

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – July 11, 2003

LIGHT RAIL GETS A BOOST

Today Link light rail got a boost when the Bush Administration sent Congress a Full Funding Grant Agreement for this crucial transportation project. In a letter to me, Jenna Dorn, head of the Federal Transit Administration, noted that, "The light rail line will extend travel options and capacity in the corridor, providing a practical alternative to driving on increasingly congested roadways."

The agreement demonstrates a firm commitment from the federal government to Link light rail, and it shows how important this project is in addressing our region's transportation crisis.

Congress now has 60 days to review the Full Funding Grant Agreement. At the end of that period, the FTA Administrator or the Secretary of Transportation may sign the agreement, obligating the federal government to provide \$500 million for Central Link light rail. I appreciate this strong statement of support from the Bush Administration, Secretary Mineta, and Administrator Dorn, and I welcome their commitment to addressing the transportation crisis in the Puget Sound area.

HELPING LAID-OFF WORKERS

In this difficult economy, many workers are exhausting their unemployment benefits but still can't find work. On Thursday, I offered an amendment on the Senate floor to extend unemployment benefits for more than 1 million people who can't find work and whose UI benefits have run out. My amendment would have helped 20,000 people in Washington State.

In May and June alone, 31,349 Washington state residents exhausted their UI benefits. From December 2000 to June 2003, our state lost 68,400 jobs. Nationally, 9.4 million Americans are now unemployed.

On an almost daily basis, I hear from workers who have lost – or are about to lose – their benefits. Yesterday, I shared one of those messages with my colleagues in the Senate. Unfortunately, my amendment was defeated 48-48 on a procedural vote. I will keep fighting to help our residents through these hard times. *For my full speech, please see:* <http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=205965>

FUNDING PORT SECURITY

On Wednesday, I secured an additional \$30 million for Operation Safe Commerce in the Senate Homeland Security Appropriations subcommittee spending bill. This newly-secured funding brings the federal commitment to the container and port security initiative to \$88 million. On Thursday, the bill passed the full Senate Appropriations Committee.

Last year, I introduced Operation Safe Commerce to help monitor and track container cargo. This week's development will give us more support to improve port security. The Senate bill also includes \$150 million for port security grants.

SAVING AMERICORPS

This week we made some progress in preventing drastic cuts to AmeriCorps, the public service program that serves Washington State. Because of inadequate funding, many AmeriCorps programs are facing reduction or elimination.

In Washington State, we are slated to lose 85 AmeriCorps members who are serving Thurston, Mason and Lewis Counties and Educational Service District 101 in Spokane.

Without more funding, we will also see the Washington Reading Corps cut by 35 % (77 AmeriCorps members) and the Washington Service Corps cut by 58% (244 AmeriCorps members).

This week, I cosponsored an amendment to provide \$100 million in funding for AmeriCorps. The amendment passed the Senate Appropriations Committee on Wednesday and passed the full Senate today. Now the House of Representatives must step up and provide funding, and the White House must push for this priority. With our slow economy and our state cutting back on services, we need AmeriCorps more than ever.

BOEING TANKERS ON TRACK

Today, Air Force Secretary James Roche officially notified Congress that the Air Force plans to lease 100 Boeing 767 aircraft to update our aging tanker fleet. This is the next step in a process that I've been working on for nearly two years. In an accompanying report, the Air Force told Congress that our men and women in uniform need new tankers as soon as possible. In fact, the Air Force report validates what I've been saying about the need for new tankers and the benefits of the lease arrangement.

We are in the homestretch now, and only the loud voices of a few critics are standing between the Air Force and much-needed new Boeing 767 tankers. I expect Congressional hearings will be held in the coming weeks, and I am confident that the Boeing tanker lease will succeed.

INTERIOR PROJECTS FUNDED

This week, we took a step forward to help protect important environmental projects in our state. On Thursday, the Senate Appropriations Committee passed the funding I secured for:

- **I-90/Plum Creek Land Exchange** - \$5 million to help the Forest Service acquire land left out of the original land exchange.
- **Yakima River Forest** in Central Washington - \$1.5 million to protect critical habitat for several endangered species
- **Upper Raging River Valley** - \$1 million to protect about 2,500 acres of threatened wildlife habitat and watershed
- **Willapa National Wildlife Refuge** - \$1.45 million to fight an infestation of Spartina grass.
- **Spokane Valley/Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer Study** - \$500,000

These projects help protect wildlife and preserve our state's national treasures. The funding must now be approved by the full Senate and then reconciled with the House. For details, please see: <http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=205989>

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