

# ***PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW***

**U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington April 18, 2003**

## **FROM SAN JUAN ISLAND TO SPOKANE**

This week began the Easter recess for Congress and gave me the opportunity to visit San Juan County, Spokane, Newport and Pend Oreille County.

### **SAN JUAN ISLAND**

On Monday I spent the day in San Juan County to talk with local residents about marine resources, economic development, energy, and transportation. I began the day meeting with the San Juan Marine Resources Committee to discuss ongoing efforts to protect the pristine coastline of Northwest Washington. Former Congressman Jack Metcalf and I helped establish the Northwest Straits Initiative in 1998 to restore and protect marine resources in Northern Puget Sound, and several members of the Commission updated me on current operations.

I then met with local community leaders to discuss how to spur economic development throughout the islands. A recurring theme was the need to expand broadband Internet access to the islands. As Mayor Boothman noted, "people enjoy the isolation of island living, but we don't want to be isolated." I am committed to working with the community through my Statewide Rural Telecom working group to help bring better access to this region.

Energy and maintaining local control over Washington's power grid were on the minds of the Board of Directors of OPALCO, the local electric utility. Many board members shared my concerns about the efforts underway in Washington D.C. to undermine our local control of energy production and transmission in the Northwest. I assured the board members that I would continue to stand up to the big out-of-state companies who want to privatize BPA and are pushing federal regulators to take control of our power lines.

Finally, I toured Cattle Point road, the only route that connects the southern part of San Juan Island to the rest of the community. Located on an unstable bluff, the embankment supporting the road is being worn away by wind and natural erosion. In last year's transportation bill, I helped provide \$350,000 to help San Juan County take steps to repair or replace the road.

### **SPOKANE**

On Tuesday I spoke at a major energy conference in Spokane. I talked about how our region's energy system is facing a triple punch from federal energy regulators and the Bush Administration.

The first punch is called Standard Market Design. This plan would impose a one-size-fits-all approach to energy marketing throughout the country.

That system might work in parts of the country that can simply burn more coal to produce more power. However here in the Northwest, we rely heavily on hydropower and cannot simply make it rain more when we need more electricity.

The second punch is Regional Transmission Organizations, or RTOs, a scheme that would give control of our power grid to a federal or regional entity and leave us with millions of dollars in operating costs each year. Our Congressional delegation is united in its opposition to RTOs, and I will continue to oppose these efforts at the federal level. The final punch is the emerging federal effort to privatize BPA, which would threaten our cost-based system and could ultimately increase costs for ratepayers.

We should take steps to increase energy production, and there are a number of promising technologies on the horizon. Wind power is becoming more viable. Biomass is another possibility, enabling farmers to turn their farm waste into electricity.

Later Tuesday, I held a community meeting in Newport with several dozen local leaders in person and with another group in Pend Oreille who joined us by videoconference. Transportation and economic development were among the topics we discussed. I will continue to work in the Senate to provide critical federal funds for our state's important transportation needs and to support working families in Eastern Washington and across the state.

## **HELP FOR AVIATION WORKERS**

I am pleased to announce that my amendment to provide 26 weeks of unemployment assistance for thousands of struggling airline industry workers became law on Wednesday as part of the War Supplemental bill signed by the President. This is great news for the thousands of Boeing workers and others who have lost their jobs. As I told my colleagues, as Congress provides support to the airlines, we can't forget about the industry's most important asset, our workers.

More than 110,000 airline industry workers, including 35,000 Boeing workers, have lost their jobs due to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, the War in Iraq, and the nationwide economic slowdown. Unfortunately, despite these numbers, the White House has fought the workers provision at every step. In fact, during the House-Senate conference committee, the Administration pressured Congressional leaders to reduce the length of assistance from 26 to 13 weeks and to limit eligibility for assistance to airline employees only. This would have excluded Boeing workers and other aircraft producers and suppliers.

Along with several of my colleagues, I successfully fought back these efforts to dilute my amendment. The depth of bipartisan support shown for my amendment is encouraging, and I will continue to work with my colleagues to stand up for America's workers in these difficult times.

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