

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – June 18, 2004

Victories for Our Guard and Reserve Families

This week, we scored another victory in my efforts to provide help to National Guard and Reserve members and their families. On Thursday, the Senate agreed to my amendment to provide child care assistance to activated soldiers.

My amendment directs the Secretary of Defense to make child care services available to activated soldiers and their families who do not live near major military installations. This amendment ensures that if non-working spouses suddenly find themselves in need of a job to help pay the bills, they'll get some help with child care costs. This will help give some peace of mind to families facing activations, deployments, and incredible hardships on behalf of our nation.

My amendment, which was supported by the Department of Defense, also applies to full-time soldiers, sailors, airmen and women and their families who don't live near a military installation. It was my latest effort to pass the provisions included in my *Guard and Reserve Enhanced Benefits Act* (S.2068), a bill I wrote after meeting with the soldiers and families of the Washington National Guard's 81st Brigade in January. To date, the Senate has passed several pieces of my bill, including:

TRICARE – Passed the Senate

Ensures full-time medical coverage for Guard and Reserve members and their families by giving them permanent access to TRICARE.

Reimbursement for Gear – Passed the Senate

Directs the Secretary of Defense to reimburse soldiers who had to buy body armor or other equipment because the Pentagon failed to provide it in a timely way.

Tax Credits for Employers – Passed the Senate

Provides a tax credit to employers continuing to pay activated Guard and Reserve employees.

Child Care – Passed the Senate

Directs the Secretary of Defense to make child care services available to activated soldiers and their families who do not live near a major military installation.

To Make These Gains Law

In order for these Senate victories to become law:

- the Senate must pass the Senate Defense Bill,
- the House of Representatives must not remove these protections during the House-Senate Conference,
- and the President must sign the Defense bill into law.

We need to keep the pressure on politicians in Washington, D.C. so that our Guard and Reserve families can get the support I've secured in the Senate bill.

Read – and watch video of – my floor speech:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=222740>

Progress for Ill Hanford Workers

On Wednesday, the Senate passed an amendment, which I co-sponsored, to fix the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program. The change was necessary because the Department of Energy has repeatedly failed to process claims and compensate ill workers from sites such as the Hanford nuclear reservation.

The amendment finally fulfills the promise that Congress made in 2000 to provide benefits to those who were made sick while building our nation's nuclear weapons. It's long

past time for these claims to be processed. I'm appalled that after spending \$95 million in administration, the Energy Department has only processed four claims.

Wednesday's vote will move the compensation program from the Energy Department to the Department of Labor, which has a much better record handling compensation claims.

I'm proud to have co-sponsored this important amendment. Workers at Hanford and other nuclear sites around the country unwittingly risked their lives to strengthen our nation's defense capabilities. Exposure to harmful materials has left thousands sick, and many dying. We must not delay in compensating these workers and their families.

Two WA Judges Confirmed

This week, the Senate unanimously confirmed two of my nominees to the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington. On Tuesday, Judge Ricardo Martinez was confirmed on a vote of 98-0. On Thursday, in a 99-0 vote, James Robart's appointment to the court was also confirmed. I've worked with Senator Maria Cantwell (D-Wash) and the White House to select these nominees and to see them through the confirmation process. I've met them both, and I know they are men of exceptional fairness and integrity.

Judge Martinez, the first Latino district judge in the history of Washington state, has been a distinguished Magistrate Judge for the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington. He has also served Washington state as a Superior Court Judge and as a King County prosecutor. Judge Martinez was named the first Drug Court judge in Washington state, and worked tirelessly to ensure the success of this program, which uses treatment services as an alternative to incarceration.

Jim Robart has been a respected member of the Seattle legal community for more than 30 years. He is an expert in complex litigation who has received a unanimous "well qualified" rating from the American Bar Association. He has also been actively involved with family organizations that provide assistance to at-risk youth and families. Both these men will serve our state with distinction, and I'm proud to have worked to bring them before the Senate.

Making Our Ports More Secure

Since the attacks of 9/11, I've been working to create a uniform security protocol for ports around the country. In meetings and hearings I chaired soon after 9/11, I found security at our ports severely lacking. Since then, I've authored the Operation Safe Commerce legislation, which uses innovative new technology to track foreign cargo containers from their point of origin, through their entry into our country, and onto their final destination.

On Wednesday, with a federal deadline looming for port security plans from shippers and ports around the country, the Senate Appropriations Homeland Security Subcommittee, of which I'm a member, agreed to my plan to develop uniform cargo security standards at our nation's ports. These standards will help make the cargo entering our ports more secure by instituting a comprehensive approach to its tracking and screening.

My language, which was inserted in the Homeland Security Act for FY2005, directs the Department of Homeland Security to provide Congress with a specific schedule for developing and implementing cargo security standards, based on the results of ongoing DHS programs, including Operation Safe Commerce. The report is due to Congress by February 8, 2005. I inserted the language in the FY2005 Homeland Security Appropriations Act, which must now pass the full Senate.

Learn more about this issue:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=222678>

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