

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – May 14, 2004

Fighting for Disabled Students

This week, in a victory for disabled students and their families, the U.S. Senate approved a bipartisan amendment that I offered to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA, along with an amendment I offered, was reauthorized by the Senate on an overwhelming 95-3 vote. The bill now goes to a Conference Committee to resolve differences between the Senate and House versions.

My amendment will provide improved access to a high-quality education for four specific groups of disabled children: those who are homeless, those in foster care, those in military families, and those in migrant families. Because they change schools frequently, a lack of continuity often prevents these students from getting the special education services they need. My amendment will improve special education for homeless and foster children with disabilities and for children with disabilities in military or migrant families by:

- Improving special education services when children transfer school districts and coordination between school districts on assessments and evaluations;
- Ensuring that students' records are transferred quickly between schools when students move;
- Clarifying which appropriate adults can advocate for children with regard to their special education services;
- Improving coordination between McKinney Vento and IDEA and overall representation of homeless and foster children in IDEA;
- Strengthening services for infants and toddlers with disabilities who are homeless, in foster care, or in military families;
- Ensuring that homeless and foster children with disabilities, children with disabilities in military families and their advocates are represented on state policy committees;
- And improving inclusion of children with disabilities who are homeless, in foster care, and in military families in research and training grants.

By providing these targeted resources, the amendment ensures that a quality education will accompany highly mobile disabled students whenever they move. Although I'm disappointed that the Senate has failed for years to fully fund IDEA, and while I remain committed to the fight to fully fund special education, the passage of this bill is a major victory for America's most vulnerable disabled students.

Helping Students Stay in School

On Thursday, at a press conference kicking off a joint effort between House and Senate lawmakers that will address the high dropout rate among Hispanic high school students, I called on Congress to take bold action to help students succeed. The joint effort with the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and other Hispanic organizations is titled "Graduation for All: A Right & Responsibility," and calls attention to low graduation rates among Hispanic students.

To help students stay in school and graduate, I've introduced the Pathways for All Students to Succeed (PASS) Act. My PASS Act calls for additional resources exactly where poor and minority students need them. The PASS Act will help America's teenagers graduate from high school, go on to college, and enter the working world with the skills they need to succeed. Title I of the PASS Act will help schools hire literacy coaches to strengthen essential reading and writing skills. Title II will provide grants for high-quality Academic Counselors to ensure each student has an individualized plan and access to services to prepare for college and a good job.

Title III targets resources to those high schools that need the most help, so they can implement research-based strategies for success. I'm working hard to see that my PASS Act becomes law.

JOBS for WA Workers

On Tuesday, the Senate passed the Jumpstart Our Business Strength (JOBS) Act by a vote of 92-5. The JOBS Act would end European Union (EU) trade sanctions currently being imposed on the U.S. Under World Trade Organization agreements, the EU began charging a 5 percent penalty on U.S. goods sold in Europe on March 1. The penalty could increase by 1 percent per month, and could rise to 17 percent in a year if it's not repealed.

My amendment to extend the Research and Development tax credit by 18 months was included in the final JOBS bill. It will help our technology sector, our manufacturing sector, and our workers by helping to keep jobs here at home that are otherwise being outsourced overseas. It gives companies a real incentive to invest here in the U.S. This is a bill that will make our companies and workers more competitive in the global marketplace, especially for trade-dependant states like Washington.

Yet, I'm very disappointed that we this bill does not include an extension of unemployment benefits to over 7,000 Washington state workers who are exhausting their unemployment benefits every month. While a strong majority of Senators agreed that this program deserves extension and that workers who've been suffering for extended periods of time deserve help, once again, a group of Republicans said "No" to working families. I'll keep working with my colleagues to ensure we get help to workers who've suffered for months and months because of this Administration's failed economic policies.

Hopefully, Senate passage of this bill will convince the House to act on this jobs bill. Further delay in the House will only increase sanctions imposed on American workers by the European Union.

Cover the Uninsured Week

Today, our health system is in crisis. More than 44 million Americans, 800,000 of them in Washington state, live without health insurance. And worse, more than 100,000 of those uninsured Washingtonians are children. For the wealthiest nation in the world, this is a disgrace.

Unfortunately, as we mark another "Cover the Uninsured Week," the situation is bad and getting worse. Millions lost health care last year. That's why on Wednesday I proudly joined several of my colleagues to introduce a resolution expressing the Sense of the Senate that we must enact legislation to provide every individual in the United States with access to health insurance coverage. That coverage, we agree, must be equal to or better than that we get as members of Congress, and must be available no later than December 31, 2006.

Washington state has often succeeded in meeting the needs of the uninsured. One only need look at our Community Health Centers or our Community Access Program grantees or our Project Access communities to see what can work and what we can do when the local community comes together to meet the health care needs of the uninsured. Every American should have access to healthcare. It's a simple goal, but it's long past time to make this goal a reality.

Honored in Tacoma – Today, the Transportation Club of Tacoma and the Port of Tacoma Chapter of the Propeller Club host their annual Maritime Festival Luncheon. I'm grateful that I'll receive the 2004 Master Mariner Award, which is given annually to the person who has given outstanding service to the maritime community and the community in general.

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