

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – January 26, 2007

STATE OF THE UNION: Changing Course Means Listening to American's Concerns

This past Election Day, the American people sent the message that it was time to change course. With our troops facing an increasingly unstable situation abroad and with families facing domestic challenges here at home, the voters said enough is enough. Americans told the President that our nation is anxious. And they asked for a new direction of hope and opportunity.

Unfortunately, during the President's State of the Union Address on Tuesday I felt a real disconnect between the President's words and the challenges facing working families in Washington state, Americans across our country, and those fighting for our freedom abroad.

In order to move our country forward, the President must first acknowledge the deep concerns of the American people. In his speech, we heard plenty of rhetoric. But the American people demand action, and I hope the President will work with us to make real the progress our country needs.

Iraq - With courage and honor, our troops have done everything our country has asked of them in the war in Iraq. They deserve both our respect and an approach that honors their tremendous sacrifice. Unfortunately, over the past four years, this President has led our troops into harm's way without a plan to win the peace. And now, rather than changing course, he has chosen to escalate the war.

Veterans - Less than two weeks after announcing a surge of American troops in Iraq, the President failed to mention America's veterans even once in his entire speech. This is a disturbing omission that leaves me, and I'm sure thousands of military families across the country, deeply unsettled and greatly concerned for the future of our nation's plan to take care of these heroes. I fear that the President will again submit a budget that will mean longer lines and more out-of-pocket costs for our veterans. Caring for those who have sacrificed so heavily for us should be a core national value that's reflected in our national budget.

To watch my response to the State of the Union visit:
<http://murray.senate.gov/video/070123-sotu.ram>

MINIMUM WAGE: Our State as a Model of Success

On Wednesday, on the Senate floor I spoke on behalf of America's working families by pushing to raise the federal minimum wage for the first time in 10 years. In doing so I cited the success we have in Washington state, where a high minimum wage has supported jobs and economic growth.

Washington State has the highest minimum wage in the country. We are living proof that a livable minimum wage is good for our state economy, good for our small businesses, and good for our citizens.

While fighting for the bill, I also spoke out against three Republican attempts to undermine working families. I urged the Senate to reject a "tip credit" proposal that would cost 120,000 Washington workers about \$12,000 in income each year. I also spoke out against a Republican plan to force

workers to accept "comp time" instead of the overtime pay they are entitled to. And I pushed back against a Republican proposal that would undermine the 40-hour work week.

To read the text of my speech visit:
<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=267940>

YAKIMA: Post Office Consolidation Prevented

On Tuesday, I commended the United State Postal Service's (USPS) decision to forgo consolidating Yakima mail processing operations with the Pasco postal facility. In Washington D.C., I have worked to prevent the Yakima consolidation and provide more transparency from the Postal Service. In July, 2006, I began an effort which would require the Postal Service to undergo an independent review of the Yakima consolidation plan. Thankfully, the Postal Service heeded this pressure and will allow the Yakima Post Office to continue to fully serve the needs of the community.

RURAL SCHOOLS: Working for Consistent Federal Funding

In Washington state our rural schools and communities often suffer from shrinking tax bases, high transportation costs and limited resources. On Wednesday, in an effort to address these issues and to help struggling rural schools, I joined a bipartisan coalition of West Coast Senators to introduce legislation that will provide our rural communities with increased revenue. The legislation aims to restore critical funds for rural schools, infrastructure, and job creation.

As a former educator, I am committed to ensuring that all children have the opportunity to learn, regardless of where they live. This bill, S. 380 - The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Reauthorization Act of 2007, is an important step in that effort.

NEW PASSPORT REQUIREMENTS

As of Tuesday, January 24th, you will be required to show a passport when flying to Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean. To obtain a passport visit the link below.

http://travel.state.gov/passport/passport_1738.html

Northern Border – This new regulation will not carry over to land travel over our state's economically vital northern border. I am currently working with the Department of Homeland Security to ensure that they properly implement a northern border crossing system that both improves security and reflects the need for efficient movement across our border.

VETERANS: Pressing for a Better Transition Home from Iraq and Afghanistan Vets

On Tuesday, I aggressively questioned top officials from the Pentagon and Veterans' Administration about the government's inadequate support for service members returning home from duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. At a hearing of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, I cited reports of long waiting lists for healthcare and benefits, disturbing government investigations, news reports, and the comments of Iraq war veterans in telling Defense Undersecretary David Chu and Deputy VA Secretary Gordon Mansfield that the status quo is unacceptable. I was not impressed with their answers.

To watch the hearing visit:
http://veterans.senate.gov/archived_110th_1.ram

**My opening statement begins at 21:00; My questioning begins at 1:15:23*