

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – October 10, 2003

WORKER TRAINING

Last week the Senate Health Education Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee unanimously approved a bill I helped write (S.1627) to retrain more American workers for good jobs. As the highest ranking Democrat on the Senate Employment, Safety and Training Subcommittee, I have worked with my Republican colleague, Sen. Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.), to expand the Workforce Investment Act. Our bipartisan bill would provide more skills development and training opportunities for workers and would strengthen the role of employers in the public workforce system.

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA), which Congress passed in 1998, provides one-stop job centers, training programs and other employment-related services for workers throughout the country. The bill also fosters partnerships between workers, businesses, community colleges and organized labor to meet the workforce needs of local communities. Congress is working to update WIA this year.

Passage of S. 1627 could mean the difference between someone who is trapped outside the workforce without the skills they need, and someone who can compete and win in today's economy. Thanks to WIA, new partnerships are being built to help workers and employers across Washington state.

My bill would:

- Empower WIA's two customers – business and workers – to use their first-hand knowledge to meet local employment needs while providing appropriate incentives and flexibility to bring people and businesses into One-Stop Centers.
- Maintain existing funding streams for youth, adults, and dislocated workers, rather than turning the funding over to block grants.
- Make WIA services more efficient at every level by streamlining the performance, reporting and eligibility criteria, and by eliminating barriers to job training.
- Provide more appropriate performance measures to reflect the type of work and the labor markets being served.

This legislation will give Washington state workers the additional tools they need to move to new jobs, higher incomes, and brighter futures. By strengthening the Workforce Investment Act, we are improving training and occupational opportunities for our workers today and paving the way for our nation's economic growth and security tomorrow.

STANDING UP FOR PRODUCERS

This week I renewed my call for the Bush Administration to fix its management of the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust (BEHT), so that local farms and businesses are not again hurt by the Administration's actions.

Last year, the Administration's cumbersome and closed-door management of the BEHT caused disruption in the soft white wheat market for farmers and local elevator operators in Washington state. In light of these actions, I requested that the USDA issue a report to Congress outlining the Administration's food aid policy. Unfortunately, the Administration has still not been responsive to our farmers.

This this week I sent another letter to Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman.

In my letter to Sec. Veneman, I called on the Bush Administration to do two things to lessen the impact on local producers:

- 1) Require the USDA to issue a report to Congress outlining its food aid policy, particularly with respect to the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust (BEHT).
- 2) Write a rule pertaining to the sale of commodities from the BEHT that would ensure that sales be conducted in a manner that does not negatively affect local farms and businesses and would increase the transparency of the BEHT's administration.

Soft white wheat is the predominant class of wheat grown in the Pacific Northwest, and it accounts for almost 11 percent of the total U.S. wheat production. The lack of a clear management policy from the USDA has both producers and elevator operators very concerned with the Administration's plans for the BEHT in 2004.

TOURING WASHINGTON STATE

During the Senate's recess this week, I took the opportunity to travel throughout Washington state to discuss important local issues.

On Monday I was in Spokane to speak at the Magnuson Club luncheon and to visit the West Central Community Center. Later I toured the University District and met with the Spokane Chamber of Commerce to talk about transportation, defense and economic development issues facing the community.

On Tuesday I attended a ribbon-cutting for the new SR-519, an overpass that will improve the flow of traffic in downtown Seattle. I also attended a press conference with officials from Thailand and the Port of Seattle to discuss a new Port Security measure which tracks container cargo from the Port of Laem Chabang in Thailand through the Port of Seattle.

On Thursday, I visited Ferry County to meet with community leaders where we discussed education, jobs, health care and rural telecommunications.

On Friday I toured Kvichak Marine in Seattle to help launch a new 43' Coast Guard response boat. This boat is competing for a 200-boat Coast Guard contract to replace the current fleet of aged Coast Guard Medium Response Boats. If Kvichak wins the contract, it will bring 50-75 jobs to the Puget Sound region. I also met with Mayors of North King County and South Snohomish County to focus on education, transportation and economic development.

WOMAN'S DAY MAGAZINE

I'm proud to report that a Washington state resident is featured in the new (Nov. 1st) edition of Woman's Day magazine.

Lisa Paolino was selected by Woman's Day magazine to share a "day in the life" with a United States Senator. I was proud to host Lisa and her husband and son earlier this year. The magazine contains a 4-page spread with lots of photos of our day together. Congratulations, Lisa!

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