

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington –December 8, 2006

Iraq Study Group: The Need for a Change is Clear

On Wednesday morning a small group of my colleagues and I were briefed on the findings of the Iraq Study Group by James Baker, Lee Hamilton, and other members of the group. The findings they conveyed to us were clear - we need to change course in Iraq. I want to commend the bipartisan members of the Iraq Study Group for sharing their expertise, giving an honest assessment, and laying out a path forward in Iraq.

I've been to Iraq, I've sat down with our troops, and I've seen how hard they're working under very difficult circumstances. We all support them, and we all want them to be able to complete their mission successfully and come home safely.

What the Administration is doing today is not working. The Iraq Study Group has given its recommendations to the President, and now it's up to the Commander-in-Chief to present his plan for a new direction in Iraq.

A Vote to Change Direction at the Pentagon

As the Iraq Study Group has shown, we need a new direction in Iraq, and that's one of the reasons I voted to confirm Robert Gates as our next Secretary of Defense. For years, I have called for the Bush Administration to provide a clear plan for Iraq. The White House has failed miserably at the task. I am hopeful that with a new defense secretary, a new Congress, and new proposals from the Iraq Study Group, the President will finally hear the message that voters sent him last month and change course in Iraq.

I am hopeful the Administration will see the need for honesty, reality, and wisdom in its path forward on Iraq, but I am not relying on hope alone. I will ask the tough questions and exercise the real oversight that Republicans failed to provide. We need to be tough and smart.

Washington state plays a critical role in our country's defense. We have first-rate military facilities and talented service members who, with their families, are making tremendous sacrifices. I look forward to working with Secretary Gates to give our men and women in uniform the support they deserve.

Republicans' Failure to Pass Funding Bills Will Delay Hanford Cleanup and the Fight Against Meth and Gangs

In a speech on the Senate floor on Thursday I stood up for Washington state communities who will be hurt if Republicans continue to block passage of the annual spending bills.

I have worked hard to secure critical funding for Washington state priorities in a series of Senate appropriations bills, but Republicans want to adjourn the Senate for the year without passing these important bills. The Senate session is ending. Unless Republicans change course, the Senate will adopt a continuing resolution until February 2007. That resolution

will delay the increased funding that I have secured and will put critical funding at risk next year.

The Republican's mismanagement will hurt priorities in Washington state including the fight against drugs and gangs and the cleanup effort at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation.

To read the text of my speech on the Senate floor visit:
<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=266651>

VETERANS: Report Shows VA Not Spending Enough on Mental Health Care

On Tuesday I was dismayed by another disturbing report that shows that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is not doing an adequate job meeting the needs of America's veterans. The report, released by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), shows how the VA has been too slow to spend the money Congress gave it for mental health care. The report also found that the VA had no system in place to track spending on mental health care, and that some money that was intended for mental health initiatives may have gone elsewhere. The report comes just ten weeks after an earlier GAO report revealed the VA failed to budget accurately over the past two years

This report is yet another example of how the VA is shortchanging America's veterans. At a time when our country's men and women are returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with disturbingly high incidences of PTSD and other mental health conditions, the VA has again shown it is unprepared to meet the needs of today's veterans and those who will come home tomorrow.

Mental health among our nation's veterans is a real problem that demands real solutions from the VA. It is time for the VA to present Congress with a real plan that includes the funding necessary to meet the great needs veterans face.

OTHER NEWS:

CONFIRMING A NEW FDA COMMISSIONER:

On Thursday, I voted to confirm Dr. Andrew von Eschenbach as the new FDA Commissioner. While I remain deeply concerned about how the FDA handled the over-the-counter application of Plan B and urge the agency to revisit the issue of age restrictions, I appreciate Dr. von Eschenbach's movement on a decision. As we work to improve drug safety and begin the process of reauthorizing critical legislation I hope that Dr. von Eschenbach will continue to provide the strong scientific leadership the FDA needs and deserves.

REMEMBERING PEARL HARBOR

Thursday marked the 65th Anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor. It was a day to remember the sacrifices of those who perished at Pearl Harbor and recognize the great service of those who fought for our freedoms during World War II. It is also a day to honor and thank all of America's veterans who have sacrificed for our country. The freedoms that we enjoy today are a gift from the men and women who have worn the uniform of our country. We must continue to work towards honoring that gift by providing veterans with the care and services that they have earned.

ANOTHER STEP FORWARD ON PIPELINE SAFETY

On Tuesday we took another critical step toward pipeline safety with the passage of the "Pipeline Inspection, Protection, Enforcement and Safety Act of 2006." This measure builds on important legislation I worked to enact in 2002 that improved pipeline inspection, raised penalties for safety violators, and enabled states to expand their safety efforts.

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