

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – February 3, 2006

Coretta Scott King

With the death of Coretta Scott King, we have lost a strong and dignified voice for a better America. Despite great personal loss, she remained committed to the belief that our common values of liberty and equality leave no room for discrimination of any kind. While we mourn her passing, we must remember that the movement she championed is never finished. We can all honor her legacy by continuing to fight for freedom, equal justice and tolerance.

State of the Union

As I listened to the President's address to the nation on Tuesday, I felt a real disconnect between his priorities and the challenges facing working families in Washington state, Americans across our country, and those fighting for our freedom abroad.

We all want America to be strong and that means we must invest in our people and in our infrastructure. What the President said this week matters much less than what he does next week when he sends his budget to Congress. That budget is a document of values, and it will tell us if he is investing in the future of America or just giving us more of the same.

That is why on Wednesday I sent a letter to the President urging him to properly fund the priorities of Washington state residents and America's working families in his fiscal year 2007 budget. Some of the priorities I believe the President must key investments in include:

Veterans Health Care

I join the President in applauding the service and sacrifice of our men and women in uniform. But I was deeply disappointed that he never once mentioned our promise to our veterans in his State of the Union address. Last year the President submitted a budget to Congress that woefully under-funded services for our veterans. After fighting for months, the Administration finally admitted its shortfall, and we were forced to pay for a deficit in VA funds with emergency spending. The Administration must learn from this experience and provide the resources for the VA to meet current and future demands for quality, affordable care. Our veterans deserve nothing less.

Hanford Clean Up

I applaud the President's new commitment to alternative energy options. But before we start creating more nuclear waste, we need to clean up the waste we have at sites like Hanford. Cleaning up Hanford is a national obligation. The Department of Energy's Environmental Management budget request should be at a level equal to the challenge. The tank farms, waste treatment plant and river corridor closure are all examples of ongoing projects that need adequate funding to be cleaned up and comply with the Tri-Party Agreement. We cannot afford a repeat of last year's low budget request. It is time to get Hanford cleanup back on track.

Port Security

The Commandant of the Coast Guard has said it would take \$7.3 billion over 10 years to properly secure the 361 port facilities across the country. Unfortunately, the President has requested only \$46 million in port security grants since September 11th, 2001. In fact, last year's budget request would have eliminated the port security grant program entirely. Fortunately, Congress has consistently provided

funding and support for this critical program. It is time for the Administration to join Congress in recognizing that port security is vital to ensuring the safety and security of our communities and our economy.

Student Loans

This year \$12.7 billion will be cut from student loans that help low and middle income families pay for college. As tuition and fees continue to rise, cutting student loans is not only the wrong priority for our nation today, but it will cost us dearly in the quality of our society and our ability to compete globally the long-term. I urge the President to invest in education at all levels and to help break down the barriers to a college education within his budget, not build them up.

For more on Senator Murray's letter to the President:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=251039>

Protecting our Most Vulnerable

Yesterday, I spoke on the floor of the U.S. Senate in favor of the Murray/Bingaman/Rockefeller amendment that we introduced to try and fix the flawed Medicare Prescription Drug law for our most vulnerable residents. As I've traveled around Washington state, I've heard about confusion and frustration surrounding the implementation of this new law – which I voted against. But I am most concerned about how this law impacts low-income seniors and the disabled who rely on both Medicare and Medicaid. These “dually eligible” people are falling through the cracks, being denied access to life saving drugs and are being further burdened by new co-pays that they just can't afford. The Murray/Bingaman/Rockefeller amendment, known as the REPAIR amendment would ensure that:

- Low-income seniors and the disabled who rely on both Medicare and Medicaid – known as dually eligible - are ensured a 30 day supply of life saving drugs regardless of any communication, data exchange problem;
- States, pharmacies and beneficiaries who have had to provide coverage to those who have fallen through the cracks, receive just and fair reimbursement; and
- That if individuals are eligible today for Medicaid and Medicare, they are assumed eligible at the drug store.

In 2003, Congress promised access to affordable prescription drug coverage. Unfortunately for too many of our residents, this is not what they're getting. We now have an obligation to address the immediate crisis for those who have the fewest options.

For more on the REPAIR amendment:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=251133>

New Protections for Hanford Workers

Yesterday we got some good news for Hanford workers. After working with my colleagues to push for new regulations, the Department of Energy has issued new rules that will raise worker safety and health standards for some workers at the Hanford Nuclear facility and other sites around the country. Until now, contractors around the country got to set their own rules for worker health and safety with inadequate oversight or enforcement. I am pleased that now all-non nuclear workers will be protected as well.

Go Hawks!

I am excited to be home in Seattle this weekend to celebrate with the best fans on earth, wearing my 12th man pin and waiting for Sen. Santorum of Pennsylvania to deliver pierogies when his Steelers lose. Hawks fans are going to have a game to remember for generations with victory this Super Bowl Sunday. Go Hawks!

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