

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – February 27, 2004

Truly Investing in Healthy Mothers and Babies

On Tuesday, the majority in the Senate brought up a bill that would have limited protections for women and babies who had suffered medical injuries through no fault of their own. I voted against the so-called "Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Act" because it failed to address the real crisis our state is facing over malpractice insurance. Instead, it undermined the rights of women and children. I am glad to say that this bill failed to move forward in the Senate.

As a woman, a mother, and a Senator who has fought for the safety and welfare of mothers and infants, I am disturbed that the U.S. Senate would single out mothers and babies for different treatment than everyone else in America. This bill told women that if we are injured we don't deserve the same legal protections as men. I wish that the people who were pushing this bill forward had shown the same interest when I was fighting to ensure women could get direct access to an OBGYN during the Patients Bill of Rights debate or when I offered an amendment to end drive-through mastectomies or when I was fighting to improve drug labeling for pregnant women. Ironically, the same people who were pushing the so-called "Healthy Mothers Act" were the same people who worked to kill all of the proposals I just mentioned.

If the sponsors of this bill are now serious about helping ensure healthy women and babies, I say 'Come on over!' I've got a long list of legislation that they can sign onto today to really help women - like extending Family and Medical Leave, boosting the federal Medicaid match for OBGYNs, and expanding Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) for low-income pregnant women. The single most important step to ensure a healthy pregnancy and a healthy baby is prenatal care. Fully-funding and expanding CHIP would provide this care to low-income women who would otherwise go without.

And if the Senate leadership really wants to help doctors and patients, I urge them to bring up the widely supported Graham-Durbin bill for a vote. Every day that a vote is denied on this important bipartisan bill is another day that passes without a real fix to the problem of medical malpractice insurance.

Homeland Security Cuts

Since the events of September 11th, our local communities have worked hard to come up with plans to prevent a future disaster. Families in every corner of our state are safer today because we have local emergency professionals who are preparing for -- and responding to -- dangerous threats. Unfortunately, the President's budget cuts federal grant money that our state's emergency management teams depend on by \$8 million.

On Wednesday, I used my seat on the Senate's Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee to raise my concerns with Michael Brown, the Undersecretary for Emergency Preparedness and Response. I told Undersecretary Brown that the President's cuts would hurt local communities here in Washington state. In 2003, 43 Washington jurisdictions -- and our state as a whole -- received a total of \$3.45 million in Emergency Management Planning Grants.

I believe that homeland security is a shared responsibility and that it is the duty of the federal government to provide our first responders and emergency planners with the resources they need to help do their jobs. By cutting and restricting these federal grants, our communities will be forced to come up with funding on their own or eliminate programs.

The President's budget cuts more than \$2.5 billion for first responders nationwide, including:

- cutting first-responder grants to states by \$990 million,
- cutting training for first responders by \$103 million,
- cutting firefighter grants by \$496 million, cutting Emergency Management Planning Grants by \$8 million,
- and eliminating the COPS program and cutting other law enforcement grants (a cut of \$911 million).

I will continue to use my position to stand up for Washington's security needs.

Keep the Walla Walla VA Open

Earlier this month, the CARES Commission -- an oversight body charged with making recommendations about veterans' health care services -- sent a recommendation to VA Secretary Anthony Principi calling for the closing of the VA facility in Walla Walla.

Since the beginning of the CARES process, I have worked with local veterans and health care leaders to protect health care access for Washington's 670,000 veterans. Closing the Walla Walla facility is the wrong thing to do, and I don't believe that Walla Walla was treated fairly in this process.

Yesterday, Senator Cantwell and I sent a letter to Sec. Principi urging him to keep Walla Walla open. We told the Secretary that closing this facility puts easily accessible care out of the reach of our region's veterans and adds questions instead of certainty for our soldiers who are returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

For a copy of the letter and to see what I have been doing to help our veterans: <http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=218481>

You can show your support for the Walla Walla VA facility by attending a rally this Saturday (February 28) from 8-noon at the VFW Post, 102 N. Colville Road, Walla Walla, WA.

Tax Cuts vs. Social Security

This week, we all learned the true cost of President Bush's irresponsible fiscal policies. On Wednesday, our nation's top economist, Federal Reserve Board Chairman Alan Greenspan, urged Congress to counter the escalating budget deficits by cutting Social Security benefits for hardworking Americans. Mortgaging the retirement security of millions of Americans is not a solution to the Administration's misguided tax and fiscal policies.

Nearly two years ago, I warned the Administration that continuing to promote economically unsound tax policies would put current and future retirees at risk
<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=189517>.

Unfortunately, the Administration didn't listen, and now we're seeing the results.

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