

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington –March 9, 2007

VETERANS: Standing Up for our Nation's HEROES

Problems in Our State

This week we have seen problems emerging in Washington state as well. Reports of soldiers languishing in medical holds at Madigan Army Hospital in Fort Lewis near Tacoma were relayed to my office and were reported in papers throughout the state.

In a hearing on Wednesday, I took my concerns about care at Fort Lewis straight to the top. I aggressively questioned Lt. General Kevin Kiley, the Surgeon General in charge of care for the troops at Fort Lewis. I expressed my outrage, and the outrage of so many in this country, that four years into the war we are hearing horror stories from our nation's warriors. I also got Lt. General Kiley's assurance that no soldier will suffer reprisals for reporting inadequate care.

To listen to my questioning of Lt. General Kiley, read my opening statement from the hearing, or read key portions of our exchange visit:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=270257>

HEROES

Following the exposure of awful living conditions at Walter Reed, bureaucratic delays, and disparity in care throughout the country, more Americans are seeing what has been clear to me for too long - the Bush administration has failed our nation's veterans. They have failed in the decrepit facilities at Walter Reed, they have failed them in medical hold units at Fort Lewis, and they have failed them in providing care in critical areas including Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and mental health. Most importantly they have failed to keep the overall promise we make to each and every member of the Armed Services when they sign up – that they will be taken care of when they come home. It has become clear that the needs of our nation's vets have not been considered in the cost of this war.

This week, I spearheaded the effort to fight back. On Tuesday, I led the Senate Democratic effort to address the veterans crises. Our plan, entitled **Honoring and Ensuring Respect for Our Exceptional Servicemembers (HEROES)** contains both oversight and legislative solutions that aim to establish a system that meets the needs of our troops by providing care from the battlefield, to the local VA, and everywhere in between.

To view the HEROES plan visit:

<http://murray.senate.gov/veterans/HEROESPlan.pdf>

Traumatic Brain Injury

The administration has also failed to properly care for and diagnose what has become the signature wound of this war – Traumatic Brain Injury. Many of the injured service members and vets who the VA and DoD fail to diagnose suffer as a result – through divorces, incarceration and even suicide. I will continue to work to ensure that service members coming home with TBI get the attention they deserve.

To view many of the stories about my work this week to address unacceptable care for our service members visit:

<http://murray.senate.gov/veterans/vetnews070309.pdf>

To view a "News Hour" on PBS story on veterans care in which I discuss the lack of a comprehensive plan visit:

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/military/jan-june07/walterreed_03-07.html

WILD SKY: Bill Takes Key Step in House

On Wednesday, the Wild Sky Wilderness Act of 2007 took another crucial step toward passage when it was passed by the House Natural Resources Committee. The Wild Sky legislation, which I have championed in the Senate, designates 106,577 acres of national forest in east Snohomish County as wilderness. This designation will preserve the pristine nature of the land and will allow for increased recreational use by millions of residents.

Congressman Larsen has been my partner in the effort to pass this legislation since 2002. With significant political roadblocks having been cleared after the 2006 election, I am now optimistic about the bill's chances for passage in the early portion of the 110th Congress. With Wednesday's committee action, the bill has now gotten further along in the House legislative process than ever before.

Cross-Border Trucking: Ensuring Safety and Security

In 2001, after a ruling by a NAFTA panel, the Bush administration announced its plan to implement cross-border trucking provisions of NAFTA and to open our Southern border to Mexican trucks to travel anywhere within the United States. On Thursday, I chaired a hearing in the Senate to find out if the Bush administration has met the safety requirements that the law and the American people demand before long-haul trucks can travel across our highways.

The purpose of the hearing was to gather information about the program from truckers, shippers, labor officials, and Secretary of Transportation Mary Peters. I will continue to monitor this program. While I understand international trade is a critical engine of our nation's economy, safety must not be the victim when it comes to expanding trade with our partners.

Bill Gates Comes to the Senate

On Wednesday, Bill Gates appeared before the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee to talk about ways to keep America competitive in the global economy. I was proud to introduce him to my colleagues at the hearing. During his testimony Mr. Gates spoke about the need to improve education, especially in science and math.

Homeland Security: Questioning DHS Head on Washington State Priorities

On Thursday, I got opportunity to question Department of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff on the President's Homeland Security budget. I asked about funding for many programs critical to our state including port security, Hanford security, and Coast Guard funding.

To read my opening statement and questions visit:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=270441>

