



# Mike Crapo

U.S. Senator

Idaho



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## **CRAPO, WYDEN WORK FOR IMPROVED PATIENT ACCESS TO HOSPITALS IN RURAL AREAS**

*Legislation introduced today eliminates bureaucratic barriers*

Washington, DC – Idaho Senator Mike Crapo joined with his colleague, Oregon Senator Ron Wyden to introduce legislation that would improve access to nearly 1,300 hospitals in rural areas around the country, including 26 in Idaho. The measure, The Critical Access Hospital Flexibility Act of 2009, provides hospitals who meet the critical access designation under Medicare with needed flexibility to deal with daily or seasonal fluctuations in the number of patients at a given hospital. Representative Greg Walden (R-Oregon) introduced the companion bill in the House of Representatives.

Crapo, who is the lead Republican on the bill and a member of the Senate Finance Committee, which has jurisdiction over Medicare issues, said, "Critical access hospitals are among the most important health care providers in rural communities around the country, many of which are in my home state of Idaho. This bill will give those hospitals the flexibility they need to provide high quality care and eliminate unnecessary and often costly hospital transfers. This bill also honors those who have served our country by guaranteeing care to veterans in these hospitals."

A critical access hospital (CAH) is certified to receive cost-based reimbursement from Medicare, which helps improve financial performance and minimize hospital closures. A hospital must meet a number of requirements to receive CAH designation, including being a licensed acute care hospital. It must be located in a rural area and must either be located over 35 miles from another hospital or be located 15 miles from another hospital in mountainous terrain or areas with only secondary roads, and cannot have more than 25 beds.

"Right now, when the 26th patient walks in the door, critical access hospitals are being asked to choose between their financial viability or their patient's health. That just doesn't make sense," said Wyden. "Folks in rural areas shouldn't have to jump through hoops to see a doctor any more than doctors should be pressured into turning patients away. This bill will help hospitals in rural, under-served areas – including some in my home state of Oregon – to serve their communities during public health emergencies."

This bill would allow increased flexibility for CAHs in measuring the patient census and 25-bed limit in a 12-month period. However, the bill would honor the original principles of the CAH program by limiting this designation to only very small, rural hospitals. In addition, the bill would exempt veterans from the daily inpatient bed limit.

The legislation has received support from the American Hospital Association as well as a number of state hospital associations, including the Idaho Hospital Association.

“Of Idaho’s 40 community acute care hospitals, 26 participate in the lifeline that is the Critical Access Hospital Program,” said Steven Millard, President of the Idaho Hospital Association. “Without this important component to community healthcare, many of these hospitals would no doubt have been forced to close their doors, or at the very least, cut critical services. By allowing community hospitals the flexibility to accommodate and treat patients during seasonal or other unexpected increases in patient census, Idahoans can get the quality treatment needed at their hometown hospital. We applaud Senators Crapo and Wyden’s support for community hospitals.”

Similar legislation was introduced in the previous Congress.

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