

# PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – October 28, 2005

## Fighting to Fund Hanford Cleanup

Hanford area residents and workers deserve a strong federal commitment to nuclear waste cleanup. This week, I was deeply concerned to learn that - largely due to a lack of advocacy by the Department of Energy - critical funding could be stripped from nuclear waste cleanup at Hanford. Specifically this money would be taken from the construction of the vitrification plant that would clean up the most dangerous waste at Hanford.

These cuts endanger the construction of the plant - and undermine an essential government responsibility to safeguard public health. This is not just a Washington state priority, but a national priority as well. That's why I'm so disturbed that the Bush Administration has dropped the ball twice - first by underfunding this critical cleanup in their budget, and now by failing to properly advocate for it.

Given current budget constraints, it will be very difficult to increase funding for cleanup at Hanford. But I know just how important this is to the livelihood of the Tri-Cities and the health of the surrounding communities. I will use every tool at my disposal, and will fight for every dollar possible to increase this funding and help meet the commitment to cleaning up waste at Hanford.

## Response to Miers's Withdrawal

On Thursday, the White House announced the withdrawal of Harriet Miers' nomination to the Supreme Court. I had not taken a position on her nomination, and, along with my Democratic colleagues, was prepared to give her a fair and diligent review. Unfortunately, after first vigorously pushing Ms. Miers, the White House now appears to have caved to right wing political pressure and compromised the nomination process to our nation's highest court.

Americans are looking to President Bush to make decisions that unite our country. Our nation deserves a Supreme Court nominee who represents mainstream judicial practice and unites the Senate just as Justice O'Connor's nomination did two decades ago. I hope the President gives serious time and thought to a nominee whom mainstream Americans will view as fair, ethical, independent and qualified. The President needs to take this moment to show that he is a leader for our entire country - not just an extreme few.

## Supporting Our Wheat Farmers

**SUPPORT FAIR WHEAT MARKETS** - On Tuesday, I invited Washington state wheat growers to meet with representatives from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). I wanted the department's officials to hear firsthand the concerns that producers shared with me during a roundtable discussion I held in Spangle on October 10.

Of particular concern were the Administration's recent decisions affecting wheat loan rates and the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust. At the meeting, producers told USDA officials about the difficulties they face in the wake of the department's decisions to change the loan rates for soft white wheat, our state's predominant class of wheat. This change has caused market distortion, and has discouraged production. I emphasized to the department's officials that we need to find a way to feed the world's hungry without hurting Washington state farmers.

**PROVIDE DISASTER ASSISTANCE** - This season's severe drought and harsh weather conditions, along with high fuel and fertilizer prices are further devastating many farmers. This kind of damage impacts all sectors of our economy.

So, last week I joined Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) in sending a letter to USDA Secretary Mike Johanns requesting disaster designation for 17 counties in our state hit hardest by the weather conditions. Governor Christine Gregoire submitted a similar request in early October, yet no action has been taken by the department. Disaster designation is critical in helping farmers recover from economic losses.

I am also a cosponsor of the Emergency Agricultural Disaster Assistance Act of 2005 (S. 1692), which would provide financial support to producers suffering losses due to harsh weather conditions. The federal government has a responsibility to step in and provide assistance during these crises, and I'll keep fighting to see that the Administration does not turn its back on our state.

## Helping Break the Cycle of Violence

**HELP FOR DV VICTIMS** - Three weeks ago, the Senate renewed the landmark Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). Although VAWA has protected countless women and children, and has helped put abusers behind bars. Unfortunately, this update did not include critical economic protections. My Security and Financial Empowerment Act (SAFE) supplements VAWA by providing these much-needed measures, and I'll be working to pass it so abuse victims get the support they need.

As part of my efforts, last week I cosponsored a measure - which passed the Senate - that recognizes the importance of economic protections for abuse victims. The resolution honors National Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and acknowledges the critical role that economic security plays in helping victims break the cycle of violence.

## Medicare Help for Our Most Vulnerable

I continue to be greatly concerned that the new Medicare Prescription Drug law threatens those who need the most help - low-income residents, the disabled, and senior citizens. In Washington state, 118,000 of these residents are "dual eligibles" - their incomes are so low they qualify for assistance from the federal Medicare and the state Medicaid programs. The new law pushes vulnerable citizens into complicated plans that cost more and provide less, keeping patients from getting drugs they need.

**MY AMENDMENT PROVIDES TEMPORARY HELP** - On Wednesday I spoke on the Senate floor on my amendment to the Labor, Health, and Human Services Appropriation bill (LHHS) to provide \$2 billion in emergency funding for states to provide "stop gap" drug coverage for low income seniors and the disabled currently receiving assistance from Medicaid, State Drug Assistance Programs or AIDS drug assistance programs. This funding is provided to ensure that no one currently receiving coverage or assistance will be left uncovered as the new law is implemented. You can read my floor speech at:

**MY "MEDICARE HEALS ACT" WOULD SOLVE THE PROBLEM** Along with this amendment, I've introduced a bill that will address the Prescription Drug law's broader shortcomings. My bill, the Medicare HEALS Act, would allow states to use Medicaid to help reduce co-pays and premiums for our most vulnerable. It would also give patients a full year to choose a plan. I will continue to fight to pass this legislation and work to prevent the Medicare drug benefit from hurting Washington residents.

## Honoring a True American Hero

With the death of Rosa Parks, we lost a true American hero. Her dignified refusal to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus ignited the Civil Rights movement, challenging our society to reject segregation. This simple yet brave act forced us to recognize that our common values of liberty and equality leave no room for discrimination of any kind.

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