House OKs final $162M Connecting Idaho installment

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BOISE -- House lawmakers voted 42-28 to sell $162 million in bonds for highway projects, the final installment in the hotly disputed $850 million "Connecting Idaho" roads program begun six years ago.

This money goes to two stretches of U.S. Highway 95 in northern Idaho near Sandpoint and Worley, as well as improvements to State Highway 16 to help connect Emmett to U.S. Interstate 84 in southwestern Idaho.

With now $65 million in annual debt service, Connecting Idaho has been disputed since then-Gov. Dirk Kempthorne in 2005 proposed selling bonds to construct roads more quickly than with annual appropriations.

Rep. Leon Smith of Twin Falls was critical again Monday, saying Kempthorne's brainchild is loved only by those lucky to get local projects funded with statewide taxes.

The bill goes to the Senate.