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NEWS RELEASE

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Dan Whiting (202) 224-8078
Sid Smith (208) 342-7985

Mining the Future **by Senator Larry Craig**

Idaho was founded on mining. That is true of many states in the American West. Christian missionaries were often the first Europeans to visit many parts of the West, but it was mining that spurred the large-scale settlement of these places.

Idahoans are proud of that mining heritage, but the reasons for my support of the mining industry lie not just in its colorful past, but in the potential it holds for Idaho, and more importantly, for the nation.

Mining provides an economic foundation for hundreds of rural communities in America, usually paying well above average wages. State and local taxes paid by mining companies and miners themselves support our schools, help build our roads, and contribute to numerous programs and services that make these communities better places to live.

More directly, mining provides the materials that keep our economy running and growing. Personal computers, hybrid cars, airframes, mountain bikes, light bulbs, body armor used by our troops and police officers, the very building you're sitting in right now – none would be possible without materials provided by mining. Mining is also vital to our national security through the provision of strategic materials used for national defense purposes.

To paraphrase a bumper sticker popular with miners, if it isn't grown, it has to be mined. Throughout my career, I have worked to ensure that the U.S. economy maintains its ability to obtain valuable and useful minerals right here at home. As our population and economy grows, the demand for mined materials will only increase, not decrease.

That is why I am so concerned with the latest mining reform effort to emerge from the House of Representatives. We can all agree that the 1872 General Mining Act needs an overhaul to reflect the realities of today. That being said, several provisions in the House bill will only serve to strangle the U.S. mining industry, instead of change it.

In particular, the proposed 8 percent royalty on new and existing operations would be the highest in the world. It would practically eliminate profit margins for most operations, which in many cases are already razor-thin. Few disagree that a royalty is necessary, just as timber and oil companies and cattle ranchers pay a royalty for activities carried out on federal lands. But the mining royalty should be reasonable, and 8 percent is not.

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I also believe that sensible guidelines should be developed to rehabilitate abandoned mine lands scarred by past practices. I'm confident this can be done in a manner that protects our environment while allowing mining to remain profitable in the United States, where we have environmental protections. Congressman Rahall's bill, as it stands, does not achieve that balance.

The need to settle the West drove the formulation of the 1872 mining law. No one disputes the fact that such a need no longer exists. Change is necessary, but the need for minerals and miners remains strong. As reform efforts move through the Senate, I'll be working with my colleagues to make sure an honorable profession remains viable in the United States, because one thing isn't changing anytime soon – if it can't be grown, it has to be mined.