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LARRY CRAIG

NEWS RELEASE

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A Story for Graduates
by: Senator Larry Craig

It's that time of year when high school seniors take their final exams and get ready to walk down the aisle in their caps and gowns. It's graduation time, and it brings back memories of my high school commencement.

It was 1963. I was valedictorian of Midvale High School, and it was my duty to find our commencement speaker. I knew who I wanted to address my class, but never imagined he'd accept my invitation. To my surprise, he did.

I remember his message clearly. He pointed at me and my fellow graduates and said, "I never got a college degree – heck, I never got a high school diploma, but I don't hire anyone who doesn't have both!" Those words have stayed with me ever since.

That man was J.R. Simplot.

Happily, that day was not the last time I would meet "Mr. Spud." In fact, I had the privilege of working with him many times, both from my seat in the Idaho State Legislature and from the U.S. Congress. He was always a straight-shooter and excellent businessman, and I never walked out of a meeting with "Jack" where I didn't learn something.

His story is the American Dream – a young boy from Declo, Idaho, drops out of school, buys some hogs, works hard, catches a couple of lucky breaks, and builds an empire that affects the lives of so many. From potatoes to mining to fertilizer to Micron, J.R. Simplot seemed to have his hand in everything that is Idaho, and everything he touched seemed to succeed.

But that's not the reason I admired the man. Even with all his success, Mr. Simplot had his failures. The difference between many people and Jack, though, was his never-ending drive and determination to get up and do something again...and to do it better. It is his persistence in wrangling successes from failures that made J.R. the kind of man he was – the kind of man who never said "I can't" or "I give up."

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I will miss my friend Jack, but I will also celebrate his life and the example he set for us all. He is a legend, and no one has had a greater impact on the State of Idaho than J.R. Simplot. He was what every Idahoan should strive to become. Graduating high school seniors would do well to study the story of this incredible man. He did so much without a formal education, but even so, he always acknowledged the importance of earning that diploma.

And so to graduates in Idaho I say this – “Just imagine what you can do with one.” Good luck and God bless!