

# PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – July 18, 2003

## SECURING MILLIONS FOR PUGET SOUND PORTS

Throughout May and June, I fought the Bush Administration's attempts to divert funding away from port security. Today, I'm pleased to report that those efforts have paid off for Washington state.

I'm proud to announce that the Ports of Seattle and Tacoma will receive \$14.2 million in Operation Safe Commerce (OSC) grants. In fact, the two Puget Sound ports will get more than half of the \$28 million available in the second round of OSC funding that I secured.

As a leading advocate in the Senate for port security, I wrote and developed OSC as a container and port security initiative at the nation's three largest container load centers – New York/New Jersey, Los Angeles/Long Beach, and Seattle/Tacoma. I won Congressional approval of \$58 million for the program in two spending bills (July 2002 and February 2003) and have earmarked an additional \$30 million in a spending bill currently moving through Congress.

Earlier this year, the Bush Administration announced it would divert \$28 million from Operation Safe Commerce to spend elsewhere. Upon learning of the Administration's scheme, I placed a "hold" on a senior budget nominee in protest. After a month-long standoff, the Administration dropped its plan to divert the funding, and Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge wrote a letter to me, promising to release the \$28 million in outstanding OSC funds. Today, that funding is being released to the nation's ports.

## EASTERN WASHINGTON JUDGE CONFIRMED

This week the U.S. Senate unanimously confirmed Lonny Suko as the new U.S. District Court Judge for the Eastern District of Washington State by a vote of 94-0. I worked with the Bush Administration to select Judge Suko for this position and testified on his behalf at a June 25<sup>th</sup> Senate Confirmation hearing. In addition, I spoke in support of Judge Suko on the Senate floor just before the vote.

Lonny Suko is a distinguished lawyer and U.S. Magistrate Judge from Washington State. He has handled some of the most difficult cases in Eastern Washington in the past decade. Judge Suko has won high praise for his judicial demeanor, his fairness and his respect for all parties. It is my pleasure to announce the confirmation of Lonny Suko as the U.S. District Court Judge for the Eastern District of Washington State.

## FUNDING AGRICULTURE

This week we took a major step forward to help protect and maintain agricultural projects in our state. On Thursday, I secured \$776,000 for Washington state agriculture priorities in the fiscal year 2004 Senate Agriculture spending bill. This federal funding will support ongoing research for a broad range of agriculture sectors in the Northwest, including wheat, potatoes, barley, shellfish, wine grapes, organic foods, hops and small fruits.

The bill includes:

- **Protecting and Enhancing Washington's Wine Industry** - \$150,000 to develop a clean "motherblock" for the Washington wine industry. As the industry grows, it needs a disease and virus-free "motherblock" of plant material. The industry has grown so rapidly that there are increasing concerns that farmers are planting grapevine that may contain viruses that could devastate the industry. The research dollars secured will help to build a new, clean rootstock for distribution to existing and new growers.
- **Strengthening Organic Crops Research and Education** - \$126,000 for the Washington State University Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources, which is developing a comprehensive organic farming research and education program. The Center's plans include developing organic seed protection and production technology, determining the effect of production practices on nutritional content, and developing organic weed control methods.
- **Hops Genetic Research** - \$250,000 for research to develop new hop varieties that are resistant to disease. Economically sustainable hop production in the Pacific Northwest has been seriously threatened by recent outbreaks of powdery mildew, a fungal disease.
- **Northwest Center for Small Fruits Research** - \$250,000 for the Northwest Center for Small Fruit Research, which conducts coordinated research for berry and grape growers in Washington, Oregon and Idaho.

## AMERICAN LEGION VETERANS HEALTHCARE REPORT

Earlier this week, the American Legion released a report detailing the massive delays facing veterans who seek healthcare at Veterans Administration (VA) facilities each year.

The report noted that many veterans are waiting six months or more to see a doctor. These waits are unacceptable. Our veterans fought hard to protect the freedom and liberty we all enjoy today. They deserve to have their needs met in a timely and professional manner.

In addition, the report urged Congress to make VA spending "mandatory," a procedural move that would help ensure the VA receives sufficient funding each year. I support this change to ensure that our veterans get the care they need.

### FORMER POW HEALTHCARE

I'm also pleased to note that the Bush Administration has followed my lead on improving healthcare access for former Prisoners of War (POWs). The Administration has announced that it will seek to expand the benefits of former POWs, a proposal I introduced in March.

These expanded benefits will make it easier for ex-POWs to receive care for conditions sustained as a result of their captivity. The expansion will also eliminate the current federal requirement that a POW must have been held for a minimum of 30 days in order to qualify for benefits. By expanding benefits for former prisoners of war, we will correct a glaring injustice and reaffirm our commitment to all those Americans who have fought for our freedom.

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