

# PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – March 17, 2006

## The Budget: Wrong Priorities

Yesterday, I voted against the Senate Budget Resolution because I believe it was not a true representation of the priorities of Washington state or America's families. How we choose to allocate our resources says a lot about the kind of country we want to be, and whether we want communities where opportunities are available to the few or to the many.

Unfortunately, the majority party in the U.S. Senate handed the American people a budget that places little value on our national priorities. This budget places too little value on the things ordinary Americans need and in doing so imperils the American dream for all of us.

I was particularly disappointed that this budget didn't do enough to help Americans who need and deserve our help the most – like our nation's veterans and families and seniors trying to find affordable housing.

That is why I introduced two amendments on the Senate floor this week to try and do more on these issues:

### Veterans Healthcare

The Republican majority in the U.S. Senate turned their backs on the needs of America's veterans this week. The majority defeated an amendment that I introduced with Senator Daniel Akaka (D-Hawaii) that would have guaranteed our veterans protection from harmful new fees and co-pays and boosted the investment in veterans care and services by \$1.5 billion.

Specifically, our amendment, which would have been paid for by closing corporate tax loopholes, would have:

- **Helped more Iraq War veterans make the transition home** by providing \$231 million for transition assistance.
- **Increased Support for PTSD and Mental Healthcare** by providing an additional \$321 million. A recent study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* reported that 35 percent of Iraq veterans received mental health care during their first year home.
- **Expanded Veteran Support Clinics** by providing \$81 million to expand Vet Centers around the country to provide daily support and assistance to veterans
- **Eliminated new Fees and Co-Payments.** My amendment would provide \$825 million to roll back a Bush Administration plan to raise fees and co-payments on veterans who seek VA healthcare.
- **Supported Rehabilitation** by providing \$42 million to expand residential rehabilitation services for veterans.

We all remember last year's fight over veterans funding and the gaping hole in the VA budget that Congress had to come back and backfill. I am disappointed that once again Senate Republicans have said no to more support for those who have sacrificed for us. This is *deja-vu* for our veterans. Those of us who have been on the ground, talked with our veterans and with those that provide the care know that we are still not doing enough.

To learn more about my veterans' amendment:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=252615>

To learn receive my Veterans' Updates:

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

### Affordable Housing and Community Development

Across our state and the nation, mayors and community leaders are up in arms about this budget's misguided billion dollar cuts to the Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG).

CDBG provides the critical seed money to bring our communities back up to standard, provide safe, affordable housing, and create jobs and economic development in underserved neighborhoods. Robbing our communities of these funds right now – when our country is trying to get back on its feet – is the wrong thing to do.

That is why on Wednesday I offered an amendment to the budget to restore and increase funding for this critical program. Unfortunately, Senate Republicans defeated my efforts.

To learn more about my CDBG amendment:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=252663>

To receive my housing updates:

<http://murray.senate.gov/economy/housingcomments.cfm>

## Standing Up for the FDA's Gold Standard

I continue to be concerned that some at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are putting politics ahead of sound science. Nowhere has this dangerous trend been more clear than in the FDA's handling of the over-the-counter application of Plan B emergency contraceptives.

Plan B was overwhelmingly recommended for approval by the FDA's own scientific advisory board over two years ago. Yet, disturbingly, the agency continues to delay a decision on the application's status due to politics and ideology.

The American people deserve an FDA that sets the gold standard in drug approval. The FDA under this Administration has squandered that trust and its dealing with Plan B is a case in point. On Thursday, the White House announced that it has nominated Dr. Andrew von Eschenbach to serve as FDA Commissioner. It is far past time for the FDA to stop dragging its heels and make a decision on Plan B. That is why I have joined with Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-New York) in placing a hold on the nomination of Dr. von Eschenbach until the FDA issues a yes or no decision on Plan B.

## Victory for Education

I am pleased to announce that the Senate passed a big victory for education this week in the form of a bi-partisan amendment by Senators Arlen Specter (R-Pennsylvania) and Tom Harkin (D-Iowa). The Specter-Harkin amendment, which I supported, provides \$7 billion in increased funding to health and education programs. As a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I know first hand how critical that funding when the Budget Resolution is conferenced with the House version. I will work to ensure that a final version of the Budget contains the Specter-Harkin boost in funding.

I will also continue to fight to increase Pell grants and student aid. Currently, only one-third of the U.S. workforce has a post-secondary education, but it is estimated that 60 percent of new jobs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will require a college degree. Workers who have attended college on average have higher incomes and lower rates of unemployment than those who don't. And those with a college education are also more likely to have jobs with benefits like health care, retirement and pension plans.

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