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NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release  
May 31, 2007

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## **No Passing the Buck on Passports** **by Senator Larry Craig**

Traveling can be a great experience. The planning, the packing, the anticipation of something new: sometimes just getting ready for the trip is half the fun.

Now, however, as you get ready for your next trip, I hope you will ask an important question so you won't risk spoiling the fun. Ask yourself, "Will I need a passport?" If the answer is "Yes," or even "Maybe," I strongly encourage you to look into the process of getting a passport right away.

Why all the urgency? On January 23, 2007, new travel regulations for U.S. citizens went into effect. Starting that day, all persons, whether U.S. citizens or not, were required to present a valid passport for air travel between the United States, Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Bermuda. And beginning January 1, 2008, a passport will be required for land or sea travel to these places as well.

So, before you tell yourself you don't need a passport, I urge you to think of the last time you took a trip to Mexico on vacation, or crossed the Canadian border at one of Idaho's two crossings. In the future, a driver's license and birth certificate will no longer be adequate identification for such a trip.

As you can imagine, these new requirements are prompting millions of Americans to apply for passports, and the processing facilities run by the U.S. Department of State are operating at or near full capacity. So, to help make the process easier and more efficient for all involved, I'd like to suggest a few guidelines. You can also find these and other helpful tips on the Department of State's website: <http://travel.state.gov>.

First of all, apply now – even if you're only thinking about a trip. State Department officials report that it currently takes at least 12 weeks and sometimes longer to receive your passport after you apply. That is up from the old response time of four to six weeks. You can pay an extra fee to have your application expedited, but even that can take four weeks or more.

To apply, you must have your documents in order. You must present: an "Application for Passport" Form DS-11; proof of U.S. citizenship (like a birth certificate); proof of your identity (such as a driver's license or military ID); two identical passport photos (many camera or drug stores can create them); any applicable fees; and a Social Security Number.

There are other guidelines for simply renewing your passport, changing your name, or other situations, so please visit the website to see for yourself.

The State Department's passport facilities and staff are processing more than 300,000 passport applications every week, which adds up to more than 1.2 million applications each month. Even if your trip is six months down the road, apply now, because the normal response time will eat up at least half that time, if not more.

Finally – and most important – if you are having any troubles with your passport being processed or if an emergency arises, call one of my six regional offices located throughout Idaho. Each office has staff members who are trained to help you through the process to a resolution.

Dealing with a federal agency can be a daunting task, and it can be difficult to know where to start. But I have always believed that government exists to serve the people, not burden them. If there is anything my staff and I can do, please let us know. We'll do all we can within the law so you can hit the road on time and enjoy that trip.