

# PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – September 23, 2005

## FDA Must be Strong & Independent

**NOT THE SAME FDA** - As the federal agency in charge of making sure the food we eat and medicines we take are safe, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) plays a critical role in Americans' health. However, I continue to be deeply concerned that some at the FDA are putting politics ahead of sound science. The FDA has long been one of the federal government's most revered agencies, but by allowing politics to play a role in decision making, the FDA is opening a Pandora's box that could have lasting consequences on the agency's credibility.

**BACKGROUND: PLAN B IS EXHIBIT A** - Nowhere has the FDA's politicization been more evident than its refusal to issue a long-promised decision on Plan B emergency contraceptives.

I've been working to get a decision from the FDA on the over-the-counter (OTC) status for Plan B. In December of 2003 – almost two years ago – the FDA's own scientific advisory board overwhelmingly recommended approval of Plan B's OTC application by a vote of 23-4, but the FDA has not adhered to its own guidelines for drug approval and continues to drag its heels.

Despite a written promise from the Secretary of Health and Human Services that a decision on Plan B would be reached by September 1, the FDA has only provided further delays. This is a serious breach of faith, and it's why I've stepped up my efforts to get a decision on Plan B and restore the role of science in decision making at the FDA.

**FIGHTING FOR SCIENCE OVER POLITICS** - This week, I took two specific actions against this dangerous trend.

First, I gave a speech on the Senate floor in support of my ongoing efforts to restore science as the guiding principle at the FDA. In that speech, I called for the FDA to return to the "gold standard" it had once set for the approval of food and drugs, instead of the "double standard" it is operating under today.

Second, I used my power on the Senate Appropriations Committee to obtain language that will be included in the final Agriculture Appropriations bill – which funds the FDA – expressing Congress's concerns over the direction of the FDA and urging the agency to expedite a decision on Plan B.

I'm proud to have stood up against the politicization of FDA. This fight is not over and I'll continue to use every tool at my disposal to work for a decision on Plan B and to return credibility to the FDA.

*Read my speech calling for a strong, independent FDA:*  
<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=246201>

*Read a timeline and get more on my work on Plan B:*  
<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=238939>

## Standing up for Our Veterans

**HELP WITH PTSD** - This week I stood up for America's veterans by ensuring that those who need help with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are not scrutinized, stigmatized, or penalized by a planned VA investigation.

**BACKGROUND: A BARRIER TO CARE** - Earlier this year, the VA announced plans to investigate the PTSD disability claims of 72,000 veterans. An earlier study of a small number of cases by the VA's Inspector General found errors in about one-third of the claims examined. Many of the problems uncovered were merely paperwork errors.

Along with organizations like the American Legion and the Paralyzed Veterans of America, I feared the VA would use the review to strip benefits from veterans with mental illness. I also knew the review would take valuable time and resources away from processing current disability claims.

**BLOCKING THE REVIEW** – Yesterday, I blocked the review by inserting language into the 2006 Military Construction and Veterans' Affairs Appropriations Bill which passed the full Senate Thursday. My language says the review cannot proceed until the VA justifies the program to Congress. It also ensures veterans cannot be stripped of their benefits except in cases of fraud.

The VA must not delay its work on today's disability claims in order to investigate decisions it made years ago. It's already hard enough for veterans to seek care for mental health problems. I can't stand by and let the VA throw down another barrier in front of veterans with PTSD.

The bill has passed the Senate, and must now be reconciled with the House of Representatives' version in conference.

*Sign up to get periodic updates on my work for our veterans:*  
<http://murray.senate.gov/vetupdates>

## Don't Shortchange Katrina Workers

**DON'T DENY RELIEF WORKERS A FAIR WAGE** – This week, I signed on as an original cosponsor of a bill that would protect fair wages for Katrina relief and reconstruction workers. The brave men and women working in the Gulf region are working in extremely hazardous conditions to rescue the stricken and rebuild devastated areas. It is simply wrong to repay their hard work and sacrifices with lower wages. We have to provide them with full pay and healthcare benefits.

**BACKGROUND: AN UNFAIR PRESIDENTIAL ORDER** - On September 8, 2005, President Bush issued a proclamation stating that federal construction contractors operating in the areas of hurricane recovery would be exempt from the prevailing wage protections of the Davis-Bacon Act. The Davis-Bacon Act has ensured since 1931 that workers earn local wages on federally-funded construction contracts.

**LEGISLATION TO PROTECT DAVIS-BACON** - That's why, I cosponsored the Fair Wages for Katrina Recovery Workers Act. It would reverse the President's suspension and ensure that the workers involved in the recovery and reconstruction effort will earn a prevailing wage. I look forward to working with my colleagues to pass this bill and protect our workers.

## Military Construction Projects for WA

**IMPROVED FACILITIES FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL** - On Thursday, I announced over \$319 million in construction projects for Washington state military installations in the Senate 2006 Military Construction and VA Appropriations bill. As a key member of this subcommittee, I worked to include critical funding for projects ranging from a new resistance training facility at Fairchild Air Force Base to housing facilities at Fort Lewis. The funding was approved by the Senate yesterday, and will now be negotiated with the House.

Washington state's military bases are strategically important to our nation's defense and our ability to project force worldwide. I'm pleased to have secured funding to improve these facilities for the training and quality of life of our military personnel. These projects will modernize and upgrade the facilities in which our men and women in uniform and their families live, work and train. By approving this funding, the Senate has sent the message that we appreciate their sacrifices.

*Get details on the distribution of the funding:*  
<http://www.murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=246310>

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