



UNITED STATES SENATOR * SERVING THE CITIZENS OF IDAHO

LARRY CRAIG

NEWS RELEASE

[HTTP://CRAIG.SENATE.GOV/PRESS/](http://craig.senate.gov/press/)

For Immediate Release
October 9, 2008

Susan Irby (202) 224-8078
Will Hart (208) 342-7985

Ensuring a World-Class Education in Rural Schools by Senator Larry Craig

Rural schools struggle daily with the challenges of being located in communities far off the beaten path, where too few students means combining multiple grades in the same classrooms, and too many parents have incomes disproportionately less than those in urban areas.

But something must be working: Many of our nation's outstanding scholars, jurists, presidents and athletes are the products of rural schools. The U.S. Department of Education, in a 1989 study noting the characteristics of National Merit scholars from rural schools, said, "The culture of rural areas and the environment of small schools produce rapport between teachers and students, greater involvement in school affairs, and closeness of families, all of which serve to contribute to their students' academic achievement."

Idaho's rural counties don't have the resources to spend a lot of money on education. They get some funding from the federal government, and somewhat more from the State government, but a significant amount of their funding comes from local property taxes.

Herein lies the problem: More than 60 percent of Idaho's land base is federally-owned and managed by the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. These 33.4 million acres cannot be taxed, so their counties face the decision of imposing higher property taxes on their residents or underfunding their schools.

To make up for some of the lost revenue, the federal government 100 years ago implemented several so-called "county payments" programs to reimburse rural counties, including one called "timber receipts," in which payments to counties are based on the amount of timber harvested on public lands within county borders. These payments are used specifically for road maintenance and construction, as well as for the support of rural schools.

[MORE]

Craig page 2 – Ensuring a World-Class Education in Rural Schools

The “timber receipts” program was working well for rural schools until the mid-1990s, when the Clinton Administration's environmental prohibitions were imposed on harvesting timber on public lands. Timber payments declined over 70 percent, squeezing rural schools funding.

I set out in 1999 to find a dependable federal funding stream to help ease the burden of rural schools’ strapped budgets due to timber sales losses and to provide the same financial resources and advantages to them as are enjoyed by their urban counterparts.

Joined by Oregon Senator Ron Wyden in 2000, I introduced the Craig/Wyden Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act, passed immediately by the Congress and signed into law by President Bush, which for the next six years restored stability and predictability to the annual payments made to rural counties. This law delivered as intended. It supplied rural communities with the resources needed to broaden their economies and provide their children with a high-quality education.

When the law expired in 2006, Congress balked at another multi-year extension, and rural counties had to make do with a one-year extension. When that expired, rural schools across America again were faced with impossible budgeting decisions. In Idaho alone, 120 teachers were about to lose their jobs, and more important, the education of our rural students was at risk.

Though Senator Wyden and I had successfully managed to shepherd another extension through the Senate several times between 2007 and 2008, the legislation could not clear the House of Representatives. At literally the 11th hour, and in what could be my final vote after 27 years in the Congress, we were able to include a four-year extension of county payments in the economic rescue bill which passed the Congress and was signed into law on Friday, October 3. What’s more, Idaho’s rural schools now will receive a 75 percent annual increase, for a total of \$210 million in funding over the next four years.

The goal of America’s public school system should be to provide every student with a world-class education. As one of ten students who graduated high school from a one-room schoolhouse in Idaho, I know how important that is. And I want that same education for my grandkids and all Idahoans for years to come.