

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – November 4, 2005

A Budget with the Wrong Priorities

This week, the Republican majority in the Senate pushed through the first piece of a budget reconciliation package that advances the wrong priorities for our nation. I believe that to make our country strong again, we need to invest here at home, and that's why I opposed this budget. It's a bill that will cut \$35 billion from America's priorities and further burdens our children with massive debt.

WE MUST INVEST IN SECURITY - Today, too many people don't feel secure. I believe we should be providing greater investments in the tools that spur economic growth and help all Americans – education, health care, transportation, and job training. In short, we should be making Americans more secure.

MISPLACED CUTS - Unfortunately, this package does just the opposite. It cuts \$35 billion from areas like healthcare and education. Next week, the Senate is expected to consider the tax portion of the package, which calls for another massive tax giveaway for the wealthiest in our nation. Not only will these cuts hurt working families and our most vulnerable, but they will also increase our current record deficits.

The budget also contains a provision that would allow drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, a plan that provides only a few months worth of oil while doing nothing to address our dependence on oil. I believe we should be investing in sustainable alternative energy sources, not drilling in the pristine wildernesses we need to preserve for future generations.

A budget is a statement of priorities. This budget pushes the wrong priorities on our nation. I'm going to continue to use my positions on the Budget and Appropriations committees to fight for the kinds of investments that make our nation stronger and our people more secure.

MY MEDICARE AMENDMENT REJECTED – On Wednesday, I offered an amendment to the Republican budget bill to ensure that people who are eligible for help from both Medicare and Medicaid – some of the most vulnerable people in our nation - don't fall through the cracks as the new Medicare prescription drug law is implemented in the coming months. My amendment was defeated on a procedural vote.

Millions of Americans could lose their drug coverage when the new Medicare prescription drug law is implemented. It's unfortunate that the United States Senate didn't view protecting the most vulnerable among us as a top priority. The Republican budget cuts support for those who have too little. Those are the wrong priorities for our country, and I'm going to keep fighting to protect our seniors and our poor from policies that will limit their access to quality healthcare and prescription drugs.

Great News for LINK Light Rail

Today, I announced that the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) will support the planned University Extension of the Seattle LINK Light Rail System. As the highest ranking Democrat on the Senate Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee, I've been a strong proponent of Sound Transit's light rail system from its outset.

"HIGH" RATING - The FTA has given the project a "High" rating – its highest designation for proposed transportation projects. This rating demonstrates that FTA recognizes that there are real transportation challenges and transit needs in the Seattle area, and is the first step toward future federal funding. I'm looking forward to seeing this project through to

its conclusion so we can increase mobility, boost our economy, and improve quality of life in the Puget Sound.

Investing in WA Agriculture

On Thursday, I successfully secured nearly \$19 million for Washington state's agriculture priorities in the 2006 Agriculture Appropriations bill. As a senior member of the Appropriations Committee, I was able to restore funding for numerous projects that were not funded in the president's budget for fiscal year 2006. The bill has cleared House-Senate negotiations and now goes to the President to be signed into law.

FUNDING AG RESEARCH - Among the projects for which I secured funding is \$3.625 million for construction of the Agricultural Research Service Laboratory at Washington State University in Pullman. This new facility will strengthen the federal-state partnership, and is critical to the future of agriculture in the Pacific Northwest. I have been a strong advocate for this facility.

I also restored over \$6.5 million in proposed Bush Administration cuts specifically for Agricultural Research Service Projects. I'm glad to have been able to secure this critical funding to boost Washington state's agriculture industry. The research enabled by this funding will help our farmers, producers, and research programs remain viable and competitive in a global marketplace.

See the list of project for which I secured funding:
<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=248231>

Closing a Wasteful Lender Loophole

On Wednesday, I engaged in a Senate floor discussion with Senator Mike Enzi (D-Nev.) about my efforts to close a costly and unnecessary federal subsidy to student loan lenders. During the discussion, I secured an important agreement from Sen. Enzi, the Chair of the full Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, of which I am also a member. Sen. Enzi agreed to address my concerns when the Higher Education Act is considered in House-Senate negotiations.

Currently, students are enjoying low interest rates on their loans. That was not always the case. In the 1980s, lenders were promised a rate of return at 9.5 percent on their loans when interest rates were high, but we were trying to keep costs down for students. In 1993, when interest rates were coming down, extra payments to lenders on 9.5 percent loans were supposed to phase out. However, they did not phase out and were rapidly increasing until I took action to end this practice.

This is my third attempt to end this runaway subsidy. I'm offering the Senate another opportunity to close this egregious loophole and finally put an end to this boondoggle. I simply can't understand why anyone supports continuing to ship billions of dollars out the door and out of the hands of our students, but I'll continue this fight for as long as it takes.

Plan B Comment Period Ends

I continue to be concerned that some at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are putting politics ahead of sound science. Nowhere has this dangerous trend been clearer than in the FDA's handling of over-the-counter status for the Plan B emergency contraceptive. Plan B was overwhelmingly recommended for approval by the FDA scientific advisory panel nearly two years ago. Yet, disturbingly, the agency continues to delay a decision on its OTC status because of politics and ideology.

This week, the public comment period on Plan B's OTC status ended. It's now time for the FDA to stop dragging its feet and get on with a decision on this very important public health issue.

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