

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – February 17, 2006

Flawed Asbestos Legislation Stalls

Asbestos liability is a very real problem. It's a problem for victims, and it's a problem for companies. We need a balanced solution. Unfortunately, the bill that came before the Senate this week was not a serious solution.

On Tuesday, I voted against moving forward on the asbestos legislation because I believe we need to do right by victims of asbestos related diseases as well as by businesses across the country.

This bill was fundamentally flawed for several reasons. First, the trust fund created to compensate victims was too small to cover everyone who deserves compensation. And, for too many, the trust fund would have come too late. The bill excludes some of the most vulnerable victims and their families in 28 high-risk American communities – known as hotspots – including one in Spokane. Throughout this process, the trust fund has been cloaked in a secrecy that must be removed in order for us to move forward.

The bill is also unfair in that it penalizes small and mid-sized companies who are being unfairly singled out for large payments to help reduce the burden on larger companies. And finally while the bill does include the ban on asbestos that I wrote and have been working on for years, it does not provide the research, treatment or public education that we need to warn consumers and communities about the dangers of this deadly product.

This bill requires fundamental changes if it is truly going to work for the American public. I've been fighting for fair compensation and reform for years, and it doesn't make any sense to squander this moment with a bill that is inadequate on so many basic levels.

The bill failed to move forward on Tuesday because many of my colleagues agreed with my assessment. Our vote sends the message that asbestos victims deserve better and the Senate can – and must – do better.

Regardless of what happens with this bill as we move ahead, the one thing we still must do is ban asbestos in America once and for all. I intend to reintroduce my Ban Asbestos in America Act, and I will fight until it becomes law.

For more on Senator Murray's Ban Asbestos in America Act:

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

To receive asbestos updates, see:

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

Tribal Schools Left Behind

This week I was proud to have to opportunity to address the National Indian Education Association at a conference they held in the U.S. Capitol, including many members from our state. They were in town to help educate members of Congress about the unique needs of our tribal schools and communities.

We all want our country to be strong. And the best way to invest in our future is to invest in education – to make sure that all of our kids are ready to succeed. But under the President's fiscal year 2007 budget, we are seeing the largest cuts to the Department of Education in our nation's history. And funding for the No Child Left Behind Act would increase by only 2 percent. That doesn't even keep up with

inflation. Our schools can't handle another year of being shortchanged.

For Indian Country, one of the real challenges of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is how we can improve Indian education while respecting and promoting tribal culture and language. I'm very concerned that the way the law is being implemented does not allow for a culturally-based education. The key ingredients must be curriculum, teaching, parents and community involvement. Unfortunately, NCLB stifles these roles.

The way the Bush Administration has implemented NCLB has focused solely on rigid testing that may not be appropriate for all children. The rigid testing is based on curriculum that ignores programs like music, art, and language which are not just critical for tribal children, but all children.

The President's budget also shortchanges Indian education in several other ways.

- It freezes funding for Impact Aid and Title VII
- It eliminates the Johnson O'Malley program
- And despite a \$1 billion backlog for new facilities and critical repairs, it cuts Indian school construction by \$50 million.

We cannot expect any school, including tribal schools, to improve without providing appropriate funding and taking into account respect for language and cultural differences. So, I'm very concerned about the lack of attention to these priorities in the President's budget. They don't reflect the reality of our schools. In the coming weeks, I will use my position on the Senate Budget Committee to work to invest in the things we need most – like the future of our schools and children. It is the only way to make our country strong again.

For Senator Murray's speech on tribal education needs:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=251610>

Improving Mine Safety

This week, as the highest ranking Democrat on the Senate Employment and Training Subcommittee, I was pleased to co-chair a Senate hearing on mine safety in our country. Just one month ago, the nation watched as families in West Virginia endured a tragedy that few of us can imagine. There are mines in communities all across our country and we need to work to make sure that we have the technology and safety precautions in place to prevent any more disasters.

Saying No to Fees for Veterans' Health

For the first time since the President released his budget, I had the opportunity to address Veterans Secretary Jim Nicholson at a Senate Veterans Committee hearing on Thursday. I told the Secretary that I appreciated the better number for veterans' health care that was provided in the VA budget this year. However, I also told him that limiting access to the VA for veterans through increased fees and co-pays is really a step backwards. We should not balance the budget on the backs of those who have served us. When our soldiers signed up to serve us there was no asterisk by health care. They weren't told that their benefits would depend on their income level or the VA's budgeting problems. Increasing fees and co-pays for our veterans at a time of war not only sends the wrong message to those who are sacrificing for us abroad today – but those who we want to recruit for the future. I will continue to work to defeat these shortsighted fees and to ensure that every person who serves our nation gets the care and benefits our government promised.

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