

# **PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW**

**U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – February 11, 2005**

## **Bush's Budget Would Hurt Our State**

Last week, in his State of the Union speech, President Bush said he would cut programs that "do not fulfill essential priorities." This week, he released a budget that defines the "non-essential" as veterans, students, ports, borders, accessible health care and nuclear waste cleanup. Here are some ways his budget proposal threatens our state:

### **HEALTH CARE**

The President eliminates the Community Access Program (CAP) and cuts \$45 billion from Medicaid. This will mean a cut of \$747 million for Washington state over 10 years. It also cuts \$10.8 million for Rural Health Outreach, a 73% cut.

### **VETERANS**

The President's budget continues to block some veterans from getting VA care. So far, 192,260 veterans have been turned away across the country, including more than 3,000 Washington state veterans. The President's budget also increases out-of-pocket fees and co-pays for our nation's veterans. It would impose a new \$250 annual fee for some veterans to seek care at VA hospitals.

### **PORT SECURITY**

The President's budget eliminates port security grants and includes no funding for Operation Safe Commerce. Last year, Washington state ports received \$14.5 million including nearly \$7 million to secure Washington state ferries.

### **HANFORD**

The President's budget cuts \$297 million from cleanup efforts at Hanford (\$148 million from the Office of River Protection and \$149 million from the Richland Operations Office). Hanford area residents and workers deserve a strong federal commitment to nuclear waste cleanup. The President's budget breaks that promise and puts the safety and economic security of this community at risk. See: <http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=231685>

### **EDUCATION**

The President's budget cuts funding for the Department of Education by \$530 million – the first cut in overall education spending in a decade. While the President's budget includes an increase in Title I funding (money for disadvantaged elementary and secondary schools) – this is still a \$9 billion shortfall, which will result in a loss of over \$306 million for Washington state. This shortfall will deny nearly 39,000 Washington state students Title I services. The President's budget also eliminates GEAR UP and parts of the TRIO program, which provide critical early intervention and preparation programs for students to help them to graduate from high school and succeed in college.

### **TRANSPORTATION**

The President's budget cuts the Federal Aviation Administration's Airport Grants program by \$472 million and the Facilities and Equipments program by \$77 million. The President's budget also eliminates funding for Amtrak. As the ranking Democrat on the Senate Transportation Appropriations Committee, I will fight to preserve funding for these important Washington state priorities.

### **AGRICULTURE**

The President's budget reduces USDA spending by \$2.6 billion in fiscal year 2006 – including a \$14 million cut in agriculture research, primarily at Washington State University. This research supports a broad range of

agriculture sectors in the state, including: wheat, potatoes, barley, shellfish, wine grapes, hops, asparagus, and small fruits.

*For more information, see:*

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=231720>

## **Bush Plan Would DOUBLE Our Electricity Rates**

The President's budget includes new attacks on Washington ratepayers and the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA). It could push up electricity rates by 20 percent annually for four years – draining another \$2 billion out of the pockets of Northwest ratepayers.

His plan will force us to pay "market rates" instead of the "cost-based" rates that have powered our region and our economy. If his plan succeeds, we'll be paying DOUBLE our current electricity rates in four years.

On Monday, Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and I sent a letter to the President expressing our strong opposition.

On Wednesday, I questioned the President's Budget Director at a hearing. He claimed that the change to BPA amounted to "a very modest increase" for our ratepayers. I said there was nothing "modest" about a 20% annual increase.

*You can see that exchange here:*

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=231841>

On Thursday, I joined Senator Cantwell (D-WA) and representatives of Northwest public utilities to denounce the proposal. I pointed out that Northwest ratepayers are still hurting from the energy crisis of 2000-2001 and can't afford further increases – especially families who rely on energy assistance programs like LIHEAP.

*Read my remarks from the press conference:*

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=231933>

## **Asbestos: W.R. Grace Indicted**

On Monday, a federal grand jury in Montana indicted the W.R. Grace Company and seven executives for the company's activities in Libby, Montana. The ten-count indictment charges that the company knew about the dangers of asbestos to workers and the community and engaged in a conspiracy to cover it up. The charges include conspiracy, Clean Air Act violations, wire fraud, and obstruction of justice.

*See my response in this speech:*

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=231755>

## **Justice Delayed - Class Action Changes**

On Thursday, I voted against a bill that changes the rules on class action lawsuits. It would let defendants move class action lawsuits from state to federal jurisdiction. Because federal courts are already facing major backlogs, the change could delay or deny justice for everyday Americans. Even the federal bench opposed the change. Unfortunately, the bill passed the Senate on Thursday.

Congress should not be in the business of delaying or denying justice for any victim. I will continue to work to ensure that the scales of justice are not tipped against average Americans.

*Read my reaction:*

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=232007>

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