

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – May 12, 2006

“Health Week” Ignores Real Needs

On Thursday, I joined Senator Maria Cantwell and Washington state Insurance Commissioner Mike Kreidler for a press conference on Capitol Hill to voice our opposition to the bill – S. 1955 - that Senate Republicans made the centerpiece of their so-called “Health Week.” We come from a state that’s a leader on healthcare. We have a great tradition of innovation, public health and low-cost care. Unfortunately, our state would be jeopardized by the bill that the Republicans were pushing in the Senate this week.

This bill would strip away the protections we’ve worked so hard to enact – like mental health parity – which took 8 years to pass. Those protections keep people healthier and reduce costs – but this bill could eliminate them for 1.8 million Washington residents. That’s wrong.

We’re not going to make people healthier by cutting off their access to: emergency services, home healthcare, drug and alcohol treatment, diabetic supplies, mammography screening and mental health services, just to name a few.

Across the country, governors, attorney’s general and state elected officials from both parties have risen in bipartisan opposition to this flawed plan to strip away consumer protections safeguarding patients in every state in America. Our Governor Chris Gregoire and our Attorney General Rob McKenna have both called for the defeat of S.1955.

We need real solutions to make healthcare more affordable, accessible and innovative. We need to focus on fixing the flawed Medicare Part D program, allowing a vote on stem cell research, and investing in community healthcare. If we are serious about health care we should invest in problems that we know make a difference, not gambling on distractions like S. 1955.

Read more, and view the full text of my remarks on the Senate floor at:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=255359>

May 15th Medicare Part D Deadline

On Monday, millions of seniors and disabled will be hit with a deadline that means higher premiums for prescription drugs. I have heard from seniors across our state who feel that they are being pressured into picking a plan that may be wrong for them. The process has been confusing, and I believe our seniors need more time to make an informed choice.

That’s why on Wednesday, I joined with fellow Democrats, seniors, and other advocates to call on Republicans to extend the deadline and avoid punishing seniors who are losing out to the insurance companies.

On Monday, May 15th, I will be holding a rally at the Ballard Senior Center, 5429 32nd Avenue Northwest, Seattle at 10:00 am to talk about what the deadline means for seniors in our state and calling on Congress to freeze the fees and penalties for those who have not yet made a decision.

Bainbridge National Park Memorial

This week, the Interior Department released a long-awaited report, supporting the inclusion of a memorial at the former Eagledale Ferry Dock - which honors the first Japanese

Americans interned during World War II - in the national park system. Located on Bainbridge Island, the dock was the site from which the first internees in the nation were forcibly removed from their homes and communities.

Along with Senator Cantwell and Rep. Jay Inslee, I helped commission and fund the study nearly three years ago, and I will support upcoming legislation that will make the Interior Department’s decision legally binding in order to ensure that the memorial is given national park status. This memorial will remind us all that we must preserve and protect this historical site for future generations. We can’t undo the injustice suffered by Japanese Americans during World War II, but we can give them the recognition they deserve and a reminder to all that this should never happen again.

NSA Phone Record Collection

On Thursday, Congress – like all Americans – learned through press reports that our government is amassing phone records of millions of ordinary Americans. I find this news very troubling. The most important job of our government is to protect the American people from harm. As a nation we must do everything we can to prevent attacks, but Congress and the Administration should work hand-in-hand to ensure this safety.

The news of the collection of phone records is yet another example of the Administration keeping Congress and the American people in the dark on issues of national security. I have called on the White House to be open and forthcoming in upcoming inquiries and investigations so that we can work to ensure the safety and liberty of all Americans. Our citizens deserve an honest assessment of the effectiveness of our intelligence agencies, and Congress and the courts must be able to exercise oversight of the Executive branch.

Republican Tax Plan Leaves Washington State Families Behind

On Thursday, after pulling the plug on “Health Care Week,” the Republican leadership in the Senate moved forward with a tax bill that fails to help Washington’s working families. Middle class families throughout Washington state and the country are struggling to pay for the skyrocketing costs of gas, college, and health care. Instead of helping these hardworking families, Republicans have once again decided to leave the middle class behind.

While I’m pleased that the tax bill includes a one-year patch for the Alternative Minimum Tax, there is not much else to be happy about in this bill. According to the Tax Policy Center, this tax bill would provide middle income families an average tax cut of just \$20, while millionaires would get an average tax cut of \$42,000.

The Republican bill also denies families in our state the ability to deduct our state sales taxes. By allowing this and other important middle class tax cuts to expire while passing a tax cut bill that primarily benefits millionaires and doesn’t expire until 2009, the Republican Congress has effectively left the middle class behind. Our delegation will fight for the inclusion of sales tax deduction in upcoming packages, but the Republican leadership has made no commitment to this issue of fundamental tax fairness.

We need a tax system that is fiscally responsible, helps business grow, and provides maximum relief to the middle class, but this bill achieves none of these goals. This is the wrong tax plan, at the wrong time, for the wrong reasons.

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