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NEWS RELEASE

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NEW DOWNWINDER BILL INCLUDES IDAHO, MONTANA

Crapo, Craig, Baucus, Tester sponsor bipartisan legislation

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Idaho Senators Mike Crapo and Larry Craig have been joined by Senators Max Baucus and Jon Tester on legislation that would make residents of Idaho and Montana eligible for a federal government program that compensates people who lived in affected areas downwind of the Nevada Test Site during periods of atmospheric nuclear testing and later contracted a specified compensable disease. The bipartisan legislation introduced today, S. 1917, would amend the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) to include all of Idaho and Montana.

Nuclear testing in Nevada during the 1950s and 1960s released radiation into the atmosphere that settled in states far away from the original test site. Researchers determined that certain elements of this fallout, such as the radioactive isotope Iodine-131, settled in states such as Idaho and Montana and found their way into food and milk supplies. Radioactive contamination can manifest itself as various forms of cancer, leukemia and other illnesses, particularly thyroid cancer. Those affected in this way are often referred to as “downwinders,” to denote their situation downwind from the fallout.

At present, these “downwinders” are now compensated only in parts of Utah, Nevada, and Arizona, although studies show Idaho and Montana received some of the highest doses of radioactive fallout from the Nevada tests. Discussions continue with representatives from other states about expanding the geographic boundaries for those eligible to be compensated under RECA.

“We will continue to push to include all of those who have suffered from exposure to radiation under RECA,” Crapo said. “This is a national issue and the fastest course to compensation for victims of atomic tests will come through the existing RECA program.”

“My colleagues and I are in the business of making Idahoans eligible for RECA compensation as expeditiously as possible,” Craig said. “Studies that take years will simply not do for citizens who would otherwise be eligible if they lived on the other side of a state or county line.”

The RECA act recognizes participants based on geography, but a report requested by Sen. Craig and released by The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) recommends Congress change RECA to base compensation on the medical history of applicants rather than their geographic location. The Senators say they want those eligible to be able to apply for compensation under the existing program while any alternatives are being framed.