

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington - June 6, 2003

ASBESTOS BAN MAY BE ADDED TO LITIGATION REFORM

On Wednesday, the Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing on asbestos compensation legislation. This proposal would create a \$108 billion fund for asbestos victims and prohibit any future lawsuits against companies who could be held liable. Unfortunately, the legislation does not require a ban on asbestos, even though asbestos continues to be put into consumer products in this country. As I have said many times, the best way to protect people from asbestos is to ban it, and that is exactly what I told the Judiciary Committee when I testified on Wednesday.

I was pleased that several members of the Judiciary Committee agreed that it makes little sense to reform asbestos litigation if asbestos is not banned. Senator Diane Feinstein (D-CA) and Senator Pat Leahy (D-VT), a co-sponsor of my legislation to ban asbestos, suggested that my bill be attached as an amendment to the asbestos litigation reform bill. Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT), the author of the litigation reform bill, admitted that my bill will likely be added.

I also told the Judiciary Committee that I am concerned with some aspects of the reform bill. First, I am afraid that the restrictive medical criteria could leave out deserving victims. On Tuesday, I met with Brian Harvey, a Mesothelioma-survivor from Marysville, Washington, and Gayla Benefield from Libby, Montana, who lost both parents to asbestos-related diseases, and has now been diagnosed herself. Neither of these deserving victims would receive aid under the current plan.

I am also concerned that the bill only covers workers exposed to asbestos on the job, and ignores people like Gayla who was exposed because she lived near a contaminated mine. The proposal would leave out people who are exposed to asbestos because they work on their brakes at home, are exposed to asbestos-tainted attic insulation, or happen to live near a processing facility.

Finally, the compensation fund may not be sufficient to help all of the victims. Even at \$108 billion, the size of the proposed asbestos trust-fund may not be enough to compensate victims who have, or may develop, an asbestos-related disease.

Any legislation to fix the asbestos litigation crisis must be balanced in its protections for present and future asbestos victims.

BUSH WOULD SIGN WILD SKY

At a Senate hearing on Wednesday, Mark Rey, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment announced that if the Wild

Sky Wilderness bill is passed by Congress, the President will sign it.

This is great news for Washington state climbers, hikers, hunters, anglers, and anyone else who wants to enjoy the beauty and serenity of our state.

Rep. Rick Larsen and I have worked for three years to develop the Wild Sky bill, which designates 106,000 acres of the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest as wilderness area. We

have worked closely with many organizations and the local community to ensure that we met the concerns of

everyone from back-country horsemen to snowmobilers to the Chelan County PUD.

I am hopeful that the bipartisan, cooperative spirit that has brought us this far will prevail in creating a lasting recreation area for Washington state families.

CHILD TAX CREDIT RESTORED

On Thursday, the Senate accepted a Democratic proposal to extend the child tax credit to 6.5 million families. Ever since we learned that final negotiations on the President's \$350 billion tax cut had eliminated a child tax credit for millions of lower income families, I have been working with my colleagues to restore the cut.

I am proud to have fought on behalf of working families in Washington state and across the country. These hardworking men and women are struggling to raise their families and would be the ones to benefit most from any changes to our tax policy.

I am proud that because of our work these families -- and 12 million children -- have not been left behind by the U.S. Senate. For the sake of millions of children and families, I hope that the House will do the right thing and follow the lead of the Senate.

STATE TRANSPORTATION FUNDS TO BE RELEASED

I am pleased to announce the release of Federal Highway Administration Interstate Maintenance grants for some of Washington state's most important transportation routes. The funds, which I made a top priority in the fiscal year 2003 Transportation spending bill, will help ease congestion, improve safety and pave the way for future economic growth.

Some of the grants that will be released on June 11th include:

- \$2,483,750 for US Highway 12, **Walla Walla** (an additional \$1.9 million for Highway 12 expansion will be released in the near future)
- \$2,980,500 for I-82/SR-240, **The Tri-Cities**
- \$2,980,500 for SE 1st-NW Lake Road Project, **Camas**

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