

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington –September 8, 2006

GreenLane Port Security Legislation Moves to the Senate Floor

Senate on the Verge of Making America more Secure

This week, nearly ten months after its introduction, the groundbreaking GreenLane port security legislation that Senator Susan Collins and I sponsored is being debated on the floor of the U.S. Senate. The measure will improve cargo screening standards, provide incentives to importers to enhance their security measures, and implement a framework to ensure the successful resumption of shipping in the event of a terrorist attack.

It has now been five years since the September 11th attacks, and our country remains dangerously vulnerable. We have huge loopholes at our ports and in our cargo container system and none of us should sleep well until they are closed. The GreenLane legislation is a comprehensive blueprint for how we can improve security while keeping trade efficient.

We need to pass this forward-looking security regime and protect Americans and our economy today. The full House of Representatives passed our bill. The Senate Homeland Security Committee passed our bill. We have worked with the Commerce and Finance Committees to address issues in the bill they had raised. Now it's up to the Senate to finally pass this bill.

To read my speech introducing this critical legislation on the Senate floor visit:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=262666>

To sign up for my GreenLane port security updates visit:

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

More Air Traffic Controllers Needed to Avoid another Catastrophe

Questioning the FAA's Long-Delayed Staffing Plan

In the wake of the tragic crash of Comair Flight 5191 in Lexington, Kentucky two weeks ago, I recently sent a letter to Federal Aviation Administrator Marion Blakey urging the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to focus its resources on ensuring that a well trained and experienced controller workforce is in place to guarantee the safety of the flying public.

In my letter I asked the Administrator to explain why the FAA's latest staffing plan would have fewer trained controllers on board this year and next year, why the FAA failed to detect violations of its staffing policy, and why the agency's November safety directive was not issued in writing, among other questions.

Air travelers all across the country need to know that they are safe. They shouldn't have to wonder if there are enough air traffic controllers or if those controllers have had enough sleep. That's why we have strict standards that the federal government must fully enforce.

To read my letter to FAA Administrator Blakey visit:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=262278>

Iraq: Calling for a Change of Course

This week, Senate Democrats offered a resolution calling on President Bush to change the course in Iraq and provide a strategy for success. I supported the resolution because I believe that we can do better than misleading the American people about pre-war intelligence, the cost of war, and the intensity of the insurgency. I believe that we can do better than a policy that leaves our troops without a clear mission and without a plan for success.

In my remarks supporting the resolution I outlined the reasons that we cannot tolerate more of the same in Iraq:

No clearly defined mission. Our troops have done everything that we have asked of them. Now the President must put forth a clearly defined strategy that outlines what is left for them to do and how they can return home quickly and safely.

A Distraction from the War on Terror. This Administration's focus on Iraq has distracted us from the War on Terror and left us vulnerable. The President has invested a majority of our resources into Iraq, weakening our ability to prosecute the global War on Terror.

Afghanistan is Sliding. In Afghanistan, violence continues to increase, we still have not captured Bin Laden, and the Taliban is re-emerging. We must not allow Iraq to distract us from this critically important military mission.

This Administration has gotten it wrong in Iraq, the War on Terror and on homeland security time and again. Continuing the status quo is unacceptable, and that's the message I sent with my support of the resolution. The American people deserve straight answers and a real debate so we can get this right. Nothing is more important for our security and our future.

Protecting Taxpayers: Putting a Stop to IRS Plan to Outsource Debt Collection

On Wednesday I sent a letter to Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Commissioner Mark Everson urging him to suspend a controversial plan to outsource the collection of debt to private agencies. Under the plan, the IRS would assign thousands of cases to private debt collection agencies. The IRS was moving forward despite a vote by the House Appropriations Committee prohibiting them from doing so.

In my letter I conveyed my concerns that the IRS plan would not adequately protect taxpayer privacy, would not ensure all taxpayers are treated fairly and respectfully, would not guarantee any cost savings to the U.S. Treasury, and would pre-empt the Senate's debate over outsourcing tax collection.

As the top Democrat on the subcommittee that oversees the Internal Revenue Service's budget, I will be using every means to ensure that the Full Senate and the Appropriations Conference Committee can review this proposal.

The IRS has an abysmal record of protecting taxpayer privacy, and this effort could further threaten privacy. I simply will not allow the IRS to ignore Congress and move forward with a plan that could threaten American taxpayers.

To read my letter to IRS Commissioner Everson visit:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=262567>

To subscribe, unsubscribe, or change your email address, visit: <http://murray.senate.gov/updates>