

# PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – April 29, 2005

## Bad Budget for Our State and Nation

As a member of the Senate Budget Committee, I know a budget is always a statement of priorities. Since President Bush forwarded his budget to Congress in February, I've been fighting as a member of the Senate Budget Committee to win back the investments our state needs to stay strong.

For example, I attempted in committee and on the Senate floor to introduce an amendment to fully fund the cost of veterans' health care, and an amendment to restore cuts to 48 education programs either cut or eliminated in the president's budget. I've also repeatedly spoken out against arbitrary and damaging cuts to Medicaid, our nation's largest provider of healthcare coverage to poor children. And last night, just before a vote on the Republican budget resolution for 2006, I spoke on the Senate floor about my various concerns with what I feel is a shortsighted budget that pursues the wrong priorities.

Unfortunately, not only have my attempts to do the right thing been rejected on repeated party-line votes, but the Republican majority has decided that more war-time tax cuts are a higher priority than taking care of our veterans', educating our children, and providing healthcare to the most vulnerable among us. In passing their \$2.57 trillion budget, the Republicans have indeed made it clear what their priorities are. In refusing to allow Democrats any input in the conference to finalize the budget, they have put a partisan political power grab ahead of what's best for our nation.

In addition to failing our future and existing veterans, and letting down working-poor families by slashing Medicaid by \$10 billion, this budget saddles our children with a massive \$382 billion deficit while opting to hand out \$106 million more in tax cuts. While this budget is nonbinding, it sets our priorities for the coming year, and I'm disappointed that Republicans in the White House and Congress have chosen to shortchange Americans in so many critical areas

*Read my floor statement outlining my budget priorities:*  
<http://www.murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=237101>

## Don't "Nuke" Checks and Balances

Extremists have declared war on our nation's judiciary – from demanding retribution for recent decisions that lawmakers disagree with to suggesting impeachment for judges who don't toe the party line. What's so concerning about this recent rhetorical assault is that it's being backed by action – action that has nothing to do with judges and everything to do with increasing Republican power at the expense of the Constitution. This becomes clear when we consider that:

- The Senate has **confirmed 95%** of President Bush's 206 judicial nominees.
- This is the **best confirmation rate** since President Reagan.
- Today, **95% of federal judicial seats are filled**, the lowest number of vacancies in 13 years.
- There are **now more federal judges** than ever before.
- In three years, we have **stopped just ten nominees** whose records raise the highest questions about their abilities to meet fairness standards all Americans expect.

But now, in an effort to force extremist judges on the American people, Senate Republicans are trying to increase their power by ignoring rules dating to our country's founding. They want to push through radical judicial

nominees who will serve a lifetime on the bench by eliminating a two-hundred-year-old Senate rule allowing each of us in the Senate to speak on behalf our constituents and fight for the ideals we hold dear. This is, plain and simply, a power grab and an effort to dismantle the system of checks and balances our Founding Fathers created. Without that system, the U.S. Senate would become a rubber stamp for the president – and the extreme policies of some of his nominees.

Over the past weeks I have spoken up against this power-grab. I've addressed the Senate on the subject twice in the past two weeks, and last week I also wrote to the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* about protecting the checks and balances that are vital to our democracy.

*Read my full Senate floor statement, and my Seattle Post-Intelligencer op-ed in opposition to the nuclear option:*  
<http://www.murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=236554>

## Helping Our Children Graduate

As a former pre-school teacher, one of my highest priorities is helping our children finish school and enter the workforce or college prepared to succeed. That's why I authored my Pathways for All Students to Succeed (PASS) Act, which provides critical resources to fund innovative reform in high schools across the country. My PASS Act helps schools by providing resources to:

- Hire **literacy and math coaches**;
- Provide **high-quality academic counselors**;
- Target **high schools that need the most help**; and
- Collect **data needed to track students' progress**.

I first introduced the PASS two years ago, and, on Wednesday, I reintroduced this important legislation in the Senate. I know the success of our high schools has very real consequences for our communities, our workforce and our economy. For too many students, graduation and college seem out of reach. My PASS Act provides the tools our schools need to reach these students earlier and put them on a track to graduate, and I'm going to work hard to get it passed into law.

*Get the full details and read a summary of my PASS Act:*  
<http://murray.senate.gov/pass>

## Great News for Our Apple Industry

This week brought great news for our state's apple industry. Taiwan announced the reopening of its borders to U.S. apple imports after remaining closed for nearly five months. Earlier this month, I joined several of my Senate colleagues from the Northwest in sending a letter to the Taiwanese government calling for immediate reopening of the borders. The closure has been devastating for our producers, and I'm pleased that our efforts to finally regain access to this important market were successful.

Taiwan closed its markets to U.S. apple imports in December 2004, following the discovery of codling moth larvae in a shipment from Oregon. Under a 2003 trade agreement, the U.S. is required to suspend apple exports to Taiwan if three cases of codling moth are found within one year. The insect has the potential to devastate apple and pear crops. The December incident marked the third case, following separate discoveries in September and October.

Taiwan is a valued trading partner, accounting for over \$47 million in Washington state apple exports each year. Regaining access to this important market is critical for our state's producers. While I hope any future conflict can be resolved in a timelier manner, I applaud U.S. and Taiwanese representatives from both government and industry for finally reaching an agreement.

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