

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – January 19, 2007

ETHICS REFORM: Changing the Way Business is Done in D.C.

Senate Passes Sweeping Ethics Bill

This past Election Day, the American people told Congress that it was time to change course. With our troops facing an increasingly unstable situation abroad and news of scandals in our nation's capital, the voters said enough is enough. They asked for a new direction of hope and opportunity, and they asked for a Congress that would take responsibility for its actions.

On Thursday, the U.S. Senate responded with the passage of the strongest ethics reforms in a generation. This bill takes the first steps toward restoring public trust and changing the way business is done in Washington, D.C.

In bringing a strong and bipartisan ethics reform package to the floor as our first piece of legislation, the Democratic leadership worked to reaffirm our commitment to transparency, civility, and accountability.

I will continue to make decisions the way I always have – by traveling around our state and hearing from communities about how I can help them to grow, advance, and improve their own quality of life with good policies and assistance from the federal government.

Last November, the American public held Congress accountable for the culture of corruption that had been allowed to fester with few checks or balances. Today we took a critical step to hold Congress accountable and begin to rebuild the public's confidence in our government.

As we continue to work through critical issues like the war in Iraq, healthcare, energy, education, and stem cell research, the American people deserve to know that the only interests we are taking into account are theirs.

IRAQ: Standing with Veterans in Opposing Escalation

Veterans are already facing long delays for healthcare, benefits

On Thursday, I stood with nine veterans of the war in Iraq to speak out against the President's plan to escalate the war. I spoke about how, in addition to ignoring the American people's message to change course, this surge will also threaten the healthcare and benefits of America's veterans.

Our troops are doing a great job for us overseas, and we have an obligation to meet their needs when they come home. Whether it's for healthcare, or for job training or benefits or making the transition back home we have got to do a better job meeting the needs of the men and women who have served our country so honorably. Today – without the surge – veterans are waiting too long for the services they've been promised. If we're not meeting the needs of the veterans today, how can we keep the promise to troops who are sent in to an escalated war? We need to understand the cost of the war, not just when the troops are overseas but when they come home.

To read or listen to my speech visit:

<http://murray.senate.gov/photos/display.cfm?id=267695>

AG NEWS: Working for Washington State Farm Families

A STEP TOWARD A STABLE FARM WORKFORCE

This week I helped sponsor the **Agricultural Job Opportunity, Benefits, and Security (AgJOBS) Act of 2007**. This bill would help secure a legal and dependable farm workforce by providing better working conditions for farm workers in the U.S. It will also help to ensure that farm workers who have been working and paying taxes in the U.S., receive proper legal protections.

PROTECTING FARM FAMILIES FROM ADDITIONAL TAXES

On Friday, I joined with several of my colleagues in sending a letter to oppose a proposed IRS regulation that would impose an unfair tax burden on many farm families. The IRS proposal would tax the **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** payments that farmers receive for volunteering to not farm environmentally-sensitive lands. I am committed to protecting Washington state farmers and will continue to monitor and fight this harmful proposal.

WASHINGTON WORKERS: Fighting for Aid to Struggling Farmers and Service Employees

On Friday, I lent my support to a bill that aims to improve the **Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA)** program. The Trade Adjustment Assistance program is a federal program that aids workers who lose their jobs (or whose hours of work and wages are reduced) as a result of increased imports.

The bill that I am supporting extends the TAA program through 2012 and will extend coverage to service workers whose jobs are increasingly being moved offshore to countries like China and India. Additionally, this bill will help even more of our state's farmers and fishermen qualify for TAA assistance. Thousands of Washington state workers have already reaped the benefits of TAA, and I will be working to ensure that even more of our state's workers qualify for this assistance.

IRS: Protecting Taxpayer Privacy

Halting the Outsourcing of Debt Collection

On Thursday, I introduced legislation with Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND) that would stop the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) from using private debt collectors to collect unpaid taxes.

The legislation would make law a recommendation from the IRS's own National Taxpayer Advocate, Nina Olson, who just last week strongly recommended that outsourcing be halted.

I have objected to this plan since it first surfaced last year. I'm deeply concerned that the plan to outsource debt collection would neither adequately protect privacy, nor guarantee any cost savings to the U.S. Treasury. This program threatens the American taxpayer's rights to fair treatment and outsources essential government functions. I am proud to work with Senator Dorgan on this legislation to put an end to the Administration's irresponsible and ineffective plan.

To subscribe, unsubscribe, or change your email address, visit: <http://murray.senate.gov/updates>