

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – July 7, 2006

Transportation: The Economic Engine of Seattle

This past week I had the privilege of participating in several events in Seattle that underscored the progress being made in public transportation. As I have stressed to constituents and transportation providers alike, transportation is the economic engine that will keep Seattle's neighborhoods moving forward. As such, I have worked hard to secure federal dollars that will help us make progress.

South Lake Union Streetcar

I was very encouraged by the enthusiasm I saw at the groundbreaking for this project. South Lake Union is quickly becoming a hub of 21st century medical research facilities, and everyday sees expanded retail, residential, and employment opportunities. This streetcar project will reduce congestion, improve safety, and lay a strong foundation for continued economic growth. It will also provide an important link for this growing area to downtown Seattle. I am glad that I was able to help get the ball rolling on this project by securing \$4 million in federal funding.

Sound Transit Progress

I was fortunate to be joined at this event by Deputy Transportation Secretary Maria Cino. The event allowed me to witness the tunneling in the Beacon Hill area and gave an overview of the University Link extension. The University Link extension will be a critical component in the Seattle mass transit grid, but it will also require significant federal investment. Because of the need for federal dollars, I felt it was important to bring Deputy Secretary Cino out to see what a significant role it will play in the future of transportation in the region.

A Ferry System Like No Other

While Deputy Secretary Maria Cino was in Seattle I also had the opportunity to show off our ferry system, the largest passenger ferry system in the country. I am grateful that the Washington state Department of Transportation helped show the Deputy Secretary the unique challenges our ferry system faces.

Katrina Relief: One Family at a Time

On Friday I visited University Place for the opening of the first ever headquarters for **Operation Hands On**. Operation Hands On is a charitable organization that was begun by University Place resident Christie Bazar. Its mission is to help victims of Hurricane Katrina with everything from clothing, to cars, to rent-free housing. The program has been operating for over a year. On Friday we marked the opening of a new facility that was made possible by selfless volunteers, the local government of University Place, and generous contributions by local and national organizations.

It was very moving to hear from those who have benefited from Operation Hands On services. Because of this pioneering, grassroots organization, as many as 20 residences have been provided rent-free for Katrina victims. Those victims told me that they had run out of options and were about to hit rock bottom before Operation Hands On reached out with a helping hand. The opening of the Operation Hands On headquarters was a great reminder of how small local operations can net big results.

Building Relationships with China

On Thursday I spoke at the Washington Council on International Trade's 11th Annual Senators' Conference. This year's topic was China and my remarks focused on the need to continue on the road of engagement with the world's most populous country. I discussed how listening and talking with the Chinese leadership is in our government's long term economic, strategic, military and security interests.

Recently some prominent voices in Congress have called for an end to engagement and have instead pushed for a more hostile approach in our relationship with China. In my remarks I recounted how my personal experiences with China taught me that reasoned discussions and accountability have proven successful in the past and should be pursued in the future.

To view the full text of my speech visit:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=258356>

Keeping America's Railroad Jobs in America

This week I joined with Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia in sending a letter to the Chairman of Amtrak and U.S. Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta in response to a proposed Amtrak plan that will invite private vendors to take over major parts of its national reservation system, including vendors based overseas.

This letter was sent in order to protest the outsourcing plan, and to urge the railroad to step away from its efforts to take jobs out of the United States. In the letter we warned that if Amtrak does not reverse its plans we will offer an amendment to the Amtrak funding legislation that would block the overseas outsourcing plan.

To view the letter visit:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=258320>

Other News:

Vet Cemetery: Progress Being Made in Eastern Washington

On Thursday I sat down with local veterans officials in Spokane to discuss efforts to bring a veterans cemetery to Eastern Washington. State officials told us about three possible locations they are considering for the cemetery in Eastern Washington.

Spokane Valley: Washington's Newest City

I recently toured the city of Spokane Valley and spoke with the Mayor and Council about all that they have accomplished since the city was incorporated in March of 2003. We discussed what they will need in the coming years from the federal government and how we can form a partnership to meet the needs of the residents of Spokane Valley.

Plan B News

This week I joined with Senator Hillary Clinton in calling on the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to investigate the highly unusual decision by the FDA to outsource to a private contractor the responsibility of collecting and reviewing comments submitted to the FDA on Plan B.

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