

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington March 14, 2003

OUR BUDGET PRIORITIES

On Wednesday, I met with the other members of the Senate Budget Committee to begin to discuss and amend the fiscal year 2004 budget. The budget funds everything from education and transportation to agriculture and healthcare.

This is a time of great uncertainty. Our nation is facing a struggling economy, a war on terrorism and the possibility of another war in Iraq. Historically, when our country has faced war and domestic challenges, we have made necessary sacrifices. Unfortunately, that is not the case with the budget currently before the Senate.

A budget is a statement of priorities. In an environment where we can't fund everything, and in the face of the cost of a new war, we need to make choices based on our values. I am disappointed that the budget currently before the Senate Budget Committee contains significant holes in funding for national priorities like homeland security, education and transportation.

FUNDING FIRST RESPONDERS

On Thursday, I introduced an amendment in the Budget Committee to speed funding to our first responders. My amendment added \$2.2 billion to the fiscal year 2003 budget to ensure that first responders like our police and firefighters have the equipment and training they need now. Unfortunately, this amendment failed on a party line vote of 12-11.

Last week, in an address from the White House, the President reminded us that our country is now a battlefield. My amendment would have guaranteed that those on the front lines have the resources they need to protect our communities.

Although he rejected homeland security funding passed by the Senate last year, President Bush criticized the 2003 Omnibus Appropriations bill for falling \$2.2 billion short of the amount needed to fund first responders. My amendment would have provided this funding now.

Homeland security is a national issue and one that requires real commitment and shared sacrifice. Unfortunately, the Administration continues to push additional tax cuts in the face of our national security needs. I am disappointed that our federal government is leaving cash-strapped communities throughout Washington state holding the bag.

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

I also offered an amendment to the budget to fully fund the No Child Left Behind Act. My amendment would add \$8.9 billion to the budget to fulfill our federal commitment to schools in Washington state and around the country.

When Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act in December of 2001, we did it based on two commitments: **1)** schools would be held accountable for their progress and **2)** the federal government would provide schools with the resources to meet those new requirements.

We came together in a bipartisan way to pass No Child Left Behind. Now is the time to come together to provide the funding we promised students over a year ago.

Unfortunately, once again, the majority party put tax cuts ahead of the needs of our schools and my amendment failed on a party-line vote. The amendment would have funded critical programs like rural education, after school centers, teacher quality, class size reduction and Title I -- a program that provides funds for extra educational services for children who are behind in school.

COMMUNITY FORESTRY

This week Weyerhaeuser announced its decision to sell the Snoqualmie Tree Farm, which comprises over 100,000 acres of forest land, to the Hancock Timber Resources Group. For the last four years, I have worked to pass legislation that would create a new forest conservation tool called Community Forestry Bonds. I passed this legislation twice in the Senate -- once in 1999 and again in 2001 -- and had attached it to another piece of legislation that was still pending at the end of the last session of Congress.

Over the past year, I have been proud to work with the Evergreen Forest Trust, Weyerhaeuser, and other stakeholders on a proposal to protect the Snoqualmie Tree Farm with Community Forest Bonds. This week's announcement has left many people wondering about the long-term future of the Snoqualmie Tree Farm and my community forestry bill.

On Thursday, I met with the President of the Hancock Timber Resources Group. I encouraged the company to sit down at the table with the Evergreen Forest Trust and other conservation groups to discuss options.

I will continue to work to pass legislation that empowers communities in Washington state and across America to use community forestry bonds to protect our forests, jobs and quality of life.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

This week I introduced an important women's health amendment on the floor of the U.S. Senate. My amendment would have advanced women's health by providing safe, responsible access to emergency contraceptives, fair treatment of contraceptives by insurers, and healthcare for low income, pregnant women under the States' Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP). Unfortunately this amendment was defeated in a vote of the full Senate.

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