

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – June 10, 2004

In Memory of President Reagan

Last Saturday, the nation suffered a loss. Ronald Wilson Reagan, the 40th President of the United States, served his country honorably. He knew that while we may disagree during the day, after 5 o'clock we weren't Republicans or Democrats – we were all Americans.

That spirit and hope is the lasting legacy I will take away from his life and service. It was moving to walk to the Capitol Rotunda with my colleagues, half of whom served during Reagan's time, as they reflected and shared memories of what times were like then. 54 members of the Senate were in Congress during Reagan's time, and I was proud to join with them to honor Ronald Reagan's service to his country and hear their stories of serving with him.

In the Rotunda, where American greats have been honored for their service and sacrifice, there was a great sense of loss, but also a spirit of strength and unity in support of this outstanding public servant. Tomorrow, the nation will bid a final farewell to President Reagan on a national day of mourning and my thoughts and prayers will be with his family.

Remembering Bellingham Victims

Today, on the fifth anniversary of the Olympic Pipeline explosion in Bellingham, I joined individuals from the local, state and federal government, pipeline agencies, and citizen groups to discuss the aftermath of the Bellingham tragedy, and to remember those who were lost.

I'll never forget how I first heard about the explosion. That evening, June 10, 1999, I stepped off a plane from Washington, D.C., into SeaTac airport, and my cell phone started ringing almost immediately. It was my twin sister, who lives in Bellingham and works as a middle school teacher there. Frantic, she said, "Patty, have you heard? Our whole world just blew up!" At first, I didn't know what she was talking about. Then she told me that a pipeline running directly under the parking lot of her school had blown up. It was just a block away from her classroom, and it took place just hours after the last student had left.

Three young lives were lost that day.

I came to Bellingham a short time after the accident, and I was amazed at the wreckage I saw. One and a half miles of creek side were reduced to ashes in an instant. A salmon spawning ground I was to have dedicated a few weeks later had been turned into an environmental disaster. As difficult as it was to see for me, I know it was indescribably painful for the families of victims. Their suffering really opened my eyes.

After the Bellingham explosion, I started looking into pipeline safety. What I discovered really shocked me. I found out there were inadequate laws, insufficient oversight, too few inspections, and a lack of awareness about pipeline dangers. I learned that one of the most important public safety offices in our government was underfunded and neglected. Through my research and discussion, I learned we needed to improve many areas: safety standards, enforcement, penalties, technology, education, state participation and citizen involvement.

So I wrote a bill to address all of those areas. The Murray-McCain Pipeline Safety Act was signed into law by the president in December 2002. And it's gotten results. Over the past 10 years in Washington state, there were an average of about 12 pipeline incidents for every million miles of pipeline. Since our law passed, pipeline incidents in Washington state have dropped by about 40 percent. And today, Washington

state has less than half the national average of incidents per million miles of pipeline. I hope that our current and future progress on this issue will prevent future tragedies.

Amtrak's Empire Builder Turns 75

Tomorrow I will help celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Empire Builder rail line that runs between Chicago, Seattle, and Portland. The line was named for its founder, James Hill, who was called "The Empire Builder" because of his success in various business enterprises. The Empire Builder is a critical link for our economy and our culture, and I want to make sure it remains strong for another 75 years. In fact, this is the most heavily traveled East-West, long-distance train in Amtrak's national system.

Unfortunately, some in Washington, D.C., want to eliminate this line – and Amtrak altogether. Even members of our own Congressional delegation – who are served by the Empire Builder – have voted to underfund Amtrak and put the trains that serve their constituents in danger of being eliminated. If they succeed in crippling Amtrak's budgets, passenger rail service all over the nation will be cut. That's a bad idea. It would take us away from what should be our goal of investing in the kinds of family-wage jobs that transportation projects help create.

Besides, Washingtonians have paid for quality rail service, and I think we should get what we deserve. When I became chair of the Transportation Subcommittee in 2001, Amtrak was very near bankruptcy. But with hard work, over the last four years, we've been able to put Amtrak on stronger financial footing.

But simply avoiding bankruptcy isn't enough. We need to do more. We need to make the kinds of investments that will allow us to build a modern, high-speed, environmentally friendly rail system. I'm going to continue to fight for Amtrak – and all passenger rail service – in Washington state and across the nation.

SeaTac South Terminal Opens

Tomorrow I will also proudly celebrate the opening of the new South Terminal at SeaTac International Airport. This new South Terminal will boost SeaTac's capacity. And that will mean more jobs, more growth, and greater prosperity for Washington's families. In fact, 5,000 people were employed to complete this project, and the increased capacity it helps build will allow us to employ thousands more in the future. These are good, family-wage jobs that increase buying power and further stimulate the regional economy.

I knew when I pledged my support for this project that we'd put people in good jobs. But I also knew that this was an ambitious effort. After all, this is the largest building project in Washington state – it's bigger than Safeco Field or Seahawks Stadium in the number of dollars spent -- \$587 million. As the former chair -- and now ranking member -- of the Appropriations Transportation Subcommittee, I've supported this project every step of the way.

The September 11th terrorist attacks increased the need for effective baggage security at the airport. As a result, we had to dramatically reconfigure and expand a baggage system that was already one third complete. I used my position on the Transportation Subcommittee to secure \$117 million in new funding to meet these security needs. I also made sure that the Department of Homeland Security knew that SeaTac should be among the first airports in the nation to receive money to upgrade security – and it was.

I'm excited about modernization efforts at SeaTac, especially because I know that transportation means jobs. Investments in transportation are investments in our economic growth – and in the improvement of quality of life for all Washingtonians.

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