

IDAHO IS A FANTASTIC VISION FOR AMERICA

Guest column submitted by U.S. Senator Mike Crapo

Thank you to the approximately 4,000 Idahoans who attended the town meetings I held in every incorporated city in Idaho over the past two years. Your thoughtful insights reinforce my belief that the best solutions for good governing come from the ground up.

The angst in our country is clear. Much of this frustration is driven by decisions and politics in Washington, DC. I decided the best thing to do is to reach out to the entire state and listen, but not just listen in the traditional way, through emails, letters, meetings and calls, although these are all important. The best way to hear clearly from Idahoans all across the state is to get in a car and travel the state. This started about 22 months ago when I met with my staff and proposed the idea of visiting every town in Idaho. A member of my staff suggested starting with incorporated towns. We found that Idaho has exactly 200 incorporated towns.

The town meetings began in Moyie Springs up north at a sawmill listening to workers and town residents. Each town meeting has opened with the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag, and I shared graphics pertaining to our national debt. I learned that Idahoans share an interest in our nation's financial stability and do not want to see it become more debt laden, like Greece or Venezuela. When I began the town meetings, the nation was approaching \$18 trillion in debt. Today, the federal debt is nearly \$20 trillion, with no end in sight.

The handmade signs welcoming me to town were encouraging. I watched as Boy Scouts brought in the flag, as students in a government class got off the bus to attend my meeting. I enjoyed homemade cookies brought to the meetings and the smiles of mothers, fathers and little children. From Bear Lake to Lake Pend Oreille, Idaho is a fantastic vision for America. Idahoans are intelligent and engaged, and also worried—worried about maintaining jobs, worried about our kids, worried about where we are going as a country and worried we cannot afford where we are going.

The then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Admiral Michael Mullen made it clear 6 years ago in multiple interviews and speeches that the national debt is the biggest threat to our nation. I was expecting him to identify Iran getting a nuclear weapon as the biggest threat. But, his warning makes clear sense. The interest on our debt will eventually consume our budget and devastate our ability to pay for our national defense and social programs.

We have ways to fix it. I was a member of the Bowles-Simpson Commission appointed by the President, and the Senate's Gang of Six. We drafted plans to reduce spending and reform programs, including Medicare and Social Security, headed for insolvency. Idahoans told me they are interested in seeing these ideas get a wider discussion. But, Washington seemingly is not listening. We have breakthroughs with bipartisan legislation:

- For example, I served as the lead Republican sponsor in the bipartisan renewal of the **Violence Against Women Act**, improving access to domestic violence assistance;
- I worked across the aisle to enact **Trevor's Law**, strengthening federal coordination in investigating potential cancer "clusters";
- Bipartisanship has been essential for the enactment and implementation of the **Owyhee Initiative** legislation I championed that utilized collaborative solutions to natural resources challenges; and more.

But, bipartisan breakthroughs are too few and far between. Visiting all 200 incorporated towns made clear that there is no better place to get national direction than here in Idaho where sensibility prevails.