

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – June 2, 2006

Making Affordable Housing a Top Priority

Over the past week, I have made several stops throughout the state to discuss the need for affordable housing. This is an issue of immense importance that affects our state's most vulnerable residents. For me, and for many who I met during my travels, it is intolerable to allow working families, seniors, and the disabled to struggle alone in this fight. There is simply too much we can be doing, and there are too many who need our help.

Bold Action

On Thursday, I had the opportunity to discuss affordable housing in Snohomish County. I heard from local elected officials, community leaders, and concerned citizens about the homeless population in their county, and their ambitious plans to find a solution. After our discussion, I joined with Snohomish County officials in formally announcing their bold 10 year plan to end homelessness within the county. The plan, which is the result of teamwork amongst several concerned groups, sets a goal of creating 2,500 housing units over the next ten years. That new housing would be sufficient to house every one of the county's current homeless residents. The plan is both practical and inspirational, and should stand as a model for other communities that wish to tackle on the problem of homelessness.

A Grassroots Approach

In addition to expansive plans like Snohomish County's, the struggle to provide affordable housing is also taking shape in smaller projects throughout the state. I visited one such development in Monroe, where a group called "Housing Hope" was opening up a new home building site. "Housing Hope" provides families with the tools they need to build their own homes, and allows them to earn ownership through their labor. I met with some of the families participating in this innovative housing program and they were all extremely thankful for this unique chance at home ownership. I also visited Olympia on Tuesday where I met with first time home buyers involved in a project to build 15 cottage style homes. The project was being funded through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program which has made a difference in the lives of many struggling families.

Fighting for Federal Funding

Back in Washington D.C., I am pressuring President Bush and Congress to maintain funding for affordable housing programs. Given the pressing needs for housing all across the country one would think that this would not be a struggle. However, this administration continues to have misplaced priorities. In fact, the most recent federal budget proposal calls for a 1.8% reduction in funding to The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which funds the majority of the federal affordable housing initiatives. There are 26% cuts to elderly housing, 50% cuts to disabled housing, and cuts of more than \$1 billion to the Community Development Block Grant program.

As I witnessed this week, there is simply too much local progress being made to allow the federal government to forget about the need to fund affordable housing projects.

To receive my housing update visit:

<http://murray.senate.gov/economy/housingcomments.cfm>

Administration Offers Dwindling Homeland Security Support

The Department of Homeland Security recently announced that funding levels for the 2006 Homeland Security Grant program had been significantly reduced from last year. Our state will receive \$32.2 million - a 26 percent decrease from last year. Additionally, Seattle will receive \$9.15 million or what amounts to a 22 percent cut.

These cuts are just more evidence that the Bush Administration is not doing enough to protect us here at home. In February, the White House actually tried to kill two of the grant programs that are bringing our state \$10 million. At a time when we need more security here at home, the Bush Administration is offering us less and less.

Transportation Innovation

This week, I had the opportunity to participate in two events that offered a glimpse of things to come in western Washington transportation.

Seattle Sound Transit

I recently gathered with Seattle officials at the two newest Sound Transit Light Rail platforms where the future of Seattle mass transit was discussed. That future is very encouraging, and should be filled with the sort of modern facilities that I viewed at the Stadium and SODO stations. Another prominent part of future Seattle mass transportation will be the University Link, which will extend light rail north to the University of Washington. Once completed, it will serve as the backbone for a system that will eventually connect communities throughout the region and will help reduce congestion, increase mobility, and grow our economy.

Federal Way Triangle Interchange

On Thursday, I took part in a press conference that celebrated steps that have been taken in securing funding to complete the Federal Triangle interchange reconstruction project in Federal Way. Federal Way is a critical link between Seattle and Tacoma, and is a region that has been experiencing tremendous growth. This interchange reconstruction project has been targeted by the state as major way to free up commerce, provide freight mobility, and alleviate commuter traffic. During the press conference I spoke about the \$9.6 million in federal funding that I have helped to secure, and visited the proposed reconstruction site. With the help of a successful final funding drive, the interchange will be serving the people of the area in the near future.

Hanford: A Close-Up View

On Wednesday, I was given a tour of the Hanford Nuclear Reservation by officials from the Department of Energy. It was a chance for me to get an updated view of the cleanup process. During the tour, I viewed the 300 Area of the site and was impressed by the number of buildings that had come down as part of the clean up process. As I have in the past, I encouraged officials to keep the cleanup plan on track by moving the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory off the premises and into outside facilities in a timely fashion.

After the tour, I spoke with Tri-City residents about the work I am doing on the federal level to ensure that we are making a commitment to the cleanup. I spoke about the questions that need to be answered in order to secure increased federal funding and warned that we must remain vigilant in guarding against cuts because of the current budget climate.

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