

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington May 16, 2003

TAX BILL PASSES SENATE

As Washington residents know all too well, states are facing historic deficits and local communities are hurting.

Washington state is facing a \$2.7 billion budget shortfall and a 7 percent unemployment rate. Since states don't have the option of deficit spending, they are being forced to make dramatic cuts to education, health care, local law enforcement and other important services.

That's why this week I offered an amendment to the Senate tax bill to provide \$40 billion in immediate assistance to our states and local communities. Under my amendment, states would have received \$20 billion in general aid and \$20 billion to provide state Medicaid relief. Washington state, in particular, would have received \$798 million, including about \$400 million for Medicaid.

Unfortunately, my effort to provide this desperately needed aid to our states was defeated by a slim majority. But I am proud that because of Democratic efforts, the Senate has still included \$20 billion in state assistance. Not a single dollar in aid to the states was included in either the House version of the tax bill or in the President's request.

Thanks to the Senate version of the tax bill, Washington state will receive \$400 million to help protect education, health care, law enforcement and other programs important to our families and local communities.

But while \$20 billion for our states is a victory in our current political environment, it is still not enough to help them recover quickly. It is disappointing that at a time when our states and communities are hurting that some in Congress continue to push for tax cuts that economic experts have said will not help – and may even hurt – our economic recovery. I will continue to work in the Senate to support aid for our states and to help get our economy moving again.

ENDING DRUNK DRIVING

On Wednesday, I joined with members of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) to help commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the worst drunk driving accident in U.S. history.

Fifteen years ago, the world changed forever for the families of passengers of a school bus in Kentucky – all because of the irresponsible actions of one drunk driver. The driver was a 34-year old repeat drunk driving offender with a blood-alcohol level twice the legal limit. He survived the crash, but 24 children and 3 adults died and another 30 people were injured.

Sadly, the consequences of drunk driving are repeated over and over again every day across America. Through most of the

1990's, we had been making progress in reducing the number of alcohol-related fatalities on U.S. roads and highways. But sadly, in 2002, for the third year in a row, alcohol-related traffic fatalities increased to nearly 18,000 deaths.

I am committed to ensuring that no family must go through what the families of the passengers of that Kentucky school bus endured fifteen years ago – and what they continue to live with every day.

As the ranking member of the Senate Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee I am proud that we were able to increase the funding for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's drunk-driving programs by 36 percent over the President's budget in 2003. And I am proud to be a strong supporter of the ".08 Law," which reduces the legal limit for drinking and driving.

As Congress prepares to reauthorize the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), it is critically important that we all work together to develop a comprehensive and thoughtful program to reduce the number of drunk driving deaths in Washington state and across the country.

HOMELAND SECURITY GRANTS RELEASED

This week the Homeland Security Department released \$25.8 million in first responder, transportation and port security grants to the City of Seattle. These grants, which were approved by Congress back in February, will help our cash strapped state pay for increased security measures to keep our families and communities safe.

Since September 11th, Washington state has faced enormous costs in preparing for and preventing another terrorist incident. Just this week, Seattle took part in a federal drill to ensure that our first responders are prepared to handle a terrorist attack.

New equipment, communications technology, and overtime pay for first responders have been costly but necessary expenses for Seattle and other cities across our state and nation. This funding that I helped secure in the Senate, which the Department of Homeland Security is now releasing, will help to improve our readiness while easing the burden on local taxpayers.

And at a time when our ports are still not receiving the federal funding they have been guaranteed, these grants will help defray new security costs. The grants include:

- \$18 million for the City of Seattle
- \$6.7 million for the Port of Seattle
- \$1 million for the King County Department of Transportation

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