

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – October 31, 2003

HELPING LAID-OFF WORKERS

This week in the Senate, I introduced legislation to extend unemployment assistance to the millions of Americans who are still unable to find work. With the current round of unemployment benefits set to expire at the end of December, and with over 217,000 unemployed workers in Washington state alone, this situation is critical.

The bill I introduced would:

- Continue federal U.I. benefits for an additional 26 weeks
- Provide assistance to those who have already exhausted their benefits
- and provide 7 additional weeks of benefits for high-unemployment states like Washington.

Unfortunately, the majority party refused to allow the bill to be voted on and provided no assurances for when we could debate my bill.

At a time when we are spending a billion dollars a week in Iraq, the least we can do is give unemployed Americans a few hundred dollars a week. I will continue my push to make sure we extend unemployment benefits before Congress ends its work for the year.

PROTECTING HEAD START

I am proud to announce that on Wednesday, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee said "No" to Head Start block grants and "Yes" to protecting the needs of our most vulnerable children.

Unfortunately, the plan passed by the House of Representatives to block grant Head Start would have dismantled this successful program. Further, the House plan would not have helped any of the thousands of children on waiting lists get into Head Start classrooms.

I am also concerned about the testing scheme being implemented by the Department of Health and Human Services to evaluate three and four year olds in Head Start programs.

As the only former pre-school teacher in the Senate, I feel a personal obligation to stand up for children in Washington state. I will continue to work in the Senate to ensure that the final reauthorization strengthens – not weakens – Head Start.

HELPING VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The month of October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. One way in which I hope we can stop the cycle of abuse is to end the system of economic discrimination that keeps victims trapped in abusive relationships. That is why I was proud to introduce legislation yesterday, called the Security and Financial Empowerment Act (SAFE Act).

My bill would:

- Protect victims who are forced to flee their jobs by extending unemployment insurance.
- Protect victims by allowing unpaid time from work to get the help they need.
- Protect victims from insurance discrimination.

Over the years I've worked on the issue of domestic violence and talked to many women who have been in serious situations. When I asked them directly "Why didn't you leave?" the answer invariably has been "I couldn't afford to, I needed to take care of my children, I didn't have the financial ability to leave." My legislation would take away those barriers so that victims have the financial security to leave dangerous situations.

VETS BENEFITS PASS SENATE

This week, the Senate unanimously approved the Omnibus Veteran's Benefits bill that contains parts of my legislation, the Francis W. Agnes Ex-POW Benefits Act. Fran Agnes was a champion for Washington state veterans who passed away earlier this year.

The bill includes my proposal to eliminate the current federal requirement that a POW must have been held for a minimum of 30 days in order to qualify for POW benefits. Under current law, the POWs of Operation Iraqi Freedom would not qualify. Improving and expanding care to former POW's remains a priority for me, and this legislation will serve forever as a tribute to Fran Agnes and his devotion to his Washington's veterans.

The Senate bill also includes my proposal to provide the entire amount of accrued benefits to veterans' survivors. The Veterans' Survivors Benefits Act (S. 1188) overturns current law under which family members are only entitled to a maximum retroactive award of two years of a veteran's accrued benefits regardless of the total award owed to that veteran at the time of his or her death. The current benefits policy sends a terrible message not only to our brave veterans, but also to the men and women risking their lives for our country today. Our nation needs to show its gratitude by expanding benefits for all those who sacrifice to protect our country.

NEW: Sign up to get the latest veterans news at:
<http://murray.senate.gov/vetupdates>

INVESTIGATING WHEAT SALES

Today I called on the Bush Administration to investigate how the Australian Wheat Board sold Iraq hundreds of thousands of metric tons of wheat at a price nearly double what U.S. producers were charging. A recent report found that the Australians charged about \$280 per metric ton for the same wheat that U.S. producers were charging only \$151 per metric ton.

While Australia is an ally and an important trade partner, we must ensure that our producers have the opportunity to compete fairly for wheat sales in Iraq. I will continue to stand up for our wheat producers to ensure they can compete and win in the global marketplace.

WATCH MY SPEECHES

This week I spoke on the Senate floor about:

- addressing climate change,
- protecting Old Growth forests,
- and extending unemployment benefits.

You can watch video of my remarks at:
<http://murray.senate.gov/video>

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