

# **PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW**

**U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – September 19, 2003**

## **GOOD NEWS FOR CLARKSTON CENTER**

Earlier this week, I secured Congressional authorization for the construction of the Clarkston Confluence Interpretive Center, as part of the Senate Energy & Water Appropriations bill.

The Confluence Interpretive Center, to be located at the meeting of the Snake and Clearwater Rivers, will house a permanent Lewis and Clark exhibit as well as traveling exhibits and displays on regional culture and history.

I am proud to have provided the authorization necessary to make this dream a reality. The local community has worked hard to make Clarkston's Lewis and Clark Bicentennial a success both for visitors and for the region's economy. Clarkston has a rich story to tell, and I look forward to it being heard by visitors from across the country.

Local partners including the City of Clarkston, Asotin County and the Port of Clarkston have contributed funds toward the Center's construction, but work can not begin without Congressional authorization. Next, the bill goes to a House Senate conference committee where I will work to ensure that House members also support this important effort.

## **STANDING UP FOR VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES**

On Wednesday I was joined by the National Commander of the American Legion, Members of Congress who are veterans, and Veterans' advocates to call on the Bush Administration to support our veterans and their families.

As the daughter of a World War II combat veteran and Purple Heart recipient, and as the first woman to serve on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, I have a special appreciation of the sacrifices made by our men and women in uniform.

The speakers addressed the need for additional funding for VA healthcare, the need to end the disabled veterans' tax, and our concerns with the CARES process, which could close or restrict services at VA hospitals in Washington state.

The CARES Commission was established to develop a plan for future healthcare delivery to veterans. But because of pressure from Washington, DC, it seems to be more concerned with budget savings than veterans' health. As a result, two Veterans Hospitals in our state could be closed or "reconfigured."

I will continue to urge the Administration to restore confidence to the CARES process and to reconsider its decision to target Veterans facilities in Walla Walla and Vancouver.

## **CLEANING UP HANFORD**

On Wednesday, the Senate approved more than \$2 billion to continue the cleanup of the Hanford Nuclear facility. In the face of the most significant budget cuts in recent history, I am proud to have helped secure this critical funding to clean up nuclear waste at Hanford.

In return for the sacrifices made by the people of the Tri Cities which helped with World War II and the Cold War and, the federal government has an obligation to clean up the millions of gallons of nuclear waste stored near the banks of the Columbia River.

Recently, the Bush Administration indicated it may try to change the definition of high-level nuclear waste in order to avoid responsibility for all the clean-up required at Hanford and other sites. After the states and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) successfully blocked the Administration's re-classification attempt in court, the DOE asked Congress to legislate the change.

I strongly urge the Department of Energy to get back to its job of cleaning up the waste, rather than wasting valuable time seeking Congressional help over a court case it lost. The fastest, most effective way to clean up sites like Hanford is for the DOE to work in partnership with the states and federal regulators to get the job done.

## **HELPING HOMELESS AND FOSTER KIDS**

On Tuesday I joined with my Republican colleague, Mike DeWine (R-Ohio) to introduce legislation to ensure that homeless and foster children with disabilities have access to special education. The Improving Education for Homeless and Foster Children with Disabilities Act would expand the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to ensure that these young people have the resources to reach their full potential.

There are more than 500,000 children in foster care and about 1.35 million children experience homelessness each year. High percentages of both populations are in need of special education services. Unfortunately, without a parental advocate or continuity of location, many of these children slip through the cracks. The Murray-DeWine bill would provide help to states and districts to meet these special challenges.

As the only former pre-school teacher in the Senate, I feel a personal obligation to stand up for our children. Standing up for our children means expanding access to special education services for those who need it most. Congress has a long and proud tradition of supporting and protecting the most vulnerable among us. It's time for Congress to step up again and make education work for homeless and foster children with disabilities.

## **PROTECTING MEDIA DIVERSITY**

On Tuesday the Senate voted to block an FCC order allowing further media consolidation. The "Congressional Veto" passed by the Senate would block the rules approved by the FCC in June to allow a single company to own TV stations reaching nearly half the nation's viewers and to allow newspapers to own TV stations in the same market.

We must ensure that the marketplace of ideas is not dominated by a few corporate conglomerates at the expense of our citizens and our democracy. Since its founding, our nation has always recognized the importance of a free press in helping citizens make informed decisions on critical public issues. That's why the FCC's order has created such a public backlash.

The next step is for the House to consider the Congressional Veto.

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