

# PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – January 30, 2004

## IMPROVING FOOD SAFETY

As you know, in December, a single dairy cow in our state was found to have "Mad Cow" disease, also known as BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy). That one incident has raised questions in the minds of consumers about the safety of our food, and it has hurt our economy as countries around the world have banned American beef.

I have spoken with officials at USDA and appreciate some of the steps that the agency has taken since December. This week, the Food and Drug Administration announced several new steps to strengthen existing firewalls that guard against the spread of BSE. However, I believe Congress must do more. Consumers need to know that the beef their families eat is safe, and producers must not suffer the consequences of unanswered questions about their cattle.

I have long been an advocate for stronger food safety protections. Since coming to the Senate, I've supported proposals which, had they passed, would have provided better safeguards against BSE. Since December, I've worked with officials at USDA and researchers at Washington State University (one of the premier institutions in this field) to assess our nation's existing food safety protections and to identify any gaps in the system.

That's why I'm a cosponsor of S. 2007, a food safety bill introduced by Senator Durbin of Illinois. I spoke about it at a press conference on Tuesday. **See photo & remarks at:** <http://murray.senate.gov/photos/display.cfm?id=217598>

Passing this bill is one of the many things we must do to improve food safety.

### Food Safety Action Plan

1. Permanently ban "downer" (non-ambulatory) cows from the human food supply. Cattlemen and scientists have supported this ban for years, but it has been defeated in Congress. I'm a cosponsor of S.1298, introduced by Senator Akaka, which makes this law.
2. Let consumers know where their beef comes from by using country-of-origin labels.
3. Give the federal government the authority to recall products when human safety is at risk. I continue to support "mandatory recall authority" for the FDA and USDA.
4. Increase testing and surveillance so that diseased cattle do not slip through the cracks.
5. Invest in research so that our policies are based on sound science.

## MORE HELP FOR AT-RISK KIDS

Today, I joined with community leaders in Thurston County to support a local non-profit group that is working to protect at-risk children from the dangers of drugs, alcohol, tobacco and violence.

Formed in 1989, TOGETHER! provides outreach and education services to children and parents. In the Senate, I secured \$50,000 to help TOGETHER! reach even more children. As a result of this new funding, the group will reach an additional 280 children through five after-school and summer school

programs throughout Thurston County. During my visit today, I got a chance to hear directly from some elementary school students who are participating in TOGETHER! activities, and I'm proud to support them.

## OLYMPIA: JOBS & EDUCATION

I was in Olympia today to meet with legislators, working families, and students. I began my day meeting with Gov Locke and then met with some members of the State House and Senate. I later spoke at a rally hosted by the Washington State Building & Construction Trades.

I also visited Capital High School in Olympia and met with students, teachers and counselors. I talked about the PASS Act, my bill to help high schools students. For details, please see: <http://murray.senate.gov/pass>

## MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG LAW

On Thursday, I met with seniors at the Pike Market Senior Center in Seattle to discuss the new prescription drug law. It's one of many forums I'm holding across the state to help seniors understand how the new law will affect them. I'm committed to fixing this troublesome bill and protecting seniors from the damage it could cause. Here are just a few ways the law could hurt seniors in our state:

- 47,250 seniors could lose their retiree health benefits in Washington state.
- 91,900 poor seniors will pay more for drugs
- 33,360 seniors will pay more for Medicare Part B
- Rural seniors will likely pay more for less coverage.
- Seniors with chronic, deadly diseases are not guaranteed the drugs they need.
- Many seniors will be forced into HMO's with restrictive networks and limits.

Those dangers are some of the reasons why I voted against the bill, and why I'm committed to working with seniors to fix it. For details, please see: <http://murray.senate.gov/rx>

## NEXT WEEK: BIG BUDGET NEWS

On Monday, the President will release his budget proposal for the coming fiscal year (FY 2005). I will be watching closely to see how the President funds key priorities for our state – everything from the Hanford Clean-Up to our schools, hospitals, transportation, and security. Every year, I use my position on the Budget Committee to stand up for the resources our state needs.

I'll have a full report in my next issue on February 6<sup>th</sup>. If you'd like details before then, please check my website throughout the week for the latest information.

<http://murray.senate.gov>

**APPROPRIATIONS DEADLINE:** If your organization plans on requesting an appropriation for Fiscal Year 2005, please ensure your complete request is received by my Washington, D.C. office by March 5<sup>th</sup>. Please note that because of mail security screenings, packages sent by the postal service and express carriers are delayed by at least one week.

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