

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – April 23, 2004

Fighting for Victims of Asbestos-Related Illness

On Wednesday, in a speech on the Senate floor, I voiced my serious concerns with the Frist/Hatch asbestos liability bill that was before the Senate yesterday. This bill is inadequate and I am pleased that it was defeated in a 50-47 vote.

Asbestos liability is a real problem. It's a problem for victims, and it's a problem for companies. We need a balanced solution. For the past three years I've worked to see that victims of asbestos-related illness are fairly treated and compensated for the negligence and duplicity that have hurt them and their families so deeply. Unfortunately, the bill the Senate voted on this week was not a serious solution.

For example, the trust fund was too small to compensate all the victims, having been cut by more than \$40 billion from the bill that passed the Senate Judiciary Committee last year. The bill also would have imposed restrictive hurdles on family members who were exposed to asbestos through no fault of their own. Those hurdles reduced the chance that family members would receive any compensation. In addition, the bill did nothing to educate the public on the existence and dangers of asbestos in their daily lives, a key feature of the legislation that I introduced in May 2002. Finally, the Frist/Hatch bill did not sufficiently invest in research, tracking or treatment for asbestos-related diseases.

That's why I voted against the bill. I'll keep fighting for the right kind of compensation for current and future victims, for their families, and for average Americans who are being exposed to deadly asbestos every day without even knowing it.

See the video of my speech at:

<http://murray.senate.gov/photos/display.cfm?id=220638>

Working for WA Veterans

North Central Washington

For years the veterans in North Central Washington have been overlooked by the VA when it comes to having access to quality health care. These brave men and women sacrificed to secure our freedom and it is unconscionable that they should now have to fight for basic medical services. That is why back in November I inserted language into a Senate bill requiring the VA to submit a plan to Congress detailing how they will go about increasing health care coverage in North Central Washington. The VA's deadline was April 15th. But today, Congress is still waiting for the VA's plan.

The VA has a responsibility to our veterans and to Congress. Because of their lack of response I have formally put a "hold" on an Administration nominee to a post within the Veterans' Administration. I am doing this to send a clear signal to the VA that Washington's veterans cannot wait any longer for the healthcare they have earned.

I intend to keep my hold on this nomination until we receive the VA's plan to serve the veterans in North Central Washington.

Walla Walla

This week I also followed through on a promise I made last week to send a letter to Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony Principi regarding the proposed closure of the Walla Walla VA hospital. At an official hearing of the Veterans Affairs

Committee, which I held in Walla Walla last week, I collected testimony from veterans' advocates and community leaders in order to make an official record for presentation to Secretary Principi. I sent the testimony, along with a letter in which I advocated for the VA to either keep the Walla Walla facility open or present a clear, detailed plan to provide the mental, substance abuse, and long-term healthcare that will be taken away if the facility is closed. I am confident that Secretary Principi will see how important this hospital is, and I await his reply.

As the daughter of a World War II veteran and as the first woman to serve on the Senate Veterans Affairs committee, it is very important to me how we treat the men and women who have fought for our country. I will keep fighting to see that they get the respect they deserve.

For more on these issues and all my work for veterans, visit:

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

Fighting to Fund Columbia River Channel Deepening

Due to its enormous impact on job creation and economic competitiveness in our state, I have made the Columbia River Channel Deepening Project one of my highest priorities. Last month I sent a bipartisan letter with my Senate colleagues from Washington, Oregon, and Idaho asking the Senate Appropriations committee to give the project the funding it deserves.

On Tuesday, at a hearing of the Senate's Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee, I questioned officials from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers about funding for the project. While the Administration has approved funds in its FY2005 budget for some projects that have not been appropriately vetted, the Columbia River project, which has been through a rigorous approval process, has had no funding approved.

I successfully fought to provide \$3.5 million last year and \$10 million over the past five years for this project – and I'm going to see to it that this important project does not become a victim of the Administration's budget games.

Get more information on this and other transportation efforts at:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=220598>

Restoring the Green/Duwamish Ecosystem

On Tuesday, I also continued my efforts to advance restoration of the Green / Duwamish Watershed by vigorously questioning officials from the Army Corps of Engineers during the same Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee hearing. Despite a favorable report on the project from the Corps in December 2000, the Office of Management and Budget has failed to take action on it. This is deeply disconcerting. Because of OMB's lack of action, the Green / Duwamish project was recommended to receive no funding in the FY2005 budget.

I've been fighting for years to provide the resources necessary for a full cleanup of the watershed, and in February I helped kick-off efforts to restore the ecosystem at an event in Tukwila. I also helped secure \$500,000 to begin restoration activities this year and improve the watershed. Restoration of this watershed is essential for the long-term environmental well being of the region, and I will continue to use my position on the subcommittee to push for this vital project.

Get more on this and other environmental efforts at:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=220593>

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