

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – March 4, 2005

Ensuring Safer Rx Drugs

This week, as a member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, I participated in two hearings aimed at improving the safety of prescription drugs in the U.S. The hearings were held in response to recent safety concerns regarding COX 2 Inhibitor drugs, such as Vioxx and Celebrex, but were an opportunity to improve the overall process of FDA drug approval and ensure long-term patient safety.

The HELP Committee is the Senate committee with FDA oversight, so it is essential that my colleagues and I continue to learn about the challenges facing FDA approval and the surveillance of drugs once they are approved. We owe it to the millions of patients who depend on the FDA to protect their health and safety.

We need to balance patient safety with the innovation and timely approval that will allow patients to get the drugs they want and need as quickly as possible. We've worked hard to give FDA more funding and authority to meet the challenges of new biotech and biomedical advances of recent years, and we know we must achieve the right balance between timeliness and safety.

The first of this week's hearings, held on Tuesday, examined where the approval process has fallen short in the past; the second, held on Thursday, was called to find strategies to improve the process. We heard from 10 witnesses, including 2 University of Washington clinicians. My questioning focused on what new authority FDA requires, from additional labeling, to post-market surveillance, to clinical trials. I also questioned experts on what additional resources FDA might need to meet the challenge of ensuring both short-term and long-term safety.

Don't Dismantle Social Security

Generations of Americans rely on Social Security. We cannot dismantle this vital program. In my ongoing efforts to battle President Bush's plan to do so, this week, I joined 41 of my Democratic Senate colleagues in sending a letter to President Bush urging him to publicly reject private accounts for Social Security.

Read the letter:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=232831>

On Thursday, I also participated in a Social Security Roundtable to discuss the impacts of privatizing Social Security on women and families. It was attended by fellow women Senators and by women and families affected by the proposed changes. The promise of Social Security is especially important to women because they face unique challenges in retirement and in taking care of their families if disability or other tragedies strike. Today, under Social Security, women and families are protected – but there's no guarantee under the Bush plan. That's why I'll work to strengthen Social Security and keep it strong into the future.

Supporting Northwest Waterways

On Wednesday, I spoke with members of the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association (PNWA) at its annual Capitol Hill visit. PNWA represents Northwest ports, shipping and barging, and other industries. I know how important our waterways and the industries that rely on them are to our prosperity and way of life in the Pacific Northwest.

In my remarks, I talked about the reauthorization of the TEA-21 Surface Transportation bill, which would fund critical infrastructure improvements in our state; the Army Corps of Engineers budget, which so many Washington industries rely

on to keep our waterways navigable; and my support for dredging and channel deepening projects as well as our small, shallow-draft ports. Unfortunately, the Bush Administration's new budget does not fund these critical priorities at the level our state needs. For example, the Columbia River Channel Deepening project received \$15 million, but there is no money in the budget for jetty repair work at the mouth of the river. The extra three feet of deepening we do is completely meaningless if the jetties continue to let silt into the river and the mouth of the river becomes closed.

In a meeting with General William Grisoli, head of the Army Corps of Engineers for the Northwest region, I voiced this concern. He agreed that the funding is necessary, and I let him know that I intend to use my positions on the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committees to get as much support as possible for this project – and all the projects that keep our waterways safe and productive.

Read my remarks to PNWA:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=232860>

Building a Strong Workforce

On Thursday, I addressed more than 80 members of the Washington Workforce Association (WWA) as well as representatives of Oregon and California's Workforce Associations, all of whom were visiting Washington, D.C. for the National Association of Workforce Boards Conference. America's prosperity and long-term economic security depend on a highly skilled workforce. Our state has lost tens of thousands of good-paying manufacturing jobs over the last four years, and our unemployment rate has been among the nation's highest over the last four years.

Essential to that goal is federal support for the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), which provides resources to train American workers for the good-paying jobs of the 21st Century. Demand for retraining is extremely high, with thousands of workers currently on waiting lists and thousands more who have given up hope of receiving any assistance from the government in finding better jobs. Many have been forced to accept lower-paying jobs just to pay the bills.

In my remarks to the WWA, I talked about the many WIA success stories I've seen while traveling around Washington state, and about the fact that the Bush budget cuts hundreds of millions of dollars in assistance to these vital programs. These cuts rob employers of access to the skilled workers they need to remain globally competitive and take away crucial opportunities for job training at time when 75% of our current workers will need to be retrained just to maintain the jobs they have. We need to fund these programs at levels that let them remain effective, and I'll fight to get adequate resources to do so.

Read my remarks to the WWA:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=232858>

Good News on Troops, Vets, Housing

This week I was named to the Military Construction and Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee. I received the new appointment after the Senate restructured the Appropriations Committee. This new opportunity gives me new opportunities to fight for Washington state's brave men and women in uniform and their families.

The restructuring also added Housing and the Judiciary to the Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee, on which I am still the highest-ranking Democrat. Housing is one of the most important but least talked about challenges here in the Senate. I look forward to raising its profile and to continue being a voice for Washington state families.

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