

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – February 4, 2005

"NO" on Gonzales

This week I voted against Alberto Gonzales' confirmation as the next U.S. attorney general. I studied his record, reviewed his testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee, and concluded that he does not meet the standards required to be attorney general.

Though I do not relish voting against any president's cabinet nominees, the position of attorney general is unique in our system of government, and I take seriously my constitutional responsibility to provide advice and consent. The attorney general has a direct impact on the rights, lives, and liberties of every American. More than an advisor to the president, he is the chief law enforcement officer of our country. He may even be called on to investigate wrongdoing by the very president who appointed him.

Because of these unique responsibilities, an attorney general must meet certain standards, including independence, an ability to ensure public confidence, and honesty.

Unfortunately, a review of Mr. Gonzales' record in Texas, at the White House, and before the Senate Judiciary Committee shows he does not meet these criteria. The most troubling example of his lack of independence is his work redefining torture in two infamous 2002 memos. Mr. Gonzales approved standards of torture that defy U.S. law, international agreements, and the Constitution.

I'm also concerned that he would not ensure public confidence in our legal system. Scrutiny of his work on Texas death row clemency appeals shows that, as then-Governor Bush's counsel, Mr. Gonzales left out exculpatory evidence and key facts that might have warranted further review of numerous clemency requests. If Mr. Gonzales was careless in protecting the due process rights of individuals as a governor's counsel, how can we expect him to be more careful as America's attorney general?

Finally, his appearance before the Judiciary Committee raises serious questions about his honesty. During his testimony, he refused to answer many questions. When he did answer, his responses were at times misleading or incomplete.

While Mr. Gonzales's personal story is inspiring, I cannot overlook these troubling aspects of his background. I thus felt it was my duty to vote against his confirmation. Yesterday, Mr. Gonzales was confirmed 60-36.

To read my full statement on this vote:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=231221>

State of the Union Response

On Wednesday night, I sat in the House chamber as President Bush gave his fifth State of the Union address. I felt proud to live in a country where our national spirit is vibrant and where Americans join together to listen to the President's plans for securing our nation's future.

Right now, too many Americans are feeling insecure about their futures. I'm concerned that the president's plans, as outlined in his State of the Union speech, do little to make the American people feel more secure where it counts. I'm especially concerned about the president's plans for Social Security (see next item). I will continue to speak out for the families and communities that are struggling at home in Washington state.

Read my full response to the State of the Union address:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=231436>

Don't Privatize Social Security

On Wednesday, I spoke on the Senate floor about the need to strengthen Social Security – and the need to stop the president's risky plan to privatize Social Security. The president's approach would do nothing to save the system, but it would gamble Social Security's guaranteed benefit on the stock market.

Social Security has pulled seniors from poverty. It's an insurance program with a guaranteed benefit that all Americans can count on. But I'm very concerned that President Bush's "restructuring" will imperil the security of all Americans – from young workers retiring in decades to seniors retiring today.

Specifically, the president's proposal:

- Ends guaranteed benefits.
- Does nothing to fix the long-term issues the system faces.
- Adds trillions of dollars to our national debt.
- Is dangerous.

There is a better alternative. I believe we must:

- Preserve Social Security's guaranteed benefit
- Preserve Social Security's protections for workers when they are disabled
- Protect against benefit reductions for women, minorities and all others
- Protect our budget from ever growing deficits

In my floor speech on Thursday morning, I also spoke about the unique impact of Social Security on women. Then I visited the memorial to President Franklin Roosevelt, where I spoke at a press conference re-affirming my commitment to fight for the values he championed. Current and future retirees need someone to stand up for them, and when I see something that's going to hurt our workers, our families, and our seniors, you can bet I'm going to fight it with everything I've got.

To read my full remarks:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=231476>

New Opportunities to Help Our State

I'm excited to announce my appointment by the Democratic leadership to two new subcommittees of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee. I will now serve on the *Bioterrorism Preparedness and Public Health Subcommittee* and the *Education and Early Childhood Development Subcommittee*. These appointments will allow me to continue my work on behalf of the people of Washington state by expanding access to quality education and by making our communities more secure. I will also continue to serve as the top ranking Democrat on the Employment, Safety and Training Subcommittee.

As a member of the HELP Committee, I've worked to fund critical biodefense research and to fight for greater research efforts in developing new, safe vaccines, therapies and treatments. Now, with this new appointment, I will have direct influence over evaluating our nation's bioterrorism preparedness efforts. I look forward to using these two new assignments to work for quality education and greater security for all Washingtonians.

Asbestos News – Get the Latest

As the new session of Congress begins, there are new opportunities to protect Americans from deadly asbestos. I'm preparing my next asbestos email update. If you'd like to receive a copy, please sign up here by Tuesday:

<http://murray.senate.gov/asbestos/updates.cfm>

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