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## **CRAIG SEEKS FULL FUNDING OF RURAL SCHOOLS ACT**

LEWISTON, IDAHO – Idaho Senator Larry Craig told Idaho County Commissioners here this week that despite the competitive budget climate in Washington, he hopes to secure full funding for the State’s schools covered under the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act.

Craig met with Commissioners and other officials from four north central counties Tuesday on the third day of the Senator’s ambitious six-day swing through Idaho to discuss issues critical to the State before the U.S. Senate returns to Washington on March 31<sup>st</sup> to tackle spending and other legislation.

In 2000, Craig co-authored the Secure Rural Schools Act, along with Oregon Senator Ron Wyden, to restore a stable, predictable funding stream for public schools in States and counties with significant portions of federal lands producing no property taxes. Annual payments to these schools have been hurt by the decline in timber harvests on public land. When sold, a percentage of the revenue from these harvests is directed to support rural schools.

Craig said that President Bush in his Fiscal Year 2009 budget recommended \$250 million to fund the so-called County Payments bill. “The challenge now is to find another quarter million dollars to fully reauthorize rural schools nationwide over the next five years,” Craig said. “The money is not yet in hand, but I’m encouraged by the number of my Senate colleagues and those in the Administration who agree that we must find a solution to give these unique rural schools the same funding advantages as those in urban areas.”

While Craig worked last year to secure a one-year authorization when Congress could not agree on full funding, he is seeking the five-year reauthorization again this year.

“The original Craig-Wyden law became a lifeline for our timber-dependent communities in 2000,” Craig said. “It has directly improved the lives of people in 700 counties, 4,400 school districts and nine million students nationwide. It also helps maintain 15,000 miles of roads. Letting this law die by not funding it is not an option for the country.”