



For Immediate Release
May 15, 2008

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SENATE COMMITTEE APPROVES COUNTY PAYMENTS, FIREFIGHTING FUNDS

WASHINGTON, D.C. – A \$400 million, one-year authorization of the county payments program which compensates public schools in States and counties with significant federal lands, was approved today by the Senate Appropriations Committee, according to Idaho Senator Larry Craig, a county payments program advocate and member of the committee. It is expected to be considered by the full Senate next week.

Craig, with Oregon Senator Ron Wyden, originally authored the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000, to establish a six-year payment formula for counties that receive revenue sharing payments for U.S. Forestry Service and Bureau of Land Management lands. The formula, based on timber receipts, provides a dedicated funding stream for rural schools which cannot collect property taxes – the schools’ primary source of funding – from national parks, U.S. forests and other public lands.

“Our rural schools cannot achieve their full potential if they do not know from year-to-year how much money they will have to pay teachers, provide school supplies, and operate and maintain school buildings and properties,” Craig said. “Rural schools must have the same funding certainties as schools in urban areas.”

Craig said that while the annual payments to rural schools have been hurt by the decline in timber harvests on public lands, the original Craig/Wyden 2000 Act has become a lifeline for 700 timber-dependent counties in 39 States like Idaho. “Not funding this law is not an option for the country,” he said.

In addition to the county payments funding, the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bill reported out of the full Appropriations Committee Thursday also contains \$450 million for national firefighting efforts which Craig said “is clearly vital to Idaho, coming off last year’s fire season.”