

# PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – March 18, 2005

## Budget Doesn't Reflect our Values

On Thursday, the Senate passed, by a vote of 49-51, a budget resolution that reflects the wrong values for our communities, our environment, our men and women in uniform – and our future. Fortunately, my Democratic colleagues and I, with the help of some moderate Republicans, were able to remove what would have been devastating cuts to Medicaid; overall, however, the bill pushes the wrong priorities on our country.

## Major Setback for Veterans

This week, I proposed an amendment to the budget with Senator Daniel Akaka (D-HI) that would have increased funding for veterans' health care by \$2.85 billion. Unfortunately, despite this being a mere three-percent increase over last year's funding levels, on Wednesday the Republican majority in the Senate defeated it on a vote of 47-53. I'm deeply disappointed that they chose to hand this major setback to veterans in Washington state, and all over the country.

Our veterans are waiting to get the health care they deserve and that they've been promised as part of their service. But instead of seeing a doctor, they're seeing long lines, red tape and understaffed hospitals. With new veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, these problems are only going to get worse. My amendment would have done the responsible thing and provided our veterans with the care they've earned.

**Specifically, the amendment, if passed, would have:**

- **Eliminated waiting lists**, lifted a "hiring freeze" on VA medical staff;
- **Funded new VA clinics** and improvements at existing VA facilities;
- **Rejected the President's proposal** to cut funding to State veterans' homes;
- **Eliminated means-tests** for veterans to enroll for VA care;
- **Provided for much-needed** mental health services; and
- **Rejected the President's proposal** to drive veterans away from the VA with annual user fees and increased prescription drug costs.

These are common-sense changes that would have gone a long way towards improving the care our veterans get. To avoid making veterans' healthcare a slave to annual budget games, I believe we need to move VA healthcare funding out of the budget process once and for all. We need to make VA healthcare funding "mandatory," so it's always there. But the Republican majority has blocked that proposal every year – so the fight goes on.

See video of my floor speech supporting this amendment:  
[rtsp://video.webcastcenter.com/srs\\_g2/murray031505.rm](rtsp://video.webcastcenter.com/srs_g2/murray031505.rm)

Sign up to receive my veterans' email update:  
<http://murray.senate.gov/vetupdates>

## More Federal Funding for Ferries

Our nation's ferries are a vital part of our culture and economy. In our state, Washington State Ferries, the largest ferry operation in the country, transports approximately 26 million passengers and carries 11 million vehicles annually. While demand for ferries has grown nationally, federal funding has not kept pace with demand. This week I took a big step toward changing that.

On Wednesday, I reintroduced my Ferry Transportation Enhancement Act (Ferry-TEA) to help increase the federal investment in ferry transportation in Washington state and

across the country. My amendment would provide \$150 million a year for the improvement of ferry service, nearly a 400 percent increase over last year's funding level.

**My Ferry Transportation Enhancement Act would specifically:**

- **Provide \$150 million/year** for the Federal Highway Administration's Ferry Boat Discretionary Program to 2009;
- **Provide \$150 million/year** for the Federal Highway Administration's Ferry Boat Discretionary Program to 2009;
- **Add ferries to the Clean Fuels Program**, which will help boat makers design cleaner and more efficient vessels;
- **Establish a Ferry Joint Program Office** to coordinate federal programs affecting ferry boat and ferry facility construction, maintenance, and operations, and to promote ferry service as a component of the nation's mass transit system;
- **Establish an information database** of ferry systems, routes, vessels, passengers and vehicles carried;
- **Establish an institute for ferries** to conduct research and development, conduct training programs, encourage collaborative efforts to promote ferry service, and preserve ferry history.

My bill currently has 10 bipartisan cosponsors, and I'll be working in the upcoming weeks to increase support and get it passed.

Read the full release on my ferry funding bill:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=233690>

## Protecting Women's Health Choices

I believe in providing women with a full range of reproductive choices and allowing them to make the best, most educated decisions possible. On Thursday, in a hearing of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, I pushed acting FDA Commissioner Lester Crawford to answer questions about a long-pending application for nationwide over-the-counter approval of Plan B emergency contraceptives.

Plan B, which is also known as the "morning after pill," has been scientifically shown to safely and effectively prevent unintended pregnancies. Although approved for prescription use, Plan B is not yet approved for nationwide over-the-counter use. FDA's expert advisory committee – whose opinion is usually the key to whether approvals are granted – voted overwhelmingly in favor of approval. But FDA has not responded to the application in the nearly two years since it was filed, a highly unusual delay.

During the hearing, Mr. Crawford said FDA has "a decision pending," but would not give a time frame. I insisted that my colleagues and I on the committee need a specific briefing on how to get this application approved as soon as possible. I told Mr. Crawford that this private meeting must take place prior to his confirmation vote as permanent Commissioner, which is scheduled for April 13.

I'm glad we've been able to get a commitment from acting commissioner Crawford to advance this important women's health issue. This decision is too important to be endlessly delayed for political reasons. It's a decision that should be based on sound science and public health needs, not on politics.

## ANWR Drilling: The Wrong Way to Go

This week, in a disappointment for those of us who love and revere our nation's great, open spaces, the Senate voted to narrowly approve oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The vote was also a disappointment for Americans like me who believe the way to rid our nation of its dependence on foreign oil is to encourage conservation, diversify energy sources, and invest in renewable energy technology. Drilling in ANWR does none of these things and only encourages old ways of thinking.

I've worked on several previous occasions to defeat ANWR drilling efforts, and I'll continue to fight against this shortsighted policy because it is bad for our land and bad for our country's future.

To subscribe, unsubscribe, or change your email address, visit: <http://murray.senate.gov/updates>