

# PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

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

## ANWR, Patriot Act, & Budget Votes

This week, the Senate made some critical decisions about drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), the Patriot Act, the budget, and banning torture.

I am pleased that we stopped a plan to drill in ANWR and banned torture. I'm also pleased that we'll be able to update the Patriot Act in the right way next year.

However, I was disappointed that the Senate passed a bad budget that will hurt our most vulnerable and put our nation at risk in order to clear the way for more tax cuts for the well-off.

**Victory on ANWR Drilling** – On Wednesday, thanks to a bipartisan coalition of Senators led by Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA), we defeated a plan to drill for oil and gas in ANWR. This controversial plan was attached at the last minute to the must-pass Defense Appropriations bill. I think it is wrong to hold hostage the funding our troops need in order to force through an unrelated and flawed proposal. Fortunately, a bipartisan group of Senators agreed to remove the ANWR provision and pass the Defense Bill.

**Time for a Better Patriot Act** – Yesterday, the Senate agreed to extend the USA Patriot Act for six months. The law, which was passed in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks, was set to expire on January 1, 2006. While I believe this law is an important tool in stopping another terrorist attack, I also believe our security efforts should not undermine our rights. Recently, very serious concerns have come to light about the Patriot Act, and that's why we need to proceed with caution. The six-month extension passed by a bipartisan group in the Senate will give us the time we need to revise the law so that we can both protect our nation and our rights.

**Bad Budget Passes** – On Wednesday, Vice President Cheney cast the tie-breaking vote to pass a deeply flawed budget plan. This budget proposes across-the-board cuts to critical services to clear the way for more tax cuts for the most well-off.

I believe to make our country strong again, we need to invest here at home. That's why I voted against this misguided budget. Among the most damaging of the proposed cuts are cuts to our homeland security efforts, including immigration and border protection; cuts to Medicare; cuts to student loan programs; cuts to essential programs for needy children; and dangerous cuts to air traffic safety. Because of some technical problems with the bill, the House will need to vote on it again.

**Vote Against Torture** – I also voted for a separate defense bill which bans the torture and abuse of prisoners who are held in U.S. custody. That ban passed the Senate, and the President has said he will sign it.

## Our Leaders Must Uphold the Law

**President's Domestic Spying Must Be Investigated** – The most important job of our government is to protect the American people from harm. As a nation we must do all we can to prevent attacks. But in the process, we should not cede our most basic rights.

The American people deserve a full and open investigation into the Administration's actions. I call on the President to begin an honest dialogue with Congress and the public about how to ensure America's safety.

Our nation is built on the rule of law and the principle that no one is above the law. Our leaders are in charge of upholding our laws, not undermining them.

## Help for Veterans with MS

**My New Legislation** – On Tuesday, I introduced new legislation to help more veterans who have Multiple Sclerosis (MS) qualify for disability benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). A growing number of veterans from the first Gulf War are now developing symptoms of MS, but they often face an uphill battle in obtaining disability benefits from the VA.

Under current law, veterans have seven years after being honorably discharged to connect their MS to their military service. Unfortunately, many veterans don't develop the symptoms of MS until after seven years, making them ineligible for automatic disability benefits from the Veterans Administration. These vets must then go through a lengthy appeals process to prove their disability is service-connected.

My bill is supported by a number of organizations that represent veterans with MS, including the National Gulf War Resource Center (NGWRC) and MS Vets.

I know that too many veterans with MS are having trouble getting the care and the benefits they deserve. These men and women served our nation bravely, and they should not be denied care because of arbitrary rules. My bill will ensure that veterans get the care they have earned no matter when their symptoms emerge. It will provide relief for veterans of the first Gulf War and will ensure adequate care for current service members who may develop MS in the future. *Details:*

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=250017>

*Get vet updates:* <http://murray.senate.gov/vetupdates>

## Helping Victims of Domestic Violence

**Congress At Last Renews Landmark Legislation** – Last Friday, after months of delay – and, unfortunately, after letting this critical legislation expire – Congress finally renewed the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA).

**Background: What VAWA Does** – The original Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) created a successful national strategy for dealing with domestic violence. VAWA brought together victims' advocates, social service providers, and law enforcement professionals to meet the immediate challenges of domestic violence. The bill passed by the Senate renews and strengthens those core programs.

**VAWA Adds New Steps Forward:** The bill also creates new programs that represent important steps forward, including:

- A national health care response to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking;
- New grants to help victims find housing;
- A new program to address police-officer-involved domestic violence.

**More Work To Do: Economic Protections** – To break the cycle of violence, we must address the economic barriers that trap victims in abusive relationships. Financial insecurity is a major factor in ongoing domestic violence. Too often, victims are forced to choose between protecting themselves and keeping a roof over their heads.

**I'll Continue To Fight** – I worked to include unpaid leave and unemployment benefits for victims in the VAWA extension. Unfortunately, my efforts were left out of the final bill. But I'm not giving up because I know who I'm fighting for. I've been to the shelters in my state, and I've talked with the victims and their advocates. I'll continue to push legislation that will get victims the help they need, including my Security and Financial Empowerment (SAFE) Act. *Details:*

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=247143>

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