

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington April 25, 2003

BELATED COMPENSATION FOR HANFORD WORKERS

On Wednesday the first Hanford worker finally received compensation for being exposed to radiation at a Department of Energy facility. For decades, the federal government had denied that radiation received by workers at Hanford and other sites could have caused cancer.

I was proud to co-sponsor and champion the legislation that helped create the nuclear workers compensation fund to fulfill the nation's long-standing commitment to nuclear facility workers.

Throughout World War II and the Cold War, workers at Hanford and other facilities around the nation worked to keep our country safe. But for too long, our government denied its responsibility to care for our workers. I'm pleased that our government is finally meeting its obligations to these American patriots. I am proud to have co-sponsored the legislation that finally forced the government to give something back to the men and women who have given so much to their country.

CELEBRATING EARTH DAY

On Tuesday Americans celebrated Earth Day, a day to remember how we must maintain and protect our environment for future generations. I am proud that Washington state continues to be a leader in promoting responsible environmental stewardship. Our state has shown the nation how to balance economic growth with environmental protection. This dedication has improved the quality of our air and water while protecting wildlife, fisheries and wilderness areas.

We are fortunate to live in such a beautiful area, and must continue to be vigilant against efforts to turn back the clock on the progress we have made.

There are some in Washington, D.C. who want to drill in pristine areas, shift the cost of cleaning up toxic waste from polluters to taxpayers, and limit the protection of wilderness areas.

One month ago, I was proud to help defeat a plan to allow oil drilling in the pristine Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Not only is this plan irresponsible and environmentally unsound, but it would do nothing to diversify our energy sources. Instead, we should focus on long-term solutions like energy efficiency, conservation, and alternative energy sources. These steps will reduce our dependence on foreign oil, while protecting the environment and creating good jobs.

I also hope the Administration will reconsider its opposition to the Superfund tax to pay for cleanup at abandoned toxic waste sites. The polluters – not the taxpayers – should pay to clean up their messes.

We all have a responsibility to protect our environment for future generations. Working together on Earth Day and every day, we can preserve the natural environment we treasure today and tomorrow.

PROTECTING OUR PORT JOBS

This week I sent a letter to the Commissioner of the Customs Service, Robert Bonner, to congratulate him for successfully urging the Canadians to adopt a 24-hour manifest rule similar to the regulation implemented in the U.S. after 9/11. Canada recently announced that it would follow our lead and require shippers to provide a list of their ships' contents to authorities 24 hours before departing a foreign port bound for Canada. The U.S. implemented that requirement in late 2002, as a way to improve our port security.

Had the Canadians not followed suit, shippers might have tried to avoid the U.S. regulations by sending their ships to Canadian ports instead. This would have cost us jobs, since there would be fewer container ships to unload at American ports, like the Ports of Seattle and Tacoma. Furthermore, containers going into Canadian ports could still pass into the U.S. by going by rail or truck across our border, thereby circumventing the new U.S. security rules.

In February, Commissioner Bonner came to my office, and I shared my serious concerns about Canada's lack of a 24 hour rule. I asked him to pressure his Canadian counterparts to adopt a similar port security regulation.

Because of our actions, the Canadians will follow our lead, which will protect U.S. security and keep our ports competitive.

WORKERS MEMORIAL DAY

Monday, April 28th, is Workers Memorial Day, a day to pay tribute to the Washingtonians who have lost their lives while doing their jobs. As we honor these workers, we must be vigilant against attempts to weaken the very laws that protect worker health and safety.

Memorial services will be held in Tacoma, Bellingham and Everett on Monday, while Spokane will honor workers on Saturday.

In my new position as the ranking member of the Senate Subcommittee on Employment, Safety and Training I will keep working to maintain the basic health and safety protections that past generations of workers were able to secure. A valued workforce deserves a safe workplace.

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