

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – March 24, 2006

I've spent this week traveling to 7 counties in our state, meeting with local residents about the challenges we face. My travels took me to Chelan, King, Whatcom, Spokane, Grant, Pierce and Snohomish counties. I met with hundreds of people including veterans, farmers, mayors, doctors, border officials, and housing advocates. In addition to the meetings described below, I also spoke to the Everett Chamber of Commerce and held two roundtables with mayors from communities in South King County and on the Eastside. I hope you enjoy this recap.

Community & Housing Groups Stand Together to Fight Budget Cuts

On Tuesday, more than 70 housing and community advocates joined me in Seattle at a press conference to oppose cuts to the Community Development Block Grant, known as CDBG.

The Bush Administration has proposed cutting more than \$1 billion from the program, which provides critical seed money to provide safe, affordable housing, and create jobs and economic development in underserved neighborhoods. It's estimated that each dollar in CDBG funds leverages another \$30 in private capital. The cuts proposed in Washington, D.C. could cost our state about \$16 million in federal support. Last week, I offered an amendment to restore that funding, but my amendment was rejected.

At Tuesday's rally, local officials including King County Executive Ron Sims and Bellevue Mayor Grant Degginger spoke about how CDBG dollars are helping families and communities. The event attracted community development agencies, non-profit housing providers and social service providers. The rally took place at the YWCA Opportunity Place in Seattle. Opportunity Place receives capital and operating funds from the program. The YWCA's regional director spoke about the impact those dollars have, and a resident of Opportunity Place told us about how the support she got there changed her life. *To receive updates about housing and community development, sign up here:*

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

New Veterans Clinic for North Central Washington

On Monday, I joined Congressman Doc Hastings and veterans in Cashmere to announce that a long-awaited veterans clinic has been approved by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The new clinic will serve veterans in North Central Washington and is expected to be open by December. It will provide primary care and mental health services and is expected to have more than 10,000 patient visits in its first year of operation.

Helping Recent Veterans Find Jobs

On Tuesday in Tacoma, I held my third roundtable with veterans to hear about the challenges they're facing finding jobs after they return home from serving our country in Iraq and Afghanistan. I'll take what I heard back with me to the Senate next week and will work to update the Transition Assistance Program, the GI Bill and the Jobs for Veterans Act. I want to thank the American Legion for hosting our discussion.

New Rail Cars for WA Produce

We grow the world's best produce here in Washington, but too often our crops are left waiting on loading docks because there aren't enough refrigerated rail cars to move them to market.

That shortage of rail capacity is squeezing our potato growers and hurting our economy.

On Monday in Moses Lake, I stood with agriculture and transportation leaders to celebrate an innovative solution. Over the past two years in the Senate, I've secured \$2 million to help us lease the rail cars our farmers need. The Governor and State legislature have also provided funding, and the Washington State Potato Commission and State Department of Transportation have spearheaded the effort, which is modeled on the successful Washington Grain Train. The new rail cars should be up and running this summer.

Also on Monday in Moses Lake, I met with several dozen farmers and growers from Grant County to update them how I'm fighting cuts to agriculture programs and to solicit their ideas for the next Farm Bill.

Northern Border Security

Today, in Bellingham, Rick Larsen and I hosted a discussion on the Bush Administration's plan improve security at the Northern Border. Congress has mandated that we verify the identity of everyone who crosses our border. I want to make sure that the steps we take will actually improve security with minimal delays and burdens for citizens and commerce. That's why today I'm giving local groups an opportunity to share their concerns with officials from the Departments of State and Homeland Security at a forum at Western Washington University.

Rural Healthcare

On Thursday, I spoke to more than 250 rural healthcare providers at the 19th annual Northwest Regional Rural Health Conference in Spokane. Compared with urban communities, rural residents face higher rates of disease, are less likely to be insured, are more likely to live below the poverty line, and are more likely to rely on Medicare or Medicaid.

Unfortunately, our government has been cutting support for rural healthcare. Last month, the President signed into law a Medicaid cut of almost \$7 billion over the next five years. Last week, the Senate passed a budget that again jeopardizes rural healthcare programs. I helped pass an amendment to restore some of the biggest cuts for the coming year, but why is rural healthcare being targeted? We're all Americans, and we all deserve affordable, high quality healthcare no matter where we live.

One of the reasons politicians have been able to get away with these cuts is because they've taken the "human being" out of the discussion. They talk about "reducing the rate of spending" and "reigning in federal programs." But they won't talk about the people who are hurt when a clinic closes or a doctor isn't trained. They won't talk about the human impact – so we have to. If we let them get away with using words that leave people behind, then we're going to get budgets that leave people behind. I encouraged healthcare leaders to join me in working to put a human face on Medicare, Medicaid and safety net programs to prevent more budget cuts.

Keep Pushing for Port Security

On Wednesday, I spoke to the Seattle Rotary about the need to improve cargo security. I invited local community members to speak out about the importance of safe, efficient cargo. If you're not familiar with my GreenLane Maritime Cargo Security Act, please visit:

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

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