea Junior High.

Don't discount the recent experience of Adams County Sheriff Ryan Zollman.

In a small town, Zollman found it impossible to conceal the identities of Deputies Cody Roland and Brian Wood, who were involved in the shooting death of Council rancher Jack Yantis.

Word gets around in a community Lewiston's size. Rest assured, people working in law enforcement, the courthouse, the medical community - not to mention some of the officers' acquaintances - have circulated the story.

If Chief Ankeny won't tell you who these officers are, your favorite waitress or barber just might.

JEERS ... to Washington state Auditor Troy Kelley. Ever since federal agents swooped in on his Tacoma home last March, he's been dodging and weaving.

As he was facing a 16-count indictment for fraud and tax evasion, Kelley came up with the idea of taking an unpaid leave of absence. Now he's back with a new twist: Since a bipartisan group of lawmakers intend to impeach him on the grounds that he "willfully abandoned his statewide elected office, performed none of its duties and provided no services to the people of the state of Washington since at least May 4, 2015," he's going to return to work.

He showed up Tuesday.

"If the Legislature would rather have me continue working as state auditor as I fight these unfair charges, I'm prepared and willing to do so," Kelley said.

That's pure fiction.

Nobody wanted Kelley to take a leave of absence.

From Gov. Jay Inslee on down, they all called on Kelley to do the right thing and resign outright - thereby avoiding the distraction and taint his legal battles would bring to an office that serves as Washington's public watchdog.

Kelley, who goes on trial in March, cites as his role models U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez, D-N.J., and former Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, who remained in office while fighting federal indictments.

That's lowering the bar, don't you think? - M.T.