

# PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – March 11, 2005

## Our Budget Must Reflect Our Values

Our country has a proud tradition of helping struggling families to reach their full potential. That tradition comes from a fundamental American belief in community, the idea that we're all in this together. Right now, these community values are under attack by the budget the President submitted to Congress last month. This budget places too little value on the things ordinary Americans need. In doing so, it imperils the American dream for every one of us.

This week, the Senate Budget Committee undertook its review of that budget. As a member of the committee, I take this responsibility very seriously, because I know a budget is a statement of priorities. So, despite the committee chairman's intention to follow closely the President's priorities, I'm working for a budget that keeps opportunities available to all Americans. Here are my budget priorities.

**VETERANS** – At a time when our nation is at war, our top priority should be to support our men and women in uniform. This budget, which underfunds veterans' needs by nearly \$3 billion, fails to do so.

Veterans' Amendment - So, on Thursday, during the Budget Committee's deliberations, I introduced an amendment to the budget that would fully fund the cost of veterans' health care.

Specifically, my amendment would have:

- increased funding for the VA by \$2.85 billion – just three percent over last year's funding levels;
- rejected the President's proposal to cut funding to state veterans' homes;
- eliminated the means-test for veterans to get VA care;
- provided for much-needed mental health services;
- rejected the President's proposal to drive veterans away from the VA with annual user fees and increased prescription drug cost; and
- provided \$71.424 billion in VA Health Care funding for fiscal year 2006, a \$2.85 billion above what Republicans on the Budget Committee wanted.

Unfortunately, my amendment was rejected by the Republican majority on the committee. So, not only did the President's budget fail to provide any money to care for veterans, but the Senate Budget Committee rejected a responsible way to pay for our veterans' health care.

But I am not finished fighting for our veterans. I will introduce my amendment as an addition to the President's supplemental funding request for the war in Iraq. I hope my Republican colleagues recognize that we must fund the full cost of this war – which includes taking care of our veterans.

*Next week, I'll have important information on my work for veterans. Sign up to get that information:*

<http://murray.senate.gov/vetupdates/index.cfm>

**HEALTHCARE** – The budget proposal we reviewed this week also falls short in providing average American families with the healthcare they need. 587,000 Washingtonians have no insurance, and that number has grown at an alarming rate in recent years. For so many vulnerable Americans, Medicaid is the only way to get the care they need if they become sick.

Yet, the President's budget proposal cut \$45 billion from Medicaid, which would mean nearly one million Washingtonians, more than half of them children, would be left without care. Also, Medicaid provides a huge boost to our state's economy by creating jobs and stimulating business activity. Medicaid cuts would also hurt our state by forcing us to make up the shortfall in federal spending, which amounts to billions of dollars annually.

Protecting Medicaid - On Thursday, I joined my Democratic colleagues on the Senate Budget Committee in obtaining a bipartisan "Sense of the Senate" agreement that puts the committee on record opposing arbitrary cuts and caps on Medicaid. This is an important first step in protecting the Medicaid's commitment to provide insurance to millions.

*Get more information about my work to save Medicaid:*

<http://www.murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=233386>

**EDUCATION** – Washington state is also being overburdened by cuts in federal funding of education. This budget would cut education funding for the first time in the past decade. These cuts hurt Washington children and families badly. A few examples:

- Elimination of GEAR UP and parts of the TRIO program, which provide critical early intervention and preparation programs for students to help them graduate and succeed in college.
- Elimination of the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Grants programs, meaning a loss of over \$7 million to our state for prevention and intervention programs.
- Elimination of the \$1.3 billion Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Program, letting down the employers and the students entering the workforce who rely on this program to find each other and keep our economy growing in the future.

In response to these cuts, I introduced an amendment on Thursday that would have restored funding to forty-eight education programs eliminated in the President's budget. It would have provided \$4.75 billion to reinstate the above programs, along with many more. My amendment was defeated on a party-line vote.

Good News for High School Students - On Thursday, however, I was able to get passed by the full Senate a number of measures that will help high school students to reach graduation. The measures were passed as part of the Perkins Act, the primary legislation providing federal funding for high schools. The provisions I included in the bill are parts of my Pathways for All Students to Succeed (PASS) Act, which focuses on individualized plans, intensive skills training and increased academic counseling as ways to ensure high school success.

*Get more information on my additions to the Perkins Act:*

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=233377>

## Senate-Passed Bankruptcy Bill Hurts WA

I've heard from residents across Washington state that the cost of medical care is forcing them into bankruptcy. Half of Washington state bankruptcies are due to rising health care costs. Most of these families are working and more than half have health insurance, but the growing cost of healthcare pushes them into bankruptcy.

On Thursday, the Senate passed a bankruptcy reform bill that hurts the very families that need help the most. I voted against it, because, instead of providing balanced reform, it puts credit card companies and politics ahead of ordinary Americans.

- It fails to adequately protect our military families, particularly our Guard and Reserve members.
- It stacks the deck against women and children, by making it harder for single mothers to collect past-due child support.
- It did not contain a number of amendments to make it less punitive toward ordinary Americans. These measures would have protected workers and retirees if their company files for bankruptcy; ensured the elderly don't lose their homes and discouraged predatory lending; and protected people who have had their identities stolen by criminals.

Unfortunately, this bill fits a pattern of recent Republican proposals that turn the tide against struggling families. I'm going to continue to fight in the U.S. Senate to minimize the damage of these policies, and to meet the needs of average Americans.

*Read my statement in response to the bankruptcy bill:*

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=233380>

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