

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington –September 15, 2006

VICTORY!!: Senate Passes My GreenLane Port Security Legislation

Five-year effort delivers new system to protect ports, secure cargo, and safeguard American lives and the U.S. economy

For Washington state, passage means security grants for state's ports, new regional coordination center, new radiation detection equipment and Customs personnel, and a new system to keep Washington's trade-dependent economy moving

On Thursday the full U.S. Senate passed my landmark cargo security legislation that will dramatically improve the security of America's ports and cargo container system. The bill passed by a vote of 98-0. I spent the past week on the Senate floor managing debate on this critically important bill.

Ever since the terrorist attacks of September 11th, I have been dedicated to making our ports safer and our cargo systems more secure. Senate passage of this bill is a giant step in improving the safety of ports in Washington and all across the country. By raising security standards and investing in cargo security, we will close a dangerous security gap and keep our country safe.

The bipartisan bill, which I introduced with Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) –

- raises security standards for all cargo entering the U.S.,
- creates a GreenLane to track and monitor cargo,
- creates a system to resume trade after an incident,
- and funds port security grants.

For Washington state, the bill will mean new security grants for Washington's ports, a new regional coordination center, new radiation detection equipment at the Port of Tacoma, new Customs personnel for Seattle/Tacoma, and a new system to keep Washington's trade-dependent economy moving.

Because our state relies so heavily on the trade that flows through our ports, we are uniquely susceptible to a devastating and economically crippling attack. My GreenLane legislation effectively pushes out our security borders, allowing us to detect tampered cargo long before it enters our ports. The bill also takes into consideration our state's unique trade needs by providing security measures that won't impede the flow of commerce.

This week's vote marks the culmination of a five-year effort to implement cargo security measures at our nation's ports. The effort began with my Operation Safe Commerce program to enhance port, cargo and supply chain security. Since that time, I have been working with constituents, colleagues and various stakeholders to formulate and pass a comprehensive port security bill. The legislation passed on Thursday is largely a result of my collaboration with Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee Chair, Senator Susan Collins (D-ME). I approached Senator Collins over a year ago to work on a bill to protect America's ports. Together, we introduced the GreenLane Maritime Security Act, and together we have worked to reach Thursday's milestone moment.

To get more information on GreenLane, or to see a timeline of my efforts to bring about comprehensive port security visit: <http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=263069>

September 11th: Five Years Later

On Monday, our country marked the fifth anniversary of the terrorist attacks of September 11th. I was pleased to see that so many people across the country came together to mourn those who were killed and to honor the sacrifices of those who protect us everyday. The anniversary was also a great opportunity to reflect on the shared values that make our country strong.

I will never forget what it felt like to stand in the Capitol and see smoke rising from the Pentagon. I will never forget the way Americans came together in the face of tragedy. And I will never forget that will still have a lot of work to do to protect our country and our citizens.

My thoughts and prayers remain with everyone who has lost a friend or loved one.

Ann Richards: "A Texas Sized Spirit"

On Wednesday the world has lost a vibrant spirit with the passing of Ann Richards. She was a passionate advocate for equality, and raised us all up with her wit, wisdom and Texas-sized spirit.

Ann took on life, politics and all of her battles with humor and grace, and our world will be forever brighter for her laughter.

Gulf War Syndrome Report: Proves Need to Protect Veterans

On Wednesday a new report from the Institute of Medicine was released that shows that veterans are suffering from Gulf War Syndrome and need help from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). I urged the Department of Defense (DoD) to avoid the mistakes of the first Gulf War by taking steps to screen and protect those serving in the current war in Iraq.

This new report leaves no room for doubt that Gulf War Syndrome is real and that veterans are suffering because of exposures during the first Gulf War. We now need to do two things. First, the VA must keep faith with these veterans and provide the healthcare and benefits they deserve. Second, the Department of Defense needs to learn from the past and screen today's service members before and after deployment to Gulf.

The report found that Gulf War veterans report higher levels of illnesses and have higher rates of disease than other veterans. The report noted that in the first Gulf War, the DoD failed to adequately screen service members and track exposures. That failure, the report concluded, complicated efforts to help injured veterans. I want to make absolutely sure that the Pentagon does not repeat those mistakes in the current Gulf conflict.

According to the VA, 32 percent of veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan that are being seen by the VA are reporting 'ill-defined symptoms.' That means that once again we have a large number of troops coming home with unknown illnesses that could be related to battlefield exposures. The Pentagon needs to begin screening today's service members and tracking exposures, so that our service members and veterans can get the care they need.

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