

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – June 24, 2005

Funding Veterans' Healthcare

A DISTURBING ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE VA

On Thursday, the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) admitted it is \$1 billion short of what it needs to care of our veterans this year. I've been saying for months that we need additional funding to take care of existing veterans, as well as those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. I'm disturbed, however, that this announcement comes two months after VA Secretary James Nicholson assured the Congress that there was no need for emergency funding, and two weeks after the VA again claimed – under direct questioning – there was no such need.

Months before yesterday's announcement, I argued that the VA was insufficiently funded. In January, I called for additional funding to meet our veterans' healthcare needs. My proposal unfortunately failed on a party-line vote three times (twice in committee and once on the Senate floor). Now our veterans face the harsh reality of a reduced level of benefits and healthcare services.

MY VETERANS' HEALTHCARE BILL

To address this problem, I introduced on Thursday a bill that provides emergency funding of an additional \$1.98 billion dollars. This bill is identical to the veterans' healthcare amendment I in April. My proposal provides:

- \$525 million for mental health care,
- \$610 million for our newest veterans, and
- \$40 million for new clinics and local needs.

I very much regret that it has come to this. As we approach the July 4th recess, I'll call on members of Congress to join me to rectify the situation. I think the most patriotic thing we can do this holiday is to make sure our veterans get the benefits they were promised as part of their service.

I also have made clear to my colleagues in Congress and to the Administration that I intend to get to the bottom of this problem. I don't know how we got into this saddening situation, but I intend to find out. This is either the product of incompetence or misdirection – and both are unacceptable. I'll work with anyone and everyone to see that we solve this crisis and make sure this doesn't happen again.

See video of my speech at a press conference on this issue:
<http://murray.senate.gov/video/murray062305.rm>

See a timeline of my efforts to fund veterans' healthcare:
<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=239496>

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

Funding WA Priorities

The Senate is currently creating its version of the various Appropriations bills for 2006. These bills will provide funding for next year's government operations and important projects in states and communities across the country. As a member of the Appropriations Committee, I'm in a position to include funding for Washington state's most important priorities.

This week, I continued my efforts to support our state as a federal appropriator. I'm proud that, even in such a tight budget year, I've been able to get money to fund the projects that are most important to our state. Funding for the following projects will now go to the full Senate for approval. Here are a few of the projects I funded this week:

Protection against Terrorist Attacks-\$2.3 Million

I secured \$2.5 million in grants to safeguard our state's residents and infrastructure from terrorist attacks. These funds will help us avoid economic losses from terrorist acts, specifically in areas like banking and finance, transportation, and commercial assets like our malls and sports stadiums. As a member of the Senate Appropriations Homeland Security Subcommittee and the HELP subcommittee on Bioterrorism Preparedness and Public Health, I'm working hard to keep our state and nation safe from terrorist attacks.

Washington State Agriculture - \$18 million

I also secured \$18 million for our state's agricultural interests. This funding will restore many projects that were cut by President Bush's budget for 2006. For example, I restored \$6.5 million in proposed Administration cuts specifically for Agriculture Research Service Projects for our state's farmers and agriculture industry.

Northwest Straits Commission - \$1.4 million

I secured \$1.4 million for the Northwest Straits Commission to protect our marine environment and to promote environmental awareness. The commission, composed of marine resource committees, tribes, and the Puget Sound Action Team among others, directs and coordinates scientific, technical, and financial aid for marine resources committees in Northwest Washington.

To get more information on my work to fund our state priorities, including complete lists of projects, please visit my Web site at:

<http://murray.senate.gov>

Guaranteeing POW Benefits

Long after honorably serving our nation, former American Prisoners of War (POWs) still suffer the physical, mental, and emotional consequences of their captivity. Having made such profound sacrifices for our country, the last thing they should face when they return home is difficulty in getting the care and benefits they deserve. Currently, many illnesses are not covered, or a POW must have been held for at least 30 days before being eligible for benefits.

MY POW BENEFITS BILL

That's why, this week, I introduced legislation to expand the medical benefits of POWs. The bill is called the Prisoner of War Benefits Act of 2005.

My bill would aid those individuals suffering medical problems resulting from their dedicated service to our freedom. It would:

- Repeal the 30-day internment period requirement;
- Add heart diseases, stroke, type II diabetes and osteoporosis to the list of disabilities covered; and
- Improve the review process for receiving services.

I believe it's crucial that we get our POWs the healthcare and benefits they deserve when they come home. I'm going to fight to get my bill passed in the Senate and signed into law.

Saving Title IX

This week we celebrated the 33rd anniversary of Title IX, which has opened doors to sports, education and success for millions of young women. Unfortunately, the Department of Education is threatening to weaken the law and reverse decades of progress. I urge my colleagues to make sure these doors of opportunity stay open for our daughters and granddaughters.

I call on the President to protect existing Title IX policies and give every young girl in America the chance to experience the roar of a crowd and not just cheer from the sidelines.

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