

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington March 7, 2003

PROTECTING AMERICA

As our nation faces the increasing likelihood of war with Iraq, we must continue to focus on the War on Terror here at home. From our ports and borders to our firefighters and health care workers, we need to make ensure that our security needs are addressed and that the resources are available to keep our families safe. Homeland security is a national issue and one that requires real commitment and shared sacrifice. The federal government has a responsibility to provide the resources to make sure all of our citizens have the protection they need and I am working in the U.S. Senate to make sure that Washington state gets the help we need.

HOMELAND SECURITY PANEL

I am pleased to announce that I have a new position in the Senate that will give me added opportunity to improve safety and security for Washington state families. On Wednesday, I was appointed to the new Homeland Security Subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee. This new position puts me in a key position to deliver critical security funds for our state.

This new committee will oversee spending for a number of agencies that were formerly controlled by other appropriations subcommittees. The Coast Guard's budget, which used to receive funding under the Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee of which I serve as the highest ranking Democratic member, will now fall under the new Homeland Security Subcommittee as will INS, Customs, Border Patrol and other areas of great importance to our state.

From the Northern Border to Hanford to the Ports of Seattle and Tacoma and the Columbia River, all of Washington has a stake in how we address homeland security. My position on this important new subcommittee will allow me to continue to secure the resources needed to protect our ports, borders, infrastructure and coastline.

BORDER SECURITY

On Thursday, I teamed up with a bipartisan group of Senators to co-sponsor legislation that would strengthen security at our Northern and Southwest borders. The Border Infrastructure and Technology Modernization Act, introduced by Sen. Pete Domenici (R-NM), would authorize \$925 million over the next five years for infrastructure and security upgrades at border crossings along the nation's borders with both Canada and Mexico.

The legislation will help protect our citizens while facilitating commerce with our neighbors to the North and South.

The Border Security bill:

- Authorizes increasing the number of Customs inspectors and staff in the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection by 1,000 full-time employees over the next five years
- Authorizes an additional 500 agents in the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement over the next 5 years
- Dedicates \$500 million over the next 5 years to address the backlog of infrastructure upgrades at border crossings
- Authorizes \$100 million a year for new border infrastructure and technology upgrades

This bill will have a direct and much needed impact on Washington state. Increased funding and technology will mean increased safety and shorter waits along our Northern Border. I have worked for ten years to increase staffing, funding and resources for the Northern Border and I am proud that my Senate colleagues are joining in the fight.

PORT SECURITY

On Thursday, I joined my colleagues, Sen. Charles Schumer (R-NY) and Sen. Ernest Hollings (D-SC) to urge President Bush to strengthen port and border security. In particular, I urged the President to release millions of dollars in port security funds for the Ports of Seattle and Tacoma that were approved by Congress and signed by the President himself over eight months ago. The Administration committed to release roughly \$59 million to Washington's ports last Friday, February 28th, but now says the money won't be sent before June.

More than 6 million cargo containers enter the U.S. each year, 1.8 million of which come through the ports of Seattle and Tacoma. With fewer than one in fifty containers inspected by hand, our challenge is knowing what's in each one, where it came from, and whether it's been tampered with en route. That is why I wrote and funded Operation Safe Commerce. This pilot program will allow our nation's three largest container ports, including Seattle/Tacoma, to monitor cargo from its point of origin, across the ocean, and into the U.S.

The President signed Operation Safe Commerce into law on August 2, 2002 along with \$28 million approved by Congress. After eight long months of waiting, the Administration promised to release the funds by February 28th, but then failed to do so. Not only did the Administration miss that mark, but we are now told it will be four more months before the money will reach our ports. This money has been in the President's pocket since August 2002, and since that time nearly four million more containers have entered U.S. ports. The one thing that has not yet gotten to our ports is the \$28 million they were promised.

We cannot wait for another attack to give our ports the help they need now. Our ports need the resources they were promised, and I urge the President to live up to his word.

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