

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – March 25, 2005

Traveling in the Middle East



Baghdad - Flying into the Green Zone.

This week, I'm traveling in the Middle East and Europe as part of a seven-Senator delegation, to visit emerging democracies. So far, we've visited Israel and the West Bank, Kuwait, Baghdad, the Republic of Georgia, Ukraine, and France.

I've been keeping an online diary, or "blog," on my Web site all week.

Below are a few excerpts,

but I'd also like to invite you to visit my Web site, <http://murray.senate.gov>, where you can get the full story and see more pictures.

Day Three - Monday, March 21, 2005:

Meeting with Washington State National Guard in Kuwait

[In Kuwait], we drove to Camp Arifjan - a huge military base. I then went separately from the rest of the group to meet with our Washington state soldiers. It was a fantastic experience...they were all very excited to meet with us. We talked about the situation in Iraq, their concern about re-deployment (most had been here a year), their concerns about their families, health care, and whether veterans' service would be there for them.

We then had dinner with the troops and ate in the mess hall.... Great conversation with troops who wanted to know the latest details from home! They also wanted us to know that they had done a lot of good here and that their work had been worthwhile.... We then had a security briefing on Iraq from the top generals in the field in preparation for our trip tomorrow....



Camp Arifjan (Kuwait) - After dinner in the mess hall with WA National Guardsmen.

Day Four - Tuesday, March 22, 2005: Into Iraq - Visting the Troops

[As we flew into Baghdad], there were a number of soldiers on board with us as well as other supplies.... We sat in seats lined on the wall and took deep breaths as we took off from Kuwait. Most people slept as we flew - it was hot in the plane - but I just sat there and kept thinking how amazing this was....

The roads [in Baghdad] were awful - torn up, and bumpy.... General Petraeus escorted us to a training site about a mile away to watch Iraqi soldiers being trained.... [Later], we met with the Charge D'affairs for a briefing (he is temporary Ambassador till a new one is named). We were then joined by General Casey for a briefing on the military side.

I did have the opportunity to ask both the Charge d'affairs and General Casey about the new constitution and the government of Iraq, and whether women would become second-class citizens.

They both tried to reassure me that they thought women would be well represented. I also asked General Casey about our men and women and the services they get when they come home. He emphasized the need for health care, especially because of the stress they live with every day there....



Baghdad – Lunch with 2 Washington Soldiers and a State Dept. Employee from Washington

I ate lunch with 2 soldiers and a State Department employee, all of whom are from Washington. We had a great conversation about the Huskies and they were ecstatic at the success. They intend to watch the game even though it plays at 3 a.m. their time!

We then went to meet with the Shia Leader, Prime Minister designate al-Jaafari. He gave us a very in-depth report of progress in putting together a government. It was clear that there were tremendous challenges, but it is a unique opportunity at this time to forge ahead. I asked him again about the role of women. He assured me they would not be second-class citizens in Iraq.

We then convoyed to the convention center where the new parliament is being set up.... We...first met with the Kurdish Leader Mr. Faili...[and] then we met with the Sunni Leader, Dr. Hachim Al-Hassani.... I think all see it as a time of both hope and danger with much work to be done before a government is in place....

Read my full blog and see many more pictures from my trip at:

<http://murray.senate.gov>

Military Families: Important Tax Benefits

Congress has made a number of tax benefits available to our military families, including special help for families with members serving in a combat zone. Benefits include:

- Suspension of any collection, audit, or other enforcement action until 180 days after a service member leaves the combat zone.
- Exclusion from taxable income pay received while in the combat zone, or while hospitalized for combat-zone-related injuries.
- Eligibility for the earned income tax credit and the refundable child tax credit.
- An automatic extension of filing deadlines for anyone serving in a combat zone.

Other important tax benefits for military families include:

- An above-the-line deduction for Guard and Reservists and for duty-related travel expenses, if more than 100 miles from home.
- An increase in tax-free government payments to families of fallen servicemen and women.
- Up to a 10-year suspension of the ownership and use test period required to qualify for the \$250,000 (\$500,000 married filing jointly) exclusion of gain on the sale of a primary residence.

NOTE: The IRS suggests that families notify the agency of combat-zone status by emailing the service member's name, home address, date of birth, and date of deployment to combatzone@irs.gov.

Get more information about these and other benefits available to military families in Publication 3 at www.irs.gov.

To subscribe, unsubscribe, or change your email address, visit: <http://murray.senate.gov/updates>