

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – April 16, 2004

Fighting for Veterans' Healthcare

On Monday, I held an official field hearing of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee at Walla Walla Community College to give local veterans a voice in the future of their healthcare. The hearing was the latest step in my ongoing fight to keep the Administration from closing the Walla Walla VA Medical Center, which serves 12,000 veterans a year.

More than 400 people attended, and we heard testimony from a dozen veterans' advocates and community leaders. As the daughter of a World War II veteran and as the first woman to serve on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, I am honored to represent Washington State's 670,000 veterans.

I've opposed this closure from day one. Last July, I learned that the CARES (*Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services*) Commission was planning to recommend closing our VA hospitals at American Lake, Vancouver and Walla Walla. I immediately wrote to Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Anthony Principi, and began working with local veterans and healthcare providers to fight these shortsighted closures. Fortunately, we were able to protect the American Lake and Vancouver facilities.

Unfortunately, two months ago, the CARES Commission formally recommended that Secretary Principi close the Walla Walla hospital. I requested the hearing, so that I can build an official record of the healthcare needs of the region's 69,000 veterans.

At the hearing, I rigorously questioned Dr. Leslie Burger, director of veterans' health for the region. He admitted several things that completely undermine the proposed closure, including the fact that adequate mental health, substance abuse, and long-term care services are not available locally.

I also refuted Administration claims that replacement services would be available for veterans. I sit on the Appropriations Committee and on the Veterans Committee. I've looked at the budget, and the VA has not requested a dime for new facilities in Walla Walla. In fact, there are no major projects in the VA pipeline. We cannot allow the Administration to close down such a vital hospital with no real plans to care for our veterans.

NEXT STEPS

I am going to share the hundreds of comments I received directly with Secretary Principi and urge him, once again, to save this hospital. I am also going to use my position on the Veterans and Appropriations Committees to continue standing up for our veterans. Next year, when I become either the Chairman or the ranking member of the Veterans Affairs Committee, the VA is going to have to come before me and my committee. I'm not going to forget how our veterans in Walla Walla were treated.

I also released a new report at the hearing, *Closure of Walla Walla VA Medical Facility: Effect on Veterans' Access to Mental Healthcare*, which was prepared by the committee's minority staff.

Read the full report at:

<http://murray.senate.gov/veterans/vetreport.pdf>

Read my full statement at:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=220395>

Read testimony from advocates and leaders at:

<http://murray.senate.gov/veterans/witnesslist.pdf>

Funding WA Transportation, Creating WA Jobs

I announced this week that some of the \$245 million in transportation funds I secured has now been sent to our state.

Among the 13 projects receiving funding this week are the South Bay Taylor Dock Project in Bellingham, the US-395 North Spokane Corridor Project, and the Grade Separation Project in Yakima. Additional funding will be released for each of these 13 projects as soon as the federal transportation act is reauthorized. I am proud to have worked so hard to bring these resources back to Washington communities. This investment in our state's transportation infrastructure ensures good-paying jobs today and continued economic growth for years to come.

See all 13 projects:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=220486>

Working for WA Jobs

On Monday, I held an Economic Development Roundtable in Walla Walla with community and business leaders to listen to concerns and discuss strategies to get the area's economy moving again. This is one of the many discussions like this I'm holding throughout our state.

Supporting Boeing Jobs

On Friday, I toured Boeing's Longacres facility in Tukwila. Before an audience of Boeing workers, I got an update on two of Boeing's innovative projects: next-generation air traffic management, for which I secured \$45 million over the past three years; and Connexion, Boeing's new airborne Internet access system. I also updated Boeing workers on my efforts to stop Airbus's campaign to kill the Boeing/Air Force tanker program.

Helping Seniors Understand the Medicare Prescription Drug Plan

On Friday, I met with senior citizens at the Givens Community Center in Port Orchard to discuss the new Medicare prescription drug law. I am holding a series of these discussions all over the state, because I believe it's crucial that Washington seniors understand exactly how the new law affects them.

Get more information on the Prescription Drug Plan:

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

Supporting Cancer Research

Also on Friday, I spoke at the Grand Opening of the new Public Health Sciences Building at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center. The new building is the latest and largest addition to the center's South Lake Union campus. I was glad to be there to express my support for the great work the center does.

Honored by the United Way

This week I was named the United Way's **Federal Partner of the Year** at the organization's annual "Spirit of Caring Awards." This national award is special for me because I know that the people of United Way are out there in our schools, in our community centers, and in our neighborhoods everyday, making our communities stronger.

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