

# PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – July 15, 2005

## We Must Maintain Full \$1.5 Billion Commitment to Our Veterans

### MY AMENDMENT AFFIRMS SENATE COMMITMENT TO \$1.5 BILLION FOR VETERANS' HEALTH CARE

This week, I led an effort on the Senate floor to reaffirm the Senate's commitment to provide \$1.5 billion in emergency spending to fill a shortfall in the VA's 2005 budget.

In an amendment to the Homeland Security Appropriations bill, I called on my Senate colleagues to stand by the commitment we made two weeks ago to fund much-needed health care for our veterans. My amendment passed 95-0 on Tuesday.

*Get more information on my amendment:*

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=240469>

### BACKGROUND: WHY DID THE SENATE HAVE TO VOTE AGAIN FOR \$1.5 BILLION?

Two weeks ago, recognizing that the shortfall in VA funding had to be corrected immediately, I successfully sponsored an amendment to provide \$1.5 billion for veterans' health care. This amendment passed the Senate 96-0 on June 29<sup>th</sup>.

Unfortunately, the House of Representatives passed a bill that only provided \$975 million. Just after the Senate voted for a \$1.5 billion boost, the Senate Majority Leader pushed for the Senate to accept the House's lower level of \$975 million (rather than \$1.5 billion). That sent a message that the Senate was backing away from its commitment to provide \$1.5 billion — and that reduction in funding would hurt our veterans.

At the **House level of funding**, our veterans would face:

- **A continued hiring freeze** at the VA;
- **No new specialists** hired for pressing health care needs like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder; and
- **No new clinics** opened in Bellingham and Wenatchee.

I'm glad the Senate passed my amendment to maintain \$1.5 billion in funding for veterans' health care. But there is still more work to do. We must continue to work for the Senate funding level in negotiations with the House, and we must see that that the President signs this bill into law.

*See video of my speech on vets' health care funding:*

<http://murray.senate.gov/video/050628-vets.ram>

*Sign up to get periodic updates on my work for veterans:*

<http://murray.senate.gov/vetupdates>

## Supporting Our Beef Industry

This week's court ruling to reopen our border to Canadian beef troubles me. As a nation, we must protect our cattle ranchers and their efforts to provide quality beef to our country. So, I believe mandatory country-of-origin labeling is essential. We need to make sure consumers know where the beef comes from so they can make informed buying decisions, and so we can increase consumers' confidence in the safety of our food supply.

I also believe the Bush Administration must reopen Japan, Korea, and other foreign markets to U.S. beef. As a state that depends on trade, we and the national cattle ranchers deserve the opportunity to supply our beef to the global

market. I'll continue to work with my Senate colleagues and the administration to ensure the safety of our residents, the strength of our economy, and consumer confidence in our food supply.

## Keeping Our Airports Safe

On Wednesday, I secured a \$1.5 million grant for runway improvement projects at Sea-Tac Airport. This grant will improve safety at the airport by rehabilitating runway 16/34 L. As the top Democrat on the Senate Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee, I am proud to secure funds to improve the safety and efficiency of our airports so they can help strengthen our state's economy.

## Fighting Terrorism at our Borders

### FUNDING HOMELAND SECURITY

This week, the Senate passed the Homeland Security Appropriations bill for 2006. I worked on the \$30.86 billion proposal as a member of the Senate's Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee.

I voted for the bill because it takes steps forward to protect our communities. However, I believe it still comes up short on critical challenges like port security, border protection, and first responders. I appreciate the efforts of the Senate to improve the Bush Administration's Homeland Security funding proposal, which many of my colleagues and I believed to be inadequate. While I know we must do better, I voted for the bill so we can lock in the progress we've made in keeping our country safe.

I'm proud to have used my position to improve on the administration's proposal in several key areas. The following are some of those improvements:

### BORDER SECURITY

Last year, Congress called for 2,000 new Border Patrol Agents to be hired. President Bush's budget would allow only 200 to be hired. I worked to provide funding for 1,000 agents in this bill — five times more than the President wanted.

### PORT SECURITY

America's ports have identified \$6.5 billion in security needs. President Bush's proposed budget would have completely eliminated the port security grant program. But at my insistence, this bill now provides \$200 million for port security grants.

### FIRST RESPONDERS

The bill also makes progress for local first-responders, including urban search and rescue teams. Estimates show that urban search and rescue teams need \$30 million to meet today's challenges. The President's budget request offered only \$7 million. With my support, the final bill now includes \$18 million.

I also worked to:

- Provide \$20 million for operations for U.S. Coast Guard District 13 (Seattle);
- Provide \$2.8 million to build a new breakwater at Neah Bay;
- Eliminate the President's proposal to increase aviation security fees.

The House of Representatives has already passed its version of a Homeland Security funding bill. As a member of the House-Senate panel that will negotiate differences between the two bills, I'll fight for funding to keep our state and nation safe.

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