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NEWS RELEASE

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An Idaho Winter **by Senator Larry Craig**

It seems like years since I've woken up and looked out my window to find a fresh snowfall, for days on end. Many parts of Idaho are used to getting some snow, but this year has broken snowfall records, and I'm excited about what it means.

Yes, snow causes problems. There's shoveling, dangerous roads, trying to figure out what to do with the kids when schools close, and even damage and destruction of property. I was sad to hear that the community center in Cambridge, not far from where I grew up, had its roof fall in this week. And just last week, I read about some businesses in Rathdrum suffering the same fate. There is definitely some bad that comes with snow.

But there's also good that comes from a lot of white stuff on the ground -- especially in the mountains.

Idaho's winter resort towns are enjoying the snow. In fact, after the Castle Rock Fire outside of Ketchum this past summer, citizens in the Sun Valley area feared the worst. But winter has been good so far, and the bustling ski town is alive and thriving with business. Just last weekend, my wife Suzanne and I visited the annual Winter Carnival in McCall, and I'll tell you what -- more than five feet of snow and hundreds of people gathered around to see the brilliant ice sculptures tells the tale of winter success.

But the positive side of snow doesn't just mean a winter of fun and games in Idaho -- it can mean much-needed drought relief that will let us catch up for the last few years of severe drought, during which farmers, ranchers and private citizens have struggled to get water. Canals and ditches have gone dry, and fields have withered away. People have had to stop watering their yards in order to conserve water for more important uses.

Last year, the winter started off promising, with above-average snowpack in the mountains, but after a couple of months, it warmed up. By the end of the summer, 21 drought emergencies had been declared across Idaho.

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But already, this year looks different. We've had more snow on the ground since October than we've had in years. In fact, I hear Coeur d'Alene recently broke the record for its snowiest winter ever, passing the mark set in 1915-16. My hope is that this year we find our reservoirs full and our fields green and producing as a result.

Our farmers and ranchers aren't the only Idahoans who will benefit from this winter. Snow is also good for our forests and even for our yards and gardens. It protects the ground from freezing, which can result in damaging soil and roots, and it helps keep soil moist through the winter months. Once the snow has melted and spring is here, you may be surprised to see your plants are healthier and maybe even more colorful. I can't wait to see my garden this spring!

Spring is a ways away though. Last week, the world's most famous weatherman, Punxsutawney Phil, the groundhog, saw his shadow, forecasting six more weeks of winter. So take this time to enjoy the snow, because it may be years again before we have another winter like this one. I sure hope not!