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Simpson looks for more meth funds

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Congressman Mike Simpson's seat on the House Appropriations Committee might pay off for the Idaho Meth Project.

Simpson on Tuesday secured a \$1 million appropriation for the project in the fiscal year 2009 Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Bill.

But this is far from a done deal.

Congress generally sets its budget around Oct. 1, but most expect the process to be delayed until after this year's general election in November.

Still, Idaho Meth Project Executive Director Megan Ronk said the \$1 million would be a boon to a campaign that began this year and is based on a similar one in Montana.

Ronk estimated that it costs about \$2.4 million annually to run the project, which produces graphic radio, television and newspaper advertisements in hopes of keeping kids from trying methamphetamine.

Most of the money has come from private sources. The Idaho Legislature earmarked \$1 million in tobacco settlement funds for the project earlier this year. Ronk said the plan going forward is to tap all sources -- private, state and federal.

"For us, that is a model that will hopefully be sustainable into the future," she said.

Simpson won't go into the budget battle unarmed. Data shows that 45,000 television ads, 35,000 radio ads, 10,000 print impressions and 1,000 billboards made a huge impression in Montana between September 2005 and September 2007.

Montana dropped from fifth to 39th in the nation in meth abuse. Teen meth use declined by 45 percent. Adult meth use dropped by 72 percent. And meth-related crime declined by 62 percent.

Idaho has its own problems with the drug, which has resulted in a surge in the prison population. At the same time, meth use has stressed the state's welfare system.

All of which led to Simpson's actions Tuesday.

"The sad reality is that meth continues to rob too many Idahoans of their money, their futures and their lives," Simpson said in a news release. "I am hoping this infusion of federal funding will help the Idaho Meth Project impact the lives of more Idahoans in a positive way and turn them away from the life-sapping scourge of methamphetamine."

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Rep. mike simpson

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