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# LARRY CRAIG

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NEWS RELEASE

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## **Live Long and Well** **by Senator Larry Craig**

“Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.” These words of Benjamin Franklin have gotten a lot of mileage since he first uttered them. While there is a lot of truth to them, we all know that staying healthy isn’t always as simple as getting plenty of rest.

The field of medicine is much more complex than that, and seems to grow more so each day. At the same time, health care costs continue their steady climb, taking an increasing bite out of the wallets of American workers. According to experts, \$1.9 trillion was spent in 2004 on health care costs. By 2015, it is estimated this figure will rise to \$4 trillion, doubling in less than a decade. Recognizing this dilemma, Congress and President Bush have taken action, but more remains to be done.

One of the actions we’ve already taken was to approve the Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit. While the program isn’t perfect, many of the problems seniors experienced when enrollment began last year have been resolved. Medicare Part D is doing what was intended: helping seniors afford their prescription drugs. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) calculates that 127,778 beneficiaries in Idaho now have prescription drug coverage, or about 66 percent. Nationwide, the average beneficiary will save \$1,100 on prescription drugs. To most people I know, that’s a pretty good chunk of money.

By the time you read this, the May 15 deadline to sign up for Medicare Part D may have passed. If you are eligible – if the deadline hasn’t passed, and you have not yet signed up – don’t hesitate any longer. There is a penalty for missing the deadline. Don’t leave money on the table. Take advantage of the savings and sign up now.

I am also cosponsoring several bills to address some other health care challenges that remain.

By some estimates, as many as 46 million Americans are without health insurance, and this has far-reaching implications. According to the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences, children and adults without insurance experience poorer health and die sooner. Health care providers and public health programs serving the uninsured can become financially unstable, forcing them to cut back services and capacity, and that hurts the insured as well.

To help more of the uninsured gain coverage, I am cosponsoring S.1955, commonly called the Small Business Health Plan bill. This legislation will give small businesses the same leverage with

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## **CRAIG Page 2 – Live Long and Well**

insurance companies as larger ones by allowing them to band together to negotiate coverage for their employees. An actuarial firm estimated that the bill will reduce the cost of health insurance for small businesses by about \$1,000 per employee. That will make it easier for businesses to provide coverage for workers.

An important part of maintaining good health is remaining physically active, and so I am cosponsoring S.772, the Workforce Health Improvement Program (WHIP) Act. This small measure eliminates the tax penalty for employers who support healthy behavior by employees and eliminates the tax penalty for employees who live healthy lifestyles. It allows employers and employees to deduct the cost of health club memberships or worksite fitness facilities from their gross income.

Two other measures I support are S.2424, which raises the limit on the amount workers can contribute to Health Savings accounts, and S. 2563, the Pharmacist Access and Recognition in Medicare (PHARM) Act. The PHARM Act requires Medicare to reimburse pharmacists in a timely fashion, which has been a problem in the past; allows consumers more flexibility in choosing pharmacists; and provides Medication Therapy Management Services, which help seniors understand how to appropriately use their medication, to live longer, healthier lives.

The costs of health care, whether they are visits to the doctor, medical tests, surgery or prescription drugs, continue to rise. I've only listed a few things that Congress and I are doing to bring these costs under control, so all Idahoans can lead healthy lives.

Some other less-famous words of Ben Franklin were "Wish not so much to live long as to live well." I'll keep working on health care issues in the United States Senate, so we can all do both – live long and well.