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NEWS RELEASE

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Sharing Idaho with the World **by Senator Larry Craig**

They say practice makes perfect, so it makes sense for Idaho to host the Special Olympics Invitational Games this week for a practice run before the big event next February. It's a privilege for our beautiful state to host the 2009 World Winter Games, and I'm excited for what Idaho can share with the world, and what the world can share with Idaho.

This week, more than 500 athletes from four states and 11 different countries will be in Idaho to participate in the Winter Olympic "test games" at venues across the state, like Boise, Sun Valley and Tamarack Resort in Donnelly. These test games are a critical step to make sure all the bugs get worked out before the world's full attention becomes focused on Idaho.

A year from now, there will be approximately 3,000 athletes from over 85 countries converging on Idaho. Along with these athletes will be an impressive support crew, with literally hundreds of coaches and officials and thousands of volunteers and family members. Preparing Idaho for this challenge has been particularly difficult because of the compressed timeframe organizers have had to work under. After Sarajevo failed to meet the Game's demands, Idaho stepped up and accepted the challenge. Instead of having four years to prepare, Idaho only has 24 months.

To make these games a success, we need all Idahoans to pitch in. Congressman Mike Simpson and I were able to secure \$7.5 million in federal funding for the Games through our roles on the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, and many Idaho businesses have made generous contributions to help the Games raise the more than \$30 million they expect to need. Additionally, hundreds of Idahoans have volunteered to be host families for the athletes and to provide logistical support where needed. It's going to have to be a state-wide effort to make these Games shine.

It's fair to say these Games will put Idaho under the microscope, which isn't a bad thing at all. We know what Idaho has to offer, and like you, I can't wait to show off to the world what

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the Gem State is all about. The extra attention will bolster Idaho's reputation, and the estimated \$50 million in new economic activity is icing on the cake.

It isn't easy, and it isn't cheap, and there's still a long way to go, but I know that we'll get there. I'm confident they will be the best Winter Games the Special Olympics has ever seen, and that Idaho will be remembered as the greatest host the Games has ever had.

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