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Critchfield Issues Statement Following the Death of Former Idaho Senator Carl Crabtree

(BOISE) – Superintendent of Public Instruction Debbie Critchfield issued the following statement after the death of former Idaho Senator Carl Crabtree on Tuesday, May 6. Crabtree represented District 7 for three terms in the Idaho Senate between 2016 and 2022. He joined the Idaho Department of Education in 2023 and served most recently as the department’s director of intergovernmental affairs. His role included work with the Idaho Land Board and members of the state legislature.

As a legislator, Crabtree was a fierce advocate for Idaho students and K-12 public schools. He championed causes that included early literacy and all-day kindergarten. In 2022, he was instrumental in passing legislation that provided supports to students with dyslexia. House Bill 731 implemented statewide screenings for dyslexic students and provided educators with dyslexia-focused training. The Idaho School Boards Association honored Crabtree with its annual “Friend of Education” distinction that year.

A proud graduate of the University of Idaho, Crabtree was also an advocate for higher education. In 2023, Lewis-Clark State College honored him with the President’s Medallion award for “significantly impacting the college by demonstrating high personal and professional standards, commitment to lifelong learning and the positive difference education makes to individuals, families and communities.”

Crabtree, of Grangeville, was a rancher and served in several capacities with state and national cattle industry organizations. In 2007, he was named Beef Magazine’s Trailblazer of the Year. He was a former University of Idaho extension agent and oversaw 4-H programs in his county for nearly three decades.

Crabtree successfully fought esophageal cancer after a diagnosis in 2022. He died in Boise following a recent battle with brain cancer.

Today, I lost one of my dearest friends and Idaho lost a true champion. Carl Crabtree was more than a colleague—he was a cowboy at heart, a fierce advocate for education and a man whose integrity shaped everything he touched. Carl’s passion for serving Idaho’s students and families never wavered, even in the face of his personal battle with cancer. From his work championing early literacy and dyslexia resources to his tireless efforts supporting educators, Carl’s legacy will live on in the lives he changed.

Carl was one of the most genuine, hardworking and kind-hearted people I’ve ever known. He was a cowboy through and through—steadfast, loyal and full of grit. While I mourn the passing of my dear friend, I am deeply grateful for the time we shared.

- Idaho Superintendent of Public Instruction Debbie Critchfield

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