

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington February 7, 2003

PROTECTING OUR SAFETY AND ECONOMIC SECURITY

On Monday, I had the opportunity to help demonstrate a new security initiative to protect our ports, our citizens, and our economy. Along with representatives of the TSA, Coast Guard, Customs and the Ports of Seattle and Tacoma, I demonstrated how new electronic tracking devices help authorities track containers entering U.S. Ports

The majority of post-September 11th security improvements have focused on our airports and borders, but an incident at one of our ports would have terrible consequences. That's why as Chair of the Senate Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee, I wrote and funded a pilot program called Operation Safe Commerce to help improve cargo security. This program enables U.S.-bound containers that are inspected overseas to be electronically sealed and tracked through a U.S. port and on to their final destinations.

In Washington state, seaports are the lifeblood of our region's economy. Our ports move billions of dollars of goods each year and generate tens of thousands of good-paying, family-wage jobs across our state. Improving security without undermining efficiency is critical to the economic health of our region.

The security initiative that I helped demonstrate on Monday will allow our nation's three largest port regions -- including Seattle and Tacoma -- to know more about what is inside the 6 million containers entering these ports annually and will help lay the foundation for a new national port security system and help make both our region and our nation safer.

ASBESTOS: STILL NOT BANNED, STILL NOT SAFE

On Thursday, I spoke on the floor of the U.S. Senate about the public health dangers of asbestos-tainted insulation called Zonolite. There are between 15 and 35 million homes, schools and businesses in America that still contain this hazardous substance, including many in Washington state.

I shared with my colleagues the story of a Spokane couple whose American dream was shattered by the discovery of Zonolite in their home. Ralph Busch and his wife Donna bought a house in Spokane and spent many nights and weekends making repairs and renovations. Then, one day, Ralph came across a newspaper article about the dangers of asbestos-tainted Zonolite insulation and realized that this deadly substance was in his own home.

Eventually, the couple was forced to abandon their dream home, incur financial loss, and fear the long term health problems they may suffer as a result of their exposure to asbestos fibers in the insulation.

Last year the EPA developed a plan to warn homeowners of the dangers of Zonolite insulation. But, internal emails and investigative reports reveal that the White House Office of Management and Budget intervened to kill the plan. If there is a role for government in people's lives, it should include protecting the public health of citizens like Ralph Busch and his wife.

We must end this failure to protect public health from the dangers of asbestos. I would hope this Administration shares my commitment to ending the shameful legacy of inadequate protections against dangers posed by asbestos.

For more information about asbestos, including the investigative report, and my legislation to ban asbestos in America, go to <http://murray.senate.gov/asbestos.html>

A GOODBYE TO SEVEN HEROES

Like all Americans, I was deeply saddened to learn of the loss of the seven Columbia astronauts who selflessly served our country and pursued scientific discovery for the benefit of all human kind.

On Tuesday, I had the great honor of sharing with my Senate colleagues the stories of two members of this amazing crew with strong ties to Washington state, Columbia pilot William McCool and Columbia Payload Commander Michael Anderson. Both of these heroes touched lives in Washington state, both were pillars in their communities, and both were much-loved family members.

Willie McCool served two tours at Naval Air Station Whidbey where he was a role model to young flyers. He and his family lived in Anacortes and Willie's appreciation for the local community was with him in the form of a Douglas Fir Cone from the Little Cranberry Lake area that he brought aboard the shuttle.

Michael Anderson considered Spokane his hometown and in May of 1998 he returned to his alma matter, Cheney High School, to share his experiences with students and return a school pennant that he had taken with him into space.

Willie McCool, Michael Anderson, and all of our Columbia astronauts gave their lives in service and exploration. We grieve with their families and honor their spirit by ensuring that space exploration and discovery go forward.

To subscribe, unsubscribe, or change your email address, visit: <http://murray.senate.gov/signup.html>