

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – October 7, 2005

Miers Must Be Thoroughly Vetted

This week, President Bush nominated Harriet Miers to replace Justice Sandra Day O'Connor as Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court. I look forward to a thorough and diligent review of Ms. Miers's nomination to the Supreme Court.

I will evaluate her based on the same standards I use for all judicial appointments. Is she ethical, honest and qualified? Will she be evenhanded, fair, and independent; and will she uphold our rights and liberties? We have much to learn about Ms. Miers, and I will not pass judgment until I have all the facts.

As I've consistently said, I take very seriously the constitutional role of the Senate in the Supreme Court nomination and confirmation process. All of us in the Senate must take our time to consider Ms. Miers' qualifications and her record. There is no need to rush to judgment on this important nomination, and I pledge to do all I can to learn about her and to actively participate in the confirmation process.

Senate Must Pass Transportation Bill

In a Senate floor speech on Thursday, I urged my colleagues to immediately debate and pass the Transportation-Treasury bill for 2006.

AIRLINE SAFETY - In my speech, I noted that the FAA has downsized 300 safety inspectors when it should be hiring more inspectors. Airline bankruptcies and mergers all require more frequent and diligent safety inspections, but the FAA's safety office is understaffed and will be until Congress passes the Transportation-Treasury bill. In addition, many airlines are outsourcing their aircraft maintenance to foreign countries. FAA safety inspectors need to monitor this outsourced maintenance more closely to ensure public safety is not compromised.

Read about my concerns with airline safety inspections:
<http://www.murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=247009>

Supporting Our Farmers

On Monday, I hosted a roundtable discussion in Spangle to hear from a broad panel about the status of agriculture in Washington state. Our farmland is some of the most beautiful and productive in the entire country. In fact, our state is the 11th largest agricultural state in the country, and what our farmer produce is worth more than \$5.6 billion.

But, you don't have to look very far to see that we're facing some serious challenges. I have long opposed cuts to agriculture funding, but despite my opposition Senate leaders are intent on removing \$3 billion from the agriculture budget. During a time when many states are facing severe droughts, fires, and rising costs in fuel and fertilizers, cuts will hurt farmers and their operations more than ever.

Furthermore, with the 2007 Farm Bill already on the horizon, I can't stress enough the importance of having an honest conversation about our priorities, and those of the USDA, in providing what our struggling farmers need. As a member of the Appropriations Committee, I'll continue to use my position to fight for the resources Washington's farmers need.

Fighting for Our Veterans

HELP ADJUSTING TO LIFE AT HOME - Today, I secured an agreement in the Senate Defense Appropriations bill which requires the Department of Defense to provide Congress with a plan for improving reintegration into civilian life for members of the National Guard and Reserve. Under my amendment, a plan must be presented to Congress within 30 days of enactment of the Defense bill, which passed the Senate today.

The brave men and women of our National Guard and Reserves sacrifice side-by-side with our active duty personnel, and I believe they deserve the same benefits and help transitioning back to life at home. My amendment will require the Defense Department to find the best way to do what our country has promised: ease their return to family, to work, and to our communities.

BACKGROUND: MY BILL - Only 35 percent of Guard and Reserve members participate in the Department of Defense's Transition Assistance Program (TAP) upon return home, compared with 68 percent of separating active duty personnel. This lack of transition assistance has broad implications for the quality of life of returning Guard and Reserve members.

In May, the Government Accounting Office released a report which found that too many of our Guard and Reserve veterans are not receiving the information they need to take advantage of TAP assistance – particularly when it comes to assistance with preparation for employment.

I've held roundtables throughout our state with veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past few years, including one in Spokane earlier this week that was dedicated specifically to helping our veterans face the economic challenges they face when they come home. And, in an official field hearing of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, which I chaired in Seattle in August, I heard testimony from Guard and Reserve members who have faced difficulty transitioning back to their jobs, families and communities after returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan.

I authored this amendment directly in response to what I've been hearing from National Guard and Reserve members at the roundtables and field hearings I've held. Every day our Guard and Reserve members face challenges as they protect us overseas, and it is our responsibility to lessen the challenges they face here at home. By improving our Guard and Reserve veterans' access to the Transitional Assistance Program, we can help ease their entry back into their jobs, families and communities.

Sign up to get periodic updates on my work for our veterans:
<http://murray.senate.gov/vetupdates>

Helping Domestic Violence Victims

LISTENING TO THE PEOPLE INVOLVED - On Tuesday, I hosted a roundtable discussion in Everett with people who have been affected by domestic violence. Among the panelists was a domestic violence survivor, who shared her story and talked about the crucial importance of economic protections for victims of domestic violence.

These are the kinds of stories that informed my Security and Financial Empowerment (SAFE) Act, which I introduced to the Senate on September 29th. The SAFE Act would provide victims with the economic tools they need to escape dangerous relationships. It allows victims to take time off work to seek help, and protects them from employment and insurance discrimination.

FOLLOWING UP: TAKING THE NEXT STEP - This week, the Senate agreed by unanimous consent to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). However, VAWA, as passed, did not include critical economic protections for women. Although VAWA has protected countless women and children, and has helped put abusers behind bars, it is time to take the next step.

On Thursday, I used the stories and information I gathered at my roundtable discussion in a Senate floor speech about the importance of including financial security measures as part of VAWA. We must ensure that no victim is financially dependent on her abuser, and I'll continue to use my position to empower victims and end domestic violence.

Read my floor speech in support of economic protections:
<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=247139>

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