

# PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – April 22, 2005

## Getting Our Troops What They Need

I have supported every major spending bill for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and I will continue to support our military personnel with the equipment they need to complete their missions safely, quickly, and effectively. That's why, this week, I voted in favor of the president's \$81 billion supplemental funding request for our war efforts, to aid tsunami victims, and to build an embassy in Baghdad.

However, I believe that taking care of our veterans after they return home from their missions is also an integral cost of war, so I'm disappointed that this bill did not include my amendment that would have provided \$2 billion in funding for veterans' healthcare. I'm going to continue to support our troops in every way possible – and that includes funding the healthcare they need.

*Learn more about my veterans' healthcare amendment:*  
<http://murray.senate.gov/vetupdates/update4.html>

## Working to Keep WA Secure

On Wednesday, I raised concerns about inadequate funding for security efforts and discussed several Washington state security priorities with Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff.

I stressed that while both the White House and Congress share the goal of improved security, the White House has failed to request the adequate security funding, and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has not allocated that funding to the most pressing threats. Good intentions are not going to help us establish a rigorous port and cargo security regime, protect our borders, or train our personnel correctly.

- **Northern Border** - I raised my concerns that more than 200 new Border Patrol agents are being dispatched to the Southern Border, with no new agents going to the Northern Border.
- **Port Security** - I noted that America's ports have sought \$1 billion in funding to improve security, but the Administration has requested zero funding for port security grants this year.
- **Cargo Security – Need for Coordination** - I also discussed the need to better coordinate cargo security programs. I noted that, at my suggestion last year, the Senate Appropriations Committee directed DHS to produce a report on coordination of cargo security efforts. The report, due to Congress on February 8<sup>th</sup>, has still not been produced. I've talked with Secretary Chertoff and others about this, and all I hear is, "We're going to study this." But I know we need to come up with a coordinated approach to secure our ports, our cargo, and our people.

*Get more on my efforts to secure our nation's ports*  
<http://murray.senate.gov/portsecurity>

## Hanford: A Federal Responsibility

At the same Thursday hearing, I also questioned Mr. Bolten about the administration's plan to meet the federal responsibility to clean up the Hanford Nuclear Reservation. Considering the health risks posed to the people of the Tri-Cities by the more than 50 million gallons of nuclear waste at Hanford, the cleanup has been too much of a challenge.

In May 1989, three parties – Washington State, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the U.S. Department of Energy – signed a comprehensive cleanup and compliance agreement, known as the Tri-Party Agreement. It set a timetable for the cleanup and set certain milestones and

deadlines. To meet these cleanup deadlines, the federal government must provide the necessary funding.

The administration, however, has proposed funding levels lower than those required to meet the Tri-Party agreement. And, in Thursday's hearing, Mr. Bolten again failed to guarantee the level of funding needed to clean up the waste in a timely manner. The President's budget for 2006 cuts funding for environmental management programs by \$548 million nationwide. Hanford alone makes up \$297 million, or about 54 percent of that cut.

Mr. Bolten provided no real answers as to why Hanford is suffering disproportionately under the President's budget and refused to guarantee that the shortfalls would be made up in future budget requests. As co-chair of the Senate's bipartisan Nuclear Cleanup Caucus, I'm disappointed that the administration has apparently chosen the people of the Tri-Cities to bear the brunt of their cuts in the nuclear cleanup budget. Though Mr. Bolton claimed they have a plan to clean up Hanford on time, I do not currently see how that is possible with the funding deficits in their budget.

## Fighting to Keep Our Rail Service

For years, I've been a strong supporter of Amtrak because I believe Washingtonians should get the full rail service they've paid for with their tax dollars. We rely on our rail system to get where we're going and to move our freight and agricultural goods. While I think it's necessary to reform our railroads to make them more efficient, I believe we must keep them strong.

Unfortunately, for several years, the Bush administration and some Republicans in Congress have been attempting to derail Amtrak. This year, the administration has requested zero dollars in funding for Amtrak. This will force Amtrak into bankruptcy, hurting intercity rail service in our state and resulting in fewer transportation options for residents.

Earlier this year, Amtrak's Board of Directors, all of whom are Bush appointees, requested no funding for Amtrak for next year. After I wrote them a letter in February, and they looked more closely at the system's finances, this week they requested a \$1.82 billion subsidy for Amtrak. The Board's request proves that neither the continuation of passenger rail service nor Amtrak reform is possible without strong federal support.

In a hearing of the Senate Transportation, Treasury, and Housing and Urban Development Appropriations subcommittee, I questioned Office of Management and Budget Director Josh Bolten on how they intend to reform or improve rail service if they insist on zero-funding Amtrak.

As the highest-ranking Democrat on the subcommittee, I pressed Mr. Bolten to submit a funding request to Congress that realistically addresses the funding needs of Amtrak. Unfortunately, Mr. Bolton both refused to endorse the Board's funding request and insisted that the request of zero dollars was the administration's final request. This will make it extremely difficult for our rail system to avoid bankruptcy – and to keep serving its 25 million annual passengers.

I believe it's time for the administration to come clean about the true funding needs of Amtrak. Whether we adopt the administration's, the Board's, or any other plan, the fact remains that passenger rail service costs money. If the administration doesn't agree with the request by a board made up entirely of its own appointees, they need to present some alternative plan that clearly tells us who will have rail service come October and who will be left standing on the platform. Any plan for true reform should combine streamlining Amtrak with providing better service and more travel options.

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