

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – February 13, 2004

Easing the Burden on Our Guard & Reserve Families

This week, I introduced a bill to help the families of our Guard and Reserve members. Currently, our state is experiencing the largest deployment of our Guard since World War II. These long deployments place special burdens on family members. For example, when a husband or wife is deployed, the remaining spouse often experiences a significant loss in income and may need to find a job and pay for child care. Guard and Reserve members often don't get the support services that are available to full-time military personnel.

On January 9, I met with members of the 81st Brigade and their families at Camp Murray and Fort Lewis. I heard about the difficulties they're experiencing and promised to do whatever I could in the Senate to help.

So this week, I introduced a bill to address the challenges that families shared with me. The **Guard and Reserve Enhanced Benefits Act of 2004** (S.2068) would provide expanded health care, family assistance, education, and financial benefits.

We are asking so much of our Guard and Reserve members and their families. We have an obligation to make it easier for their spouses and children during these long deployments.

Bill Details: <http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=218051>
Watch my speech:
[rtsp://video.webcastcenter.com/srs_g2/murray021204.rm](http://video.webcastcenter.com/srs_g2/murray021204.rm)

Senate Passes Transportation Bill

On Thursday, the Senate passed a bill that will increase funding for transportation projects in our state. The bipartisan proposal passed 76-21. The bill, nicknamed "SAFE TEA," provides \$318 billion over the next six years for highways, roads, bridges, and transit projects. That's a 70.3 percent increase for Washington state in highway and transit funding from the previous authorization (TEA-21). It's projected to create 1.6 million jobs nationwide.

I voted for the bill to improve our state's congested transportation system. I know that transportation investments create jobs today and improve our productivity, business climate, and quality of life. The White House has threatened to veto the bill.

Record Funding for Ferries

The transportation bill also includes good news for everyone who rides a Washington state ferry. This week, I succeeded in boosting our federal commitment to America's ferries.

For years, the federal government has under-funded ferry systems – even as they have become more important in places like Washington. Our state operates the nation's largest ferry system, and passenger demand is projected to grow by 15.4 percent through 2009. This week, I offered an amendment to the federal surface transportation reauthorization bill. My amendment authorizes \$720 million in ferry funding -- more

than triple the current amount – through 2009. My amendment was accepted as part of the transportation bill, which passed the Senate Thursday.

Details: <http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=218064>

White House Wants to Cut Port Security Funding

The President's budget includes disturbing news for those of us who care about port security.

1. The President wants to eliminate Operation Safe Commerce, an innovative program to track cargo containers that is being implemented at the Ports of Seattle and Tacoma.
2. The President is only providing 7 percent of the funding needed this year to implement the Marine Transportation Security Act.
3. The White House is asking much more of our Coast Guard but is not providing the funding to allow the Coast Guard to complete all of its missions.

I raised these concerns directly with Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge on Wednesday and at a press conference:

Video: <http://murray.senate.gov/video/040211-hspress.rm>
Text: <http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=217971>

Working to Confirm Another Washington Judge

I am working to confirm James Robart, a Seattle attorney, to a vacancy on the U.S. District Court for Washington's Western District. On Wednesday, I introduced Mr. Robart before the Senate Judiciary Committee, which is considering his nomination. Mr. Robart received his undergraduate degree at Whitman College, and has been active in Seattle's legal community for more than 30 years. **Read My Remarks:**
<http://murray.senate.gov/photos/display.cfm?id=218059>

Veterans Update

HOSPITALS:

This week, the VA CARES Commission submitted its final report to Veterans Secretary Principi. Since last year, I have worked with local veterans and health care leaders to protect health care access for Washington's 670,000 veterans. The report recommends keeping the Vancouver VA facility open, but it calls for closing the Walla Walla VA facility. This is the wrong thing to do to our veterans, and I will continue to stand up for their health care needs. For more details, please see:

Walla Walla: <http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=218078>
Vancouver: <http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=218077>

OVERTIME:

I also urged Secretary Principi to protect veterans from new labor department rules that would make some veterans ineligible for overtime pay.

Details: <http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=217883>

BUDGET:

I also raised concerns about the President's inadequate funding for veterans healthcare and services. **Details:**
<http://murray.senate.gov/photos/display.cfm?id=218062>

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