

# PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – June 10, 2005

## Getting Vets the Care They Deserve

Caring for the mental health needs of our veterans is about American values. If we value the strength of our families, the strength of our economy and the promises we have made to our military, then we must provide our veterans with the care they've been promised in return for their service and sacrifice.

So, on Thursday, I stood with fellow Democrats and veterans' advocates to introduce legislation that would provide quality mental health care to America's veterans and returning service members. As a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, I am an original co-sponsor of the Veterans' Mental Health Care Capacity Enhancement Act of 2005.

Over the past several months, I've held roundtable forums with Guard and Reserve veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan to hear about the challenges they face as they return home from the battlefield. Last week, at a forum in Port Orchard, I heard from recent veterans who discussed mental health challenges and increased stress as they return home from their missions abroad. I also heard about family struggles due to inadequate mental health resources.

We need to have the mental health services in place to let our veterans know there are resources available to help them and their families get through these tough times. The Veterans' Mental Health Care Capacity and Enhancement Act of 2005 would help provide much-needed services. It would:

- Establish guidelines for screening primary care patients for mental health disorders and illnesses;
- Strengthen performance measures for VA mental health programs;
- Require that Community-Based Outpatient Clinics have the capacity to provide mental health services to a certain percentage of their patient populations;
- And take a number of additional measures to see that our veterans and their families are educated and equipped to handle any mental health challenges they face.

Sign up to receive periodic updates on my work for veterans:  
<http://murray.senate.gov/vetupdates/index.cfm>

## Funding WA Priorities

This week, as a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I secured funding for several of our state's most important priorities. Funding for the following projects passed the Senate Appropriations Committee Thursday and will now go to the full Senate for consideration.

### CLEANER DRINKING WATER IN CLARK COUNTY

On Thursday, I announced that I've secured a half million dollars to help Clark Public Utilities to provide safe, clean drinking water to residents of Clark County. The \$500,000 I secured will help to construct a new satellite water system for residents in northern Clark County who have been impacted by arsenic contamination in private wells.

Recent tests of private wells in areas of northern Clark County have revealed arsenic levels above 500 parts per billion (ppb), which greatly exceed the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) new drinking water standard. This exposure level is particularly dangerous to children and pregnant women, and has been linked to lung, bladder and skin cancer and other health disorders.

Unfortunately, there is no major public water system available to the affected area and no cost-effective way to remove such high levels arsenic from the wells. The funding will allow for the construction of a new satellite water system to provide affordable drinking water for northern Clark County residents.

Residents of Clark County should not have to fear dangerous levels of arsenic in their water. I'm pleased to be able to help the Clark Public Utilities protect the health of our residents. Protecting the health and well-being of residents in Clark County requires a local and federal partnership, and I'm glad we've taken a big step by securing a federal commitment to protect this community.

### MAINTAINING OUR STATE'S NATIVE ECOSYSTEMS

On Thursday, I announced that I've secured \$1.4 million for the control of Spartina grass in the Willapa Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Spartina grass is a non-native plant that has invaded salt marshes and areas exposed during low tide in Willapa Bay.

In recent years, Willapa has been highlighted by the Audubon Society as one of the nation's top ten "Hot Spots" for invasive species. This is the fourth year that I've secured critical federal dollars to help fight Spartina infestations in Willapa Bay. I know we need to do all we can to protect fragile wildlife and habitat areas like Willapa Bay for future generations. I am pleased to provide this funding to help keep the Refuge healthy and to protect the jobs and livelihood of our region's shellfish growers.

### PRESERVING HANFORD REACH HISTORY

Also on Thursday, I announced that I've secured \$2.25 million for the Hanford Reach Visitor Center. The Center will tell the rich history of the Hanford Reach area and inform visitors about the region's recreational opportunities.

I've worked on protection of the Hanford Reach since I was elected to the U.S. Senate. I helped designate the National Monument at Hanford, and have worked to ensure the community's participation in management of the area. Last year, I secured \$750,000 for the Visitor's Center in the Interior Appropriations bill and \$1 million through my role as ranking member of the Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee.

As a longtime supporter of protection of the Hanford Reach, I'm glad to have secured these funds for the Visitor Center. From its pristine natural beauty to the salmon that spawn in its waters to its strong Native American history, the Hanford Reach is a unique American resource. The Visitor Center will help tell the story of the Hanford reach to travelers from across the country.

### PROTECTING OUR COASTAL MARINE ENVIRONMENTS

I also announced on Thursday that I have secured \$250,000 in the Senate Appropriations bill for the WSU Beach Watchers Program. The Beach Watchers program is a volunteer-driven organization that works to protect and raise awareness of the local marine environment.

Since the program was founded in 1989, 242 volunteers in Island County have become Beach Watchers by completing more than 100 hours of training through WSU Extension. In return, volunteers commit to at least 100 hours in community service. To date, Beach Watchers have returned more than 95,000 hours in volunteer service and public education to the community.

I'm pleased to be able to support this great program. One of the reasons Washington state is such a great place to live is because of its natural beauty. The Beach Watchers program is a great example of local community coming together to preserve that beauty for generations to come.

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