

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington March 21, 2003

WAR IN IRAQ

On Wednesday night we learned that the President had ordered the attack on Iraq. I made the following statement on the Senate floor before voting in favor of a Senate resolution supporting our troops.

The President has now started an operation that we had all hoped to avoid. Now that battle has begun, we must win the war and win the peace.

There has been considerable disagreement leading up to this moment - in this chamber, in this country, and throughout the world. Many people have very strong feelings about the military operation in Iraq, and they have expressed those feelings. The debate has been vigorous. But now that American forces are in combat, our soldiers should not doubt our support for them.

We stand firmly behind the men and women of our military. They have volunteered to serve their country. We are proud of their service, and we admire their courage. During this difficult time, our thoughts and prayers are with them and the families who await their return.

My state of Washington is home to thousands of soldiers, sailors and airmen. I have had the privilege of meeting many of them – at Fort Lewis, Fairchild Air Force Base, McChord Air Force base, Whidbey Naval Air Station, the Yakima Training Center, Everett Naval Station, Bremerton Naval Station, the Bangor Sub base, and at our Coast Guard stations.

Some of Washington State's finest are now serving in the Middle East and may be seeing combat. I have no doubt they will distinguish themselves in carrying out their missions.

Many of these soldiers have family back in Washington State. Throughout my state and across the nation, families are anxious, knowing that their loved ones are in military action.

We take comfort in knowing that America's soldiers are the best-trained, best-equipped, and most capable fighting force the world has ever known. They will carry out this dangerous mission, and they will prevail. We are proud of their dedication and courage, and we all pray for their safe and swift return.

AMERICAN EX-POWs AWARD

On Thursday I proudly accepted the "Barbed Wire" award as the Legislator of the Year from the American Ex-Prisoners of War. The award noted my work on veterans' issues, including legislation to improve veterans' health care, to provide honor guards at the veterans' funerals, and to require the V.A. to assist veterans with benefits claims.

During my remarks I remembered Fran Agnes, a Washington state veteran who recently passed away, and who served as National Commander of the American Ex-POWs. Fran was a champion for ex-POWs and for veterans who will be dearly missed.

I will continue to stand up for our men and women in uniform while they are serving and after they come home.

THE 2004 BUDGET

This week the Senate debated the 2004 budget which lays out the federal priorities for the coming year. Many people have raised concerns about the large new tax cut (\$725 billion), especially when the federal government is now running huge deficits, and when Congress has not yet budgeted for the costs of the war in Iraq.

I was proud to speak on the Senate floor to support protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Fortunately, we prevailed in stopping an effort to open up that pristine wilderness area to new drilling and oil exploration.

I offered several amendments to the budget to meet important priorities. My amendment to fully fund the bipartisan "No Child Left Behind" law was defeated 50-48. Two other amendments - one to increase funding for firefighters and police and another to increase funding for federal highway and transit programs - are still pending.

As this week's newsletter goes to press, the Senate is still debating the budget, so we do not know what the final outcome will be. I'll let you know next week.

HOW TO SUPPORT OUR TROOPS

Many people are asking how they can show their support for our service members. In the past, Americans could send a letter or care package to "Any Service Member." Because of security and transportation concerns, however, the Pentagon has suspended delivery of letters or care packages addressed to "Any Service Member." Here are other ways to show your support:

- Donate a long distance calling card to help keep service members in touch with their families at Operation Uplink at <http://www.operationuplink.org/>
- Send a greeting via e-mail through Operation Dear Abby at <http://anyservicemember.navy.mil/> or www.OperationDearAbby.net
- Sign a virtual thank you card at the Defend America Web site at <http://www.defendamerica.mil/nmam.html>
- Donate to "Operation USO Care Package" at <http://www.usometrodc.org/care.html>
- Support the American Red Cross Armed Forces Emergency Services at <http://www.redcross.org/services/afes/>

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