

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – March 31, 2006

Immigration: We Need a Comprehensive, Balanced Bill

This week, the U.S. Senate began a spirited debate about reforming our nation's immigration policy. This debate is really about the type of country we want to be, what we stand for, and what type of future we all want to build. That's why when I spoke on the floor of the Senate this week, I encouraged my colleagues not to lose sight of the bigger picture because this debate touches nearly every aspect of American life – from our economy to our security and from our classrooms to our workplaces. There is a lot of pressure to "do something" about immigration – especially in an election year – but we must be careful to get it right. Perhaps the biggest mistake we could make is to think that addressing enforcement alone will create the changes we want to see. Enforcement is important, but enforcement without investments in our people and our communities will do little good.

Washington state has a lot at stake in the debate over immigration reform. We have the highest per capita concentration of undocumented workers of any state. Those workers put food on our table and bring in billions of dollars in economic activity a year. I've led discussions from Moses Lake to Seattle and from Bellingham to Spokane with key stakeholders who have experiences in areas like border security, labor needs, agriculture, education and housing that all help inform my perspective. That's why I believe we need a holistic approach. I believe comprehensive immigration reform should do 7 things:

1. It should improve enforcement.
2. It should treat the Northern border fairly.
3. It should include a guest worker plan, which includes a path to citizenship.
4. It should provide a path forward so that people who are here have an opportunity to become citizens and realize the American Dream.
5. It should protect the rights of victims and refugees.
6. It should not turn into criminals those compassionate souls who care for their wounds, teach their children or feed their families.
7. And finally, it should provide the resources to help families rise above their circumstances through education and training.

Enforcement is important. Securing our borders is important. But if we leave out things like education and job training, and if we ignore the tools that families need to rise about their circumstances and build a better life, we'll be throwing away the ladders of success that generations of Americans have relied on to make their families and our country stronger. I hope the Senate will take the time to get it right.

Read my full speech:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=253344>

Protecting Taxpayer Privacy

Last week, we learned that the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) is considering altering privacy protections that would allow tax preparers greater freedom to sell taxpayers' personal financial information. Frankly, I find this proposal outrageous. That's why, as the top ranking Democrat on the committee that oversees the IRS I wrote to IRS Commissioner Mark Everson expressing my concerns. I will question the Commissioner about this in person at a hearing on April 27th.

Read my letter to Commissioner Everson:

<http://murray.senate.gov/justice/everson-irs.pdf>

Protecting our Borders

On Tuesday, we learned from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) that government investigators were able to smuggle radioactive material into the United States through both our Northern and Southern borders – including a border crossing in Washington state.

This is unacceptable and an alarming wakeup call about our vulnerability nearly five years since the tragic events of September 11th. If a terrorist were to smuggle the makings of a dirty bomb or any other weapon into our country through either a cargo container or over one of our borders, the cost in both human life and economic loss would be catastrophic.

It has always been an uphill battle to get the resources and attention we need for the Northern Border. For years we've seen the lion's share of funding and resources go to the Southern border. It is far past time to heed the warnings of the 9/11 Commission and shore up security at our ports and borders. That is why I have worked to increase funding for customs and INS inspectors at the Northern Border as well as to increase technology, surveillance and communications tools along our border with Canada.

The cargo security legislation that I have introduced with Senator Susan Collins (R-Maine) will also help to increase security along our borders. The GAO report identified several major problems that will be solved by the GreenLane Maritime Security Act.

For one, the GAO report found that deployment of portal monitors by the Department of Homeland Security to be used to screen cargo for radioactive substances had fallen behind schedule. Our GreenLane bill requires that all cargo entering the U.S. – even across land borders – be screened for radiation.

The GAO report also found system-wide problems facing U.S. efforts to provide, maintain and monitor nuclear detection devices at border crossings and in foreign nations. Again, our GreenLane bill would help solve these problems by authorizing the Department of State to negotiate trade agreements including giving U.S. inspectors the authority to screen cargo in foreign locations.

In places where portal monitors existed and worked correctly, communications problems and human error allowed for the entry of radioactive substances into our country. I will continue to push for increased resources and training for our border and customs inspectors at our ports and border crossings. We must make the security of our communities and the strength of our economy a top priority. As Hurricane Katrina taught us all – providing the funding a resources to prevent a disaster is much less costly than rebuilding after one occurs.

Cargo Security Bill on Fast Track

I'm pleased to announce that the GreenLane Act (mentioned above) will get its first Senate hearing on April 5th before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. Senator Susan Collins will chair the hearing, and I will testify in support of our bill.

We're also making progress in the House with a companion bill called the "Security and Accountability for Every (SAFE) Port Act" (HR 4954). The lead sponsors are Dan Lungren (R-CA) and Jane Harman (D-CA). A hearing was held in the House on March 16th, and the bill was marked up on March 30th. Floor action is expected in the House during the week of April 23rd.

To receive my GreenLane Updates:

<http://murray.senate.gov/greenlane/#updates>

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