

Idaho Falls Post Register, Friday, May 23, 2008 – by Nick Draper

Risch talks health care

The lieutenant governor met with I.F. doctors and business leaders to discuss health-care fixes.

Using innovative techniques is one of the keys to solving the nation's health-care crisis, Lt. Gov. Jim Risch announced Thursday at a news conference. Risch, one of eight Republicans vying for Sen. Larry Craig's seat in Tuesday's upcoming primary, stopped in Idaho Falls on Thursday to discuss the rising health-care costs and potential solutions with local doctors and business leaders.

"We have the best health care in the world, (but) we don't have the cheapest health care in the world," Risch said. "It is a complex problem."

Risch spent the day with doctors from Mountain View Hospital and Melaleuca CEO Frank VanderSloot to learn how some eastern Idaho businesses are providing health care and helping cut costs. One area where they're making strides is in implementing an electronic records management system, Risch said.

Sometimes three doctors will each order the same test for a single patient without knowing it, Risch said, which just adds to that patient's final bill. An electronic records management system would dramatically reduce costs by creating a database that lists what tests -- along with results -- have been performed on a particular patient, said Risch, a former Boise lawyer who served more than 20 years in the Idaho Senate.

Doctors and lawyers typically are on opposite sides of policy issues, but Mountain View President Jeffrey Sayer had no qualms about endorsing Risch for the U.S. Senate on Thursday. "We're honored to host him and champion his cause," Sayer said. "Our doctors learned that he is one that will look out for them and their interests."

Risch said he was grateful for their support and for a chance to learn more about how health care is administered. "I'm truly learning and it was very helpful to get their input," he said. If elected, Risch said health care would be one of his top priorities behind making the Bush tax cuts permanent and working toward solving the nation's energy needs.