

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – October 17, 2003

SUPPORTING OUR TROOPS, DEMANDING ACCOUNTABILITY

As the daughter of a disabled World War II veteran and the representative for hundreds of thousands of Washington state veterans and military families, I appreciate the sacrifice of our soldiers. Today, I voted in favor of the \$87 billion request to fund military reconstruction in Iraq and Afghanistan. The measure passed the full Senate 87-12 and now goes on to conference with the House of Representatives.

I have always fought for and supported every dollar our troops need to protect themselves and to complete their missions successfully. I have received letters and heard stories about young men and women from across Washington state who are serving in Iraq and are facing deadly attacks every day. But they don't have the proper equipment to do their jobs safely. Just yesterday I read a letter sent by the parents of a young soldier from Bellingham who had to use his birthday money to buy protective gear for his tour of duty in Iraq. It is outrageous that we are sending our soldiers to Iraq without the equipment they need.

But even as I support this funding, I am deeply troubled that the President still does not have a plan for success in Iraq. That is why I'm going to watch this Administration very closely. I'm going to watch how they spend this money, how accountable they are, and how much international support they get to share the burden in Iraq.

Throughout this week of debate on the Senate floor, I worked to improve the President's request by voting for several amendments. One key amendment which passed last night turns half of the \$20 billion in Iraqi reconstruction funds into a loan, rather than a grant. Before our troops were sent to Iraq, the American people were told that Iraq's oil reserves would finance its reconstruction, but now U.S. taxpayers are getting stuck with the bill.

We all agree that we must help Iraq and Afghanistan get back on their feet quickly, but we should not carry the burden alone while our own schools, hospitals, and communities are in need.

So, today's vote was not an end to the discussion about this funding, but the beginning of a new discussion about the Bush Administration's accountability. I will continue to ask the questions that need to be asked and to stand up for our troops abroad and our families here at home.

Read my full statement and the letter from a soldier's family: <http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=213622>

A STEP FORWARD FOR DISABLED VETERANS' BENEFITS

For years, I've urged Congress to do the right thing and extend full retirement and disability benefits to all of our nation's disabled veterans. Currently, our government follows the unfair practice of requiring disabled veterans to forfeit one dollar of retirement compensation for every dollar they receive in disability pay. Receiving both of these well-earned benefits is called "concurrent receipt."

I am pleased to note that on Thursday, House Republicans finally announced a plan to phase-in concurrent receipt for some of our veterans over the next ten years. The actions taken in the House are a good first step, but we still have much more to do.

The House plan only covers increased benefits for about half of our disabled veterans whose retirement benefits have been reduced or eliminated under current law because they also receive disability benefits. I will continue to push for full benefits for all of our veterans, so we end this unfair "Disabled Veterans Tax."

With a new generation of combat veterans deployed around the world, we must keep our commitment to those who risk their lives to protect us.

PATIENT PROTECTION PASSES SENATE

Scientists have recently completed the historic task of deciphering the entire DNA sequence of the human genetic code. This new knowledge is already allowing doctors in Washington state and across the country to develop better ways to diagnose, prevent and treat diseases. But for genetic research to fulfill its promise, patients need to know that genetic information will not be used as a basis for discrimination in health insurance or employment.

That is why I am pleased to announce that the bipartisan Genetic Information Act, which I co-sponsored, passed the Senate 95-0. This legislation will establish strong protections to prevent employers and health insurers from discriminating based on genetic information.

I am hopeful that the House will follow our lead and support the comprehensive protections needed to defend the medical privacy of all Americans.

MARTINEZ NOMINATION SENT TO SENATE

This week, President Bush officially sent the nomination of Ricardo Martinez to the U.S. Senate for consideration as the new U.S. District Court Judge for the Western District of Washington.

I met with Magistrate Judge Martinez in early August and worked closely with the President and Senator Cantwell to select him for nomination. Judge Martinez clearly meets the standards of fairness and adherence to the law that we look for in our federal judges. Judge Martinez embodies the type of community-oriented, even-handed solutions that are the mainstay of our judicial system. I support his swift confirmation.

A DAY IN THE SENATE

Last week, I mentioned that a Washington state resident, Lisa Paolino, is featured in the new (Nov. 1st) edition of Woman's Day magazine. I'm pleased to announce that you can now view the story (and all the pictures) online at:

http://www.womansday.com/article.asp?section_id=39&article_id=8252

It's an insider's look at a typical day in the United States Senate.

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