

# **PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW**

**U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington - June 20, 2003**

## **STANDING UP FOR WORKERS**

On Wednesday, Lacey resident Mike Kennedy, the executive director of the Pacific Mountain Workforce Development Council, joined me at a Senate Employment, Safety and Training subcommittee hearing on the Workforce Investment Act (WIA).

The Workforce Investment Act provides "one-stop" job centers, training programs and other employment-related services for workers in Washington State and around the nation. It also fosters partnerships between workers, businesses, community colleges and organized labor to meet the workforce needs in local communities. Businesses tell one-stops what type skills they are looking for in new employees, and the one stops help train workers with the skills to fill those jobs.

Job training centers were established under the Workforce Investment Act, which Congress first passed into law in 1998. I was proud to have worked on the original Act. This year I am working hard as Congress updates this important legislation.

As Congress rewrites the Workforce Investment Act, it is important to remember that we do not want to push people into dead-end jobs. Our goal is to empower people to find jobs that will last and that will truly improve their lives.

There is still more work to be done. We've got to stop the funding cuts that undermine our workers. We've got to fund workforce development programs adequately to meet the growing needs of millions of unemployed and underemployed Americans who have worked hard and played by the rules.

I believe that a strengthened Workforce Investment Act can help provide the skills employers need to remain competitive in our global economy.

## **PRESCRIPTION DRUG BENEFITS**

This week the Senate began working on a prescription drug benefit for seniors under Medicare. It is time that Congress enacts this important legislation to correct a deficiency that has gone on for far too long – the fact that Medicare today does not provide a prescription drug benefit.

We all know the challenges seniors are facing. Today, prescription drugs are more effective and more necessary than ever before. They are helping Americans live longer, healthier lives. Advances in new medications have helped reduce the need for doctor and hospital visits.

For five years I have been pushing my colleagues to adopt a prescription drug benefit. In 1999 and again in 2002, Democrats led the charge to add a Medicare drug benefit, but our efforts were blocked. I am hopeful that this time, all of our hard work will pay off.

The proposal before the Senate is not perfect. It is not the drug plan I would have written, but I believe that this approach will open the door to solving an urgent problem for so many seniors.

I have a few concerns with the current proposal, and I hope to address these concerns as the Senate continues to debate this bill.

First, I'm concerned that there's a coverage gap that could leave some low-income seniors without the help they need. Second, I want to protect seniors from increases in premiums. We must ensure that, down the road, insurance companies won't just keep raising the premiums that seniors must pay.

Third, this drug benefit should not reinforce the regional inequities that we see in the existing Medicare program. Finally, I still believe that the best way to provide a seamless drug benefit is to treat prescription drugs just like a doctor or hospital visit through Medicare. So I will continue to work to improve this bill every step of the way.

This proposal is not my vision of how to best provide prescription drugs, but after years of struggling, it's a start. I'm convinced that we cannot let this opportunity slip by without helping seniors get the medicine they need.

## **ASBESTOS BAN TAKES STEP FORWARD**

A ban on putting asbestos into consumer products may soon become part of the asbestos litigation reform proposal, Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) said on Thursday. The important development came one year to the day after I first introduced legislation to ban asbestos.

The legislation being written by the Senate Judiciary Committee would prevent any future asbestos lawsuits and create a trust fund for asbestos victims. But, until yesterday the legislation did not address the fact that thousands of tons of asbestos continue to be put into consumer products. Failing to ban asbestos could create new asbestos victims far into the future.

Yesterday, however, Senator Hatch said he would add an amendment to ban the use or importation of asbestos in most consumer products. The Judiciary Committee will continue its work on Tuesday, and I look forward to working with the members of the committee to get a strong ban into the legislation. I have been working tirelessly to enact a ban on asbestos, and it looks like we have nearly reached our goal.