

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – June 4, 2004

Bad News for Hanford Cleanup

This week the Senate held a vote that spells bad news for Washington's efforts to clean up the Hanford Nuclear Reservation. On Thursday, the Senate defeated, on a 48-48 vote, an amendment by Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) to the Department of Defense authorization bill. This amendment would have prevented the U.S. Department of Energy from reclassifying high-level nuclear waste at the Savannah River site in South Carolina. The failure of Senator Cantwell's amendment grants the Department of Energy (DOE) the authority to down-grade the waste and leave more waste untreated in the ground. While the provision does not immediately impact Hanford, it sets a terrible precedent for the people of Hanford and all of the Northwest.

In July 2003, the Idaho District Court ruled that the Department of Energy could not unilaterally re-classify nuclear waste sitting in tanks in Washington, Idaho, and South Carolina. The court rejected the Department's proposal that it be allowed to leave a portion of this waste and in the ground untreated. Since July, the Department has been trying to achieve through legislative tricks what the court already rejected.

Senator Cantwell and I agree that the fastest, most effective way to clean up America's contaminated nuclear sites is for the DOE to work as a partner with the states. But sadly, we are seeing a new attempt by the White House to overreach its authority, circumvent a court case it lost, and blackmail Washington state into accepting a lower clean up standard. That threatens the families I represent, and I'm not going to stand for it.

Since Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham first requested new legislative authority last year, I have spoken out about the threat of this scheme and fought the Administration's efforts. I was a co-sponsor of Senator Cantwell's amendment and delivered a speech on the Senate floor in support of it on Thursday.

Unfortunately, in supporting the Administration's legislative proposal, the Republicans in Congress have made it harder for the people of Washington state to ensure nuclear waste at Hanford will be truly cleaned up.

The Hanford Nuclear Reservation in the Tri-Cities houses over 50 million tons of nuclear waste. It's where we developed the plutonium that helped our country win World War II and the Cold War. My grandfather settled in the Tri-Cities in 1916, and my dad grew up there. My dad saw how much those communities sacrificed to help our nation have a strong military. Our country has an obligation to make those communities whole – not leave them with high-level nuclear waste that has leaked from underground tanks.

That's why, time and again, I've used my position on the Budget Committee and the Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee to protect Washington state, and I've gone toe-to-toe with this Administration over nuclear clean up. It's one of the reasons I joined with my colleagues in 2001 to create the Senate Nuclear Cleanup Caucus – so that all the communities across the country who are dealing with nuclear waste will have a strong, bipartisan voice in the Senate.

Instead of that bipartisan cooperation, we have an Administration that is trying to win in Congress what it lost in court – and is now one step closer to doing so. I'm very disappointed our efforts have not been met with greater openness by the Administration. This is a complex issue dealing with some of the world's most dangerous material. It

deserves more attention and consensus than was given through consideration of this Defense Authorization bill. The Administration should urge Congress to remove this provision at conference, abandon any further effort to slip in legislative provisions on this matter, and go back to work with impacted states on real cleanup.

Read my Senate floor speech:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=222174>

Watch the video of my speech:

<http://murray.senate.gov/video>

Fighting for Guard and Reservists

A major portion my Guard and Reserve Enhanced Benefits Act, was included in the Department of Defense Authorization bill (S.2400) this week. The Graham-Daschle-Murray amendment will improve health care coverage for members of the National Guard and Reserves, and their families, by providing access to TRICARE, regardless of employment or insurance status. The amendment will also allow Guard and Reserve families to maintain private health care plans during mobilizations, with the Department of Defense paying the premiums while their loved one is activated and deployed overseas.

Another portion of my Guard and Reserve package was included in the FISC/ETI tax bill, which passed the Senate last month. The Landrieu-Murray amendment will provide tax credits for employers to make up the difference of their employees' salary while they are activated and serving to defend our country. Next week, I will offer a more comprehensive amendment based on my Guard and Reserve package when the Senate resumes consideration of the Department of Defense Authorization bill. I will also offer a targeted amendment to provide Guard and Reserve families with a child care benefit during extended deployments.

Get more information on my Guard and Reserve bill:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=218051>

Southwest WA Events Friday

CAMAS - Northwest Lake Road and Southeast First Street Improvement Project: I spoke at a groundbreaking ceremony for the Northwest Lake Road/Southeast First Street Project, for which I've secured \$3 million. This improvement will contribute to the local economy by creating jobs and attracting new businesses. It will also allow residents of Camas and Vancouver to get where they're going faster, safer, and more comfortably.

COWLITZ COUNTY - Lexington Bridge Check Presentation: I spoke at the Lexington Bridge construction project, which was the Metropolitan Planning Organization's number one priority in 2003 and 2004. The bridge will offer easier routes to I-5 for Lexington residents, and will reduce traffic congestion on other highways. I also presented a check to the county commissioners for the project. I've secured more than \$7.5 million dollars in federal funding for the project.

CENTRALIA - Centralia Community College Workforce Development Roundtable: I met with Centralia Community College officials and educators to discuss workforce development programs. I spoke about Workforce Development Issues, Worker Retraining and Financial Aid issues that are before the Senate. Providing federal aid for greater access to education and training is among my highest priorities in the U.S. Senate. As the Ranking Member of the Senate HELP Committee's Employment, Safety and Training subcommittee, and as a member of the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations subcommittee, I've fought for legislation that increases access to funding for programs that help Washingtonians find better jobs – and work for better futures.

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