

# **PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW**

**U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – July 25, 2003**

## **HOMELAND SECURITY BILL PASSES SENATE**

Last night the Senate passed the Homeland Security Appropriations bill by a vote of 95-1. The bill includes critical funding to protect our ports and high-threat urban areas. In particular, the bill provides more funding for Operation Safe Commerce, a container cargo initiative I authored to increase security at the nation's busiest ports, including Seattle and Tacoma. The bill also funds port security grants, which will help the nation's ports strengthen and upgrade their infrastructure, and provides additional funding for high-threat urban areas, like Seattle.

I am proud to have helped secure this important funding that will make a difference to the security of citizens in Washington state. With local budgets being squeezed, our communities and first responders deserve every available resource to help protect the safety of our residents. I am proud to have supported these federal funds which will keep our families and communities safe.

The Senate bill includes:

- \$30 million for Operation Safe Commerce
- \$150 million for Port Security Grants
- \$750 million for High Threat Urban Area grants

## **EPA DENIES SPOKANE RIVER CLEAN-UP**

Last week the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced it will allocate \$49 million to begin clean-up efforts at 11 Superfund sites. However, the agency said it would not clean up 10 other extremely hazardous waste sites across the country, including contaminated areas along the Spokane River in Washington.

The Bunker Hill Mining and Metallurgical Site in Idaho polluted the Coeur D'Alene River, Lake Coeur D'Alene and the Spokane River with its mining and lead smelting operations from the late 1800s through the 1970s. These operations contaminated the soil, groundwater and the river systems with lead, arsenic and zinc. As a result, the Coeur D'Alene basin has been designated a Superfund site.

It is deeply troubling that the EPA has chosen not to fund clean-up efforts in Washington State, despite the contamination of our water and our soil. It is outrageous that EPA is going to fund cleanup for the same project on the Idaho side of the border, but ignore the Washington sites.

According to the EPA, there is not enough money in the Superfund account to clean up all of the toxic sites around the nation. That's because the Superfund tax, paid by polluting industries, has not been renewed.

I believe that polluters, not local taxpayers, should be held accountable to clean up toxic wastes. The Superfund tax should be reinstated so that polluters are held accountable for the messes they make. Families in Eastern Washington deserve to live in a healthy, clean environment. And they deserve leaders who will stand up to the polluters and make sure they clean up the messes they make.

## **PROTECTING HEALTH CARE FOR OUR VETS**

As a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee and the daughter of a WWII veteran, I was shocked to learn that despite our growing veterans population and increasing need for health care services, the Department of Veteran's Affairs is advocating for the closure of three veterans' health care facilities in Washington State. The VA headquarters has ordered state officials to study the possibility of closing VA hospitals in American Lake, Vancouver and Walla Walla. Closing these critical facilities would deny health care access to thousands of Washington veterans.

Our state is home to nearly 700,000 veterans and military retirees who have dedicated their lives to protecting the safety and liberty of our nation. An increasing number of these heroes rely upon the VA for their health care needs.

Upon hearing of the Administration's directive to explore the closures, I wrote to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, to express my concerns. I told him that the VA's mandate would restrict and deny critical health care services to thousands of Washington veterans, including those with specialty care needs. I informed him that this directive completely disregards regional recommendations about the health care needs of veterans in Washington State and urged him to withdraw the mandate to potentially close the health facilities in American Lake, Vancouver and Walla Walla. I will continue to work as a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee to protect the rights and needs of our veterans.

## **WILD SKY WILDERNESS BILL PASSES SENATE COMMITTEE**

This week we took a major step toward preserving a pristine area in Washington's scenic Skykomish River Valley.

I am pleased to announce that the Wild Sky Wilderness bill cleared the Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee Wednesday and is on its way to being considered by the full Senate.

The proposed Wild Sky Wilderness area is the result of more than three years of bipartisan collaboration, community involvement and hard work. Led by myself and Rep. Rick Larsen, the proposal would protect 106,000 acres of the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest for a host of outdoor recreational activities.

We have worked extensively with local stakeholders and interested parties to design the wilderness area. Designation of this wilderness area would protect wildlife and promote clean water, protect threatened salmon, steelhead and trout, protect recreational opportunities for the region, and contribute to the local economy.

I am proud that the Senate has again put Wild Sky on track to become law and I will continue to work to pass this bill through Congress.

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