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CRAIG SEEKS EXTENSION OF COUNTY PAYMENTS PROGRAM

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Idaho Senator Larry Craig today reintroduced an amendment to the emergency supplemental appropriations bill to extend the county payments program. The one-year, \$400 million extension would secure funding for over 775 counties and 4,400 school districts across 42 states while Congress works on a multi-year solution.

The original Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000, co-authored by Craig and Oregon Senator Ron Wyden, established 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.

“Schools across the country are now making critical hiring decisions for the coming school year,” Craig said. “In Idaho, numerous school districts and potentially several hundred teachers are getting their termination notices because there simply is no money to hire or to continue to hire them. These districts need this money; it’s quite simple.”

Craig’s amendment would restore the county payments legislation to the emergency supplemental bill that was passed by the House of Representatives last week. In addition to war funding, the House-approved bill includes veterans’ provisions as well as disaster relief for flooding in the Midwest. The full Senate is expected to consider the legislation this week.

“In my state of Idaho we are dealing with a disaster in Clearwater County,” Craig said. “It isn’t flooding. It is a school district that is dramatically having to diminish the quality of education because Congress has not acted in a timely fashion. I call that an emergency. I call that a need to address the supplemental bill.”

Craig’s amendment is co-sponsored by Senators Mike Crapo of Idaho, Gordon Smith of Oregon, Pete Domenici of New Mexico, Ted Stevens and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Bob Bennett of Utah.