

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington January 31, 2003

FIGHTING FOR OUR VETERANS

Yesterday, I joined 26 of my colleagues in sending a letter to President Bush calling for him to resume enrollment for Priority 8 veterans in the VA healthcare system. Earlier this month the Administration announced its intention to suspend health care enrollment for new Priority 8 veterans in order to reduce backlog and alleviate a longstanding funding crisis within the VA.

This logic is outrageous. Our veterans fought hard to secure our freedom, and it is wrong that they must also fight for access to health care.

Cutting off enrollment to veterans of modest income at a time when more veterans than ever are seeking health care from the VA does not solve the Department's difficulties, but it does undermine the commitment this country has made to our veterans. The decision to close the VA's doors to Priority 8 veterans denies them access to affordable prescription drugs and access to necessary preventative care.

My father was a World War II veteran, who won the Purple Heart. I understand the sacrifices our veterans have made for all of us. It is wrong for the President to speak eloquently about supporting our men and women in uniform and then turn around and reduce health care access for those who have fought so hard in the past to ensure the freedom we all enjoy today.

The VA needs to seek out comprehensive and creative solutions to its current service and budget crisis, such as allowing veterans to fill prescriptions prescribed by non-VA physicians. As a member of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, I will continue to support increased funding for the Veterans' Medical Care Account and efforts to make sure our veterans get the services and benefits they deserve.

PROTECTING WOMEN'S COLLEGE ATHLETICS

On Thursday, a Bush Administration advisory commission on Title IX voted to accept several recommendations that could reverse the progress that has been made for women athletes over the last thirty years. Since 1972, Title IX has opened the doors to athletics, education and success for 2.8 million young women.

I am disappointed with the commission's recommended changes that could undermine Title IX's success. I don't believe the commission should be changing a law that has made such a difference for so many women. Instead, we should have better enforcement of the existing law.

Title IX means more equity and more opportunity not just for women, but for all Americans, and we must not allow anyone to undermine such a successful civil rights law.

THE STATE OF THE UNION

On Tuesday, President Bush delivered his annual State of the Union Address to offer his ideas for our country's future, and I congratulate him on his speech. As I sat in the House Chamber with my colleagues, I felt proud to live in a country where our national spirit is vibrant and where we have come together in the face of adversity to move our country forward.

But our nation faces growing challenges. We face a floundering economy, the possibility of a war in Iraq, and ongoing dangers in protecting the security of our homeland. Many of our friends and neighbors have lost their jobs or their health care. While, as the President said, the state of our union is strong, the state of our nation is anxious.

At last year's State of the Union, the President said his number one priority was jobs. But since he took office, this country has lost 2.1 million jobs. In 2001, the President signed a \$1.7 trillion tax cut, which he said would "provide an important boost at an important time for our economy." But in the last 18 months, Washington state has lost 74,000 jobs.

In the past, the President has spoken about how we could have it all – massive tax cuts and more spending, all while still saving Social Security, leaving no child behind, and paying off our debt. But we now face growing deficits, and our schools are facing cuts. It is time for the President to put together a strong domestic agenda to invest in job creation, to expand health care, and to strengthen our homeland security.

The President is right to call for a prescription drug benefit under Medicare. But I am concerned that his approach is to force seniors into restrictive HMOs in order to get the drug benefit. In the past, these approaches have failed in our state, because many rural communities lack the population to sustain an HMO, and therefore would not benefit from this scheme.

In foreign affairs, I will continue to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the President in winning the war on terrorism to protect Americans from harm. We must continue to build global support for disarming Saddam Hussein and the threat he poses to the Middle East and the world. And we must take the steps necessary to reduce global threats to America's national security.

But I will continue to speak out for the families and communities that are struggling at home in Washington state. By working together to continue our progress we will ensure that the state of our union is strong now and for the future.

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