

# Idaho's Risch could become big ally of small businesses

*He may move into a position on U.S. Senate panel with aim to ease burden of federal regulations*

**William L. Spence/Lewiston Tribune**

WASHINGTON - Small businesses that are struggling with federal regulations could gain an ally in January if Idaho Sen. Jim Risch becomes chairman of the Senate Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee.

Risch, who is two years into his second term in the U.S. Senate, is the ranking Republican on the 19-member committee. The current chairman, Sen. David Vitter of Louisiana, announced last fall that he would not seek re-election when his term expires this year.

The committee has jurisdiction over the Small Business Administration, whose mission is to help Americans start and grow their businesses. It has a budget of about \$700 million and oversees a \$100 billion portfolio of small business loans and loan guarantees.

"It's pretty small dollars in the overall scheme of things, but it deals with a very important part of the economy," Risch said Thursday.

Like many Republicans - and Idahoans - Risch said he is concerned about "how intrusive the federal government has become with its rules and regulations."

While major corporations may have the resources to deal with these agency demands, he said, "if you're repairing lawn mowers in your garage, it's a big problem."

Should he take over as chairman of the committee, Risch said, a primary focus would be strengthening the SBA's Office of Advocacy, which is tasked with reviewing new bills and regulations and assessing their potential effect on small businesses.

During a Senate hearing Tuesday, for example, Tom Sullivan, a former attorney for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency who now heads up the Office of Advocacy, cited studies suggesting it costs small businesses almost \$12,000 per employee to comply with federal regulations - double the burden for larger firms.

"This disproportionate regulatory burden is even more pronounced for environmental regulations, where small firms bear over three times the costs per-employee, compared to their larger business competitors," Sullivan testified.

He noted that federal agencies are supposed to certify whether new regulations have a significant influence on small businesses, but those decisions often don't reflect reality.

The EPA, for example, certified that its "waters of the U.S." proposal would have no impact, even though it expands the agency's regulatory authority to include stock ponds, ditches and other water bodies located on private lands.

The Office of Advocacy objected, but "that's just treated like an inter-agency difference of opinion," Sullivan said. The office has no authority to force the EPA or any other agencies to re-evaluate their claims of no impact.

The office "doesn't have the power it needs," Risch said. As chairman, "my focus would be on ratcheting those people up."

Whether he actually secures the chairmanship, though, depends on Senate Republicans maintaining their majority. The party currently controls 54 seats, but 24 of those are up for election this year, including Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho. By comparison, just 10 Democratic seats will be contested, including Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash.

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