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**NEWS RELEASE**

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**Whiskey and Water in the American West**  
**by Senator Larry Craig**

Over the past several weeks, I have enjoyed spending time in Idaho with friends and family and celebrating the holidays. I have also enjoyed watching the rain, and more importantly, the snow continue to fall more regularly on nearly all of Idaho this winter.

It is rumored that author Mark Twain once said, “Whiskey is for drinking; water is for fighting over.” For generations of Westerners, this saying has been true. I’ve had my fair share of fights in the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate to protect Idaho’s right to control its water, and will continue to be vigilant in the future. But outside Congress, I have noticed a shift in recent years. Thankfully, folks are now starting to sit down to talk and work together to address the challenges presented by this scarce commodity.

We are all familiar with the drought Idaho has suffered through for the past five years, going on six. The last two years, Idaho agricultural producers have worried through unusually dry winters, only to be saved by unusually heavy spring rains. Those spring rains have provided our streams, lakes and reservoirs with just enough to get through the growing season, but not enough to ease drought conditions.

This winter has gotten off to a promising start, according to the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service, with precipitation totals well above average in every region of Idaho except the panhandle, which stands at 96 percent, as I write this. However, the winter isn’t over, and if our current snowpack stays at these same levels for the remainder of the season, we may be left praying for those late spring rains to save our farmers and ranchers once again.

Such is the nature of life in the West. The region we love is, in general, a dry one. In this day and age, water is becoming the scarce and precious commodity of highest value, not unlike the gold and silver that attracted settlers who came here more than a century ago. But a vital difference is that our water sources are a known quantity, and they are limited.

At the same time, the stream of people relocating to western cities and town is seemingly endless, and this is beginning to pose a very real challenge. In addition, recovery of endangered or threatened species such as salmon and steelhead have added complexity to the question of how our water is used.

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Much of our water infrastructure is aging rapidly or needs updating. Congress is also very concerned with reining in federal spending, and the Bush Administration has given clues that its budget requests for fiscal year 2007 will be a continuation of efforts to cut the federal budget deficit in half by 2009. This means a lean financial environment for water projects.

Because I am concerned about these issues and finding ways to address them, I serve as a member of the Board of Trustees for the Center for the New West, which recently concluded a conference titled “Water and the West – Meeting Supply Challenges Today and Beyond.”

This conference was held in Las Vegas, Nevada, a city whose very existence highlights the challenges of using and managing water in the West. Las Vegas is in the middle of a desert, but it is one of the fastest-growing cities in the United States. The West is growing rapidly and the growth does not always occur where water is abundant, so we face a huge obstacle in bringing water from where it is to where it is most needed.

The “Water and the West” meeting brought leaders from the public sector and private industry together to discuss important water issues and look for solutions that meet the needs of all water users. In many instances, some innovative solutions have been found, and conferences like this one allow new ideas and perspectives to be shared and applied on a broader basis.

We had a very productive and rewarding meeting this week, and I was proud to be a part of it. That being said, many problems still exist and will continue to spring up as the West continues to grow and change. Thanks to the Center for the New West, we can be sure that leaders from all walks of life will continue to work, not fight, for real water solutions.