

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – March 10, 2006

Making the Case for Improved Port Security

We still don't know what yesterday's announcement by Dubai Ports World (that it will transfer the leases of six American ports to another entity) means for the future operations of these ports. Considering the lack of scrutiny and general mismanagement of the lease deal to this point, we need to continue to proceed with caution.

But while we don't yet know enough about what the announcement means, we do know that there are gaping holes in cargo and port security that need to be plugged.

America can't afford to outsource the security of our ports. The safety of our citizens and the strength of our economy are the most important responsibility of the United States government. And our government must begin to take that responsibility seriously.

I urge the Administration and Congress to take a serious look at the GreenLane Maritime Cargo Security Act that I have introduced with Senator Susan Collins of Maine. The GreenLane bill develops a cargo security system that closes vulnerabilities, provides a way to resume trade after an incident, and maintains the efficient flow of commerce. I believe that we can move ahead with this legislation this year.

The GreenLane bill improves security by establishing:

- The GreenLane, comprised of supply chain participants who voluntarily meet the highest level of security, allows our security services to better identify and respond to potential threats and provides real incentives to importers to enhance their supply chain security measures.
- Minimum security standards for all cargo containers entering the U.S. and requirements that strengthen current cargo security programs.
- The Office of Cargo Security Policy to ensure accountability and coordination of cargo security policies, procedures & regulations at the Department of Homeland Security and with other agencies.
- Joint Operations Centers to ensure a coordinated, measured response and the resumption and flow of commerce in the event of an incident or heightened national security threat level.
- The Act also Authorizes Port Security Grants, the Container Security Initiative and C-TPAT.

For more on GreenLane:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=252001>

Working to Protect Veterans from Unfair Fees and Co-Pays

Last month, President Bush submitted a fiscal year 2007 budget proposal that included increased fees and co-pays meant to dissuade veterans from accessing VA care. In fact, according to the VA, the President's plan would discourage more than 200,000 veterans from accessing care and would discourage another 1.1 million from enrolling in the VA healthcare system at all.

When our soldiers sign up to serve us, we don't tell them that their benefits are based on their future incomes – but that is exactly what the President's budget does.

Unfortunately, this week Republicans on the Senate Budget Committee offered a budget proposal that largely mirrors the President's misguided request. I believe our veterans deserve better and that's why, as a member of the Committee, I tried to improve the upcoming federal budget and eliminate these unfair fees and co-pays.

My amendment, which would have eliminated the fees and co-pays and boosted the federal investment in veterans' care and services by \$1.5 billion, was defeated on a straight party-line vote. All eleven Republicans on the Committee voted against my plan. It is disappointing that Senate Republicans have instead endorsed a White House plan that increases barriers to veterans care rather than fulfilling a solemn promise to care for those who have sacrificed to serve our country.

My amendment would have addressed some of the biggest challenges facing our veterans, including transition assistance for Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans and increased assistance for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other mental health challenges.

Specifically, my amendment, which would have been paid for by closing corporate tax loopholes would:

- **Help more Iraq War veterans make the transition home** by providing \$231 million for transition assistance.
- **Increase Support for PTSD and Mental Healthcare** by providing an additional \$321 million. A recent study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* reported that 35 percent of Iraq veterans received mental health care during their first year home.
- **Expand Veteran Support Clinics** by providing \$81 million to expand Vet Centers around the country to provide daily support and assistance to veterans
- **Eliminate new Fees and Co-Payments.** Murray's amendment would provide \$825 million to roll back a Bush Administration plan to raise fees and co-payments on veterans who seek VA healthcare.
- **Support Rehabilitation** by providing \$42 million to expand residential rehabilitation services for veterans.

I will continue to fight to protect our veterans and to increase access to care and benefits

To receive my Veterans Updates:

<http://murray.senate.gov/vetupdates>

A Good Step for Northwest Ratepayers

The President's budget request included a misguided plan to use surplus revenue from the Bonneville Power Administration to pay down the federal debt instead of lowering electricity rates for Northwest businesses and consumers. That's why, yesterday, I worked with Senators Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Mike Crapo (R-ID) to make it more difficult for this plan to progress. By putting language in the Senate Budget Committee's version of the budget that makes it easier for the full Senate to reject the proposal, we sent a clear message that we will stand together in fighting the White House's plan to raise energy costs for Northwest ratepayers. This is the first step in a long fight we're waging to protect our families and businesses from higher energy costs, and we will continue to work together to stop this unfair burden on Northwest residents.

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