

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – April 30, 2004

Note to President Bush on Behalf of Washington's Veterans

This week, I sent a personal, hand-written note to President George W. Bush urging him to reject the proposed closure of the Walla Walla VA facility. The President was scheduled to review the CARES Commission report with Veterans Affairs Secretary Anthony Principi this week.

In February, the VA's CARES Commission recommended closing the Walla Walla Medical Center, which serves the region's 69,000 veterans. Since that time, I have pushed Secretary Principi to protect the facility and maintain critically needed substance abuse, long-term care, and mental health services in Walla Walla. In my letter, I urged the President to support Southeast Washington's veterans by continuing operations in Walla Walla.

"This facility is tremendously important. It provides real care to veterans, and is a treasured community asset. Please take a very hard look at the case to keep the Walla Walla VA open," I wrote to the President.

Last week, following through on a promise I made to Washington's veterans, I sent a letter to Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony Principi regarding the proposed closure of the Walla Walla VA hospital. I also held an official hearing of the Veterans Affairs Committee in Walla Walla this month, where 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 still awaiting Secretary Principi's 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 and the care they deserve.

A PDF version of my hand-written letter is available at:

<http://murray.senate.gov/veterans/040428-lettertobush.pdf>

For more on this issue and all my work for veterans, visit:

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

Protecting American Workers

On Thursday, we marked the 15th "Workers' Memorial Day," and on that day I proudly joined Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy and many more of my Senate colleagues in sponsoring a bill that furthers workers' rights. The Protecting America's Workers Act would extend Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) protections to millions of American workers who do not currently receive such protections. In addition to increasing the number of protected workers, the bill makes important improvements in existing regulations by:

- Providing meaningful penalties to violators,
- Protecting the public's right to know,
- Protecting whistleblowers,
- And requiring employers to provide personal protective safety equipment.

This bill is a step in the right direction for the millions of American workers who are injured – or even killed – on the job annually, and I am proud to give it my support.

Extension for Boeing Workers

Two weeks ago, I toured Boeing's Longacres facility in Tukwila. I spoke with workers and got an update on two of Boeing's innovative projects – next-generation air traffic management, for which I secured \$45 million over the past three years; and Connexion, Boeing's new airborne Internet access system. I also updated the employees on my efforts to stop Aribus's campaign to kill the Boeing/Air Force tanker program.

This week, Boeing announced a \$3.1 million contract extension for its Phantom Works' Advanced Air Traffic Management Systems organization. The extension will allow work on the project to continue through the summer while the Federal Aviation Administration finalizes the selection process and awards the contract for Phase Two of the project. This is great news for the Boeing workers whose jobs have been extended, and their families. It's also great news for the local economy, which is starting to see the fruits of the direct investment that I've been fighting for in the Senate.

For more information on the Boeing tanker deal, visit:

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

Defending Salmon Fisheries

This week, a draft of the Bush Administration's new policy toward the role of hatchery-bred salmon in the restoration of wild salmon stocks was made public in the press. Until now, the health of wild salmon stocks has been the gauge of whether or not a salmon species receives protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). However, the Administration's new policy will count the hundreds of millions of hatchery-bred salmon that are annually fed into our fisheries when assessing the overall health of wild salmon stocks – and consequently when making the decision about whether several salmon species will continue to receive protection.

Recovery of wild salmon stocks is important for our state's economy, meeting treaty obligations, and maintaining the high quality of life we enjoy in the Pacific Northwest. Unfortunately, this new plan has not been shared with me or several of my Congressional colleagues who represent Washington state.

Today I joined those colleagues in sending a letter to Secretary of Commerce Donald Evans requesting a copy of the draft policy. We also requested relevant scientific analysis, an explanation of how the Administration believes the new policy meets the legal requirements of the ESA, an explanation of how the change in policy will alter the federal commitment to recovery of salmon runs, and how it will affect the listing or de-listing of salmon in the Pacific Northwest. I look forward to their reply, and I look forward to reading and responding to the draft so that I can continue to work for the best interests of the Pacific Northwest's people and our fisheries.

Get Help with Federal Grants

All over Washington State, people are working to solve problems and improve their communities. Each year, Congress provides federal Cabinet departments with money to support innovative local efforts through grants.

Federal grants are important to me. In the Senate, I use my position on the Appropriations Committee to fund our nation's grant programs, and a member of my staff focuses on federal grants. Recently, the section of my Web site that helps constituents apply for government grants, the "Grants Gateway," was recognized by the Congressional Management Foundation's Congress Online Project as being particularly helpful to those who seek government funding to help make their communities better.

You can visit my Grants Gateway at:

<http://murray.senate.gov/grants/grantsstep1.cfm>

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