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Republicans and Democrats United over Worker Safety Community Leaders Come Together for Signing of SB 159

SALT LAKE CITY, April 12, 2005—Governor Jon Huntsman, Jr. joined with Democratic Senator Ed Mayne, Republican Representative Roger Barrus, and others for the signing of Senate Bill 159 on Friday, April 8. The signing is a symbol of bipartisan partnership that will benefit workers in Utah and nationwide. SB 159 provides a way for continued funding of the Rocky Mountain Center for Occupational and Environmental Health (RMC), one of only 16 centers in the U.S. conducting critical education, care and research for worker health and safety across the country.

As part of the University of Utah School of Medicine, the RMC is an internationally recognized research, teaching and continuing education facility recognized by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. Its programs in occupational medicine, industrial hygiene, hazardous materials control, and ergonomics and safety contribute locally to Utah's safe working environment, comparatively low injury and illness rates, attractive workers' compensation rates, and acclaimed reputation for research.

For more than 25 years, the RMC has operated on funding from state appropriations and federal grants, but state funding had dwindled in recent years and the future of the RMC became uncertain. With the passage of SB 159, there is now an alternate source of funding, as self-insured companies and carriers who write workers' compensation insurance can voluntarily contribute to the Rocky Mountain Center. In return, donors receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for the contribution against their premium tax assessment. Donations are capped at an amount equal to 0.1% of their premium.

"We appreciate the bipartisan and business community support given to SB 159," says bill sponsor Senator Mayne. "All parties have come together to enable the Rocky Mountain Center to continue, which will benefit Utah's economy and workplace safety."

Also attending the signing were Clark Richards and C. David Richards, M.D., representing the Dr. Paul S. Richards Foundation. Dr. Paul S. Richards, "Dr. Paul," was a twentieth century, Utah pioneer in occupational medicine and workplace safety. He was among the first to recognize the relationship between silica exposure in the mines and lung disease, pneumonia and other illnesses. Dr. Paul was instrumental in bringing about Utah's first Occupational Disease Disability Act in 1941. This led the way for further laws protecting workers from occupational illness and hazard. Dr. Paul made a tremendous contribution to Utahns as he headed the Bingham Canyon hospital for more than 25 years, caring for workers and townspeople alike.

But there's more to the event than meets the eye. The bill signing snapshots capture the far-reaching legacy of Dr. Paul. Among Dr. Paul's many accomplishments is a tale of professional compassion. While overseeing the Bingham Canyon hospital, he took in and helped raise a local boy whose mother had died and whose father was unable to care for the child. That young man was "Red" Mayne. Red later named his own son after the kind physician who took him in, calling his son Edward Paul Mayne. This son grew up to be AFL-CIO President and State Senator Ed Mayne, who invited his father to the signing of SB 159 especially to meet with Dr. Richards' family.

"Dr. Richards' tireless commitment to serving others has had a lasting impact on my family, as well as laborers across the country. The Rocky Mountain Center is likewise committed to improving lives, and it is a privilege to be connected to so many involved in the cause of protecting workers from harm and illness," says Senator Mayne.

Established in 1977 to meet the need for a comprehensive occupational and environmental health and safety program in the Intermountain West, the RMC offers master and PhD programs; provides in-depth continuing

education courses; and conducts research and service programs in occupational medicine, industrial hygiene, ergonomics and safety, injury prevention, and hazardous materials control. Over 50 percent of the more than 330 graduates of the RMC's academic program remain in Utah. Approximately 80 percent of the 2,600 health and safety professionals in the Center's continuing education courses each year are from Utah. For more information on the RMC's programs and contributions, please contact Dr. Kurt Hegmann, RMC Director, at 801-581-4800.

Salt Lake City-based Workers Compensation Fund (WCF) is Utah's premier workers' compensation insurance provider, promoting workplace safety to more than 30,000 Utah companies. Established in 1917, WCF is a mutual insurance company owned by its policyholders and governed by a board of directors. WCF offers its customers a variety of services including safety and loss control, claims administration, medical case management, vocational rehabilitation, and fraud investigations. WCF is rated A- (Excellent) by the A.M. Best Company.

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