

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington –February 2, 2007

VETERANS: Upcoming Bush Budget Must Honor America's Veterans

On Thursday, I joined with veterans of the Iraq War, senators, and veterans' advocates at a press conference in the Capitol. We stood together to call on the President to finally present a budget that adequately funds the needs of America's veterans. The President is expected to send his budget proposal to Congress on Monday, February 5th. For the past few years, the President's budget has sought to impose new fees and restrictions on veterans seeking the care they have earned. I cautioned the President to not send us another budget that leaves America's veterans behind.

One of the speakers at the event was Brady Van Engelen, who graduated from Seattle University and served with the 1st Armored Division in Iraq. In April 2004, Brady was shot in the head by a sniper and was evacuated out of Iraq to recover at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. Brady spoke about the great care he received and worried about how other veterans, who suffered more serious injuries, are doing back in their local communities.

Other speakers included: Iraq war veteran John Bruhns; Steve Robinson (Veterans for America); Joyce Raezer (National Military Family Association) and Senators Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), and John Tester (D-MT).

To watch footage of the press conference visit:
<http://murray.senate.gov/video/070201-vets.ram>

Minimum Wage Increase Passes

On Thursday, I helped to support America's workers by voting to pass the first increase in the federal minimum wage in 10 years. The legislation will raise the minimum wage from the current rate of \$5.15 to \$7.25 over the next two years. The legislation passed the Senate by a vote of 94-3.

America's workers have helped our country make tremendous gains in productivity and economic growth, and they deserve to share in the prosperity they've created. It's been almost 10 years since Congress last raised the minimum wage and during that time, the value of wages has fallen while the costs of health care, energy, and housing have gone up significantly. I am glad that we are finally giving America's workers the pay raise they have earned.

In Washington State we have the highest minimum wage in the country. We also have a thriving economy, a low unemployment rate, and a growing job market. We are living proof that a livable minimum wage is good for our state economy, good for our small businesses, and good for our citizens.

By raising the minimum wage to \$7.25, we are putting an extra \$4,400 a year into the pockets of workers across the country. This is money that will enable struggling families to afford utilities, rent, groceries, and tuition. It will allow working parents to better support their families, and low-wage workers to improve their quality of life. I am proud to have been able to stand with America's workers in this fight.

NEW NORTHWEST VETERANS CLINIC

On Thursday, I was given word that the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will open a new VA health clinic in Northwest Washington to serve veterans in a five county area. The VA aims to open a community-based outpatient clinic (CBOC) in Northwest Washington within 12 months. The clinic will be located in Mount Vernon and will serve veterans in San Juan, Island, Whatcom, Skagit and northern Snohomish County.

Along with Rep. Rick Larsen (D- WA 2nd), I have been pushing for a new clinic in northwest Washington for many years. Currently, local veterans have to spend hours in traffic to reach the VA medical center in Seattle. VA Secretary James Nicholson informed me of the decision to open the clinic one day after I met with him to discuss the clinic and other veterans issues.

To view a timeline of efforts to open this clinic visit:
<http://www.murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=268356>

HEALTHCARE: President's Health Proposals Could Do More Harm Than Good

On Thursday I spoke on the Senate floor to respond to several healthcare proposals that President Bush mentioned in his State of the Union address last week. I warned that his plan could undermine the employer-based health insurance system, push people into the expensive individual insurance market, fail to provide coverage for our most vulnerable, and divert funds for the health care safety net to experimental programs. In my speech I cited the example of a Washington state resident who has faced serious challenges getting health insurance.

To watch my speech visit:
rtsp://video.webcastcenter.com/srs_g2/murray020107.rm

Transportation and Housing Get Needed Increases in Critical Funding Resolution

On Wednesday I applauded the decision to include critical funding increases for Section 8 housing assistance, federal highway and transit construction, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the Federal Railroad Administration and other Department of Transportation Agencies in the Fiscal Year 2007 Joint Funding Resolution. The Joint Funding Resolution will set spending levels for a substantial portion of the federal government for Fiscal Year 2007.

For 2007, because Republican leaders failed to pass most federal spending bills, Democrats had to freeze spending levels for many programs in the Joint funding Resolution. However, I worked with my colleagues to ensure that the housing and transportation priorities that I oversee as Chairman of the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Subcommittee were given the funding they desperately needed. I am pleased that we were able to help soften the impact on critical Washington state housing and transportation programs.

Read my latest housing update:
<http://murray.senate.gov/economy/update4.html>

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