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NEWS RELEASE

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Dan Whiting (202) 224-8078
Sid Smith (202) 224-8708

Not Just Anybody
by Senator Larry Craig

“It’s not only who you know, but what they think about you.” A friend of mine is very fond of pointing this out to people, and when you think about it, it’s often true. Just knowing someone isn’t always the key to a successful working relationship.

If there’s one thing I’m sure of, it’s that Governor Dirk Kempthorne thinks pretty highly of Idahoans and Westerners. And that’s a good thing, since he has been nominated to be the next Secretary of Interior. The person who leads the Department of Interior (DOI) plays a very large role in the lives of people in the West, and Dirk has firsthand experience with many of the issues that impact our region. I am confident he will draw on that experience to forge positive solutions to many of these challenges.

Since his nomination, Dirk and I have been working together to prepare for his nomination hearings before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. In returning to the Senate, Governor Kempthorne will be on familiar turf, seeing many places and faces that became familiar during his tenure as a senator from 1993 to 1999. A few things have changed, however, and I have been doing my best to bring him up to speed with the new personalities and dynamics within the Senate.

While his time in the Senate will be helpful, Dirk also has a solid list of accomplishments to draw upon as he makes his case for confirmation.

The reintroduction of wolves in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming has not been a popular project with ranchers and many outdoorsmen. However, Dirk has used the power of the Governor’s Office very effectively to make the best of the situation. He directed the Idaho Department of Fish and Game to develop a sound wolf-management plan that demonstrated the State of Idaho could be trusted to take over control of the wolfpacks from the federal government. It paid off, and now our state agencies, who operate among the very people they serve, have control over wolves in Idaho.

Through a collaborative approach, Dirk helped varied groups overcome difficulties and differences, resulting in a historic water rights settlement on the Snake River, and conservation agreements to restore the sage grouse and slickspot peppergrass without listing them as endangered species.

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When he was a colleague of mine in the Senate, he negotiated a significant revision of the Safe Drinking Water Act, and helped move Endangered Species Act reform much closer to reality. His most substantial legislative victory may have been the enactment of his “unfunded mandate” bill, which prohibited the federal government from requiring states to undertake new programs or regulations without providing the funding to do so.

These achievements and many more demonstrate that Dirk believes in accountability in government. Equally important, these achievements show that Dirk understands the values and experiences of the West, and that he will work on our behalf. And in doing that, he will seek to bring along as wide a variety of groups and voices as possible, so we all have a stake in success.

He will listen to mining interests, environmental groups, ranchers, hunters and anglers and more, and work with them all in good faith. These aren't just my beliefs; they are the facts, backed up by Dirk Kempthorne's strong record of public service.

It isn't enough to simply know influential people. What they think of you is important too. In the same way, it isn't enough to simply have an Idahoan at Interior; we need one who will represent us and our values well. Dirk Kempthorne is that Idahoan.