

Remarks for Senator Patty Murray  
Washington State Labor Council Annual Convention – “Working Families United”  
Tuesday, Aug. 5, 2008

Thank you so much Rick.

What a great crowd! I am thrilled to stand here in Vancouver, U.S.A., with the best workforce in the world. The people in this room are the backbone of our state’s economy. You work hard every day for your families, for our state, and for our country. And for that you deserve respect, you deserve decent wages, affordable health care, a safe and healthy workplace, and the freedom to join a union and exercise your rights.

Government should be working with you – not against you. And I’ve been proud to stand up for you in Washington, D.C. – to fight for working families, and better pay, benefits, and working conditions.

And let me say – I’ve been so glad to have such a great partner back home in Washington state in Governor Chris Gregoire. Chris has gone to battle to make sure our working men and women get a fair shake in the workplace – and at the bargaining table. And I know you’re going to join me in doing everything we can to get her elected to another four years.

So I’m excited about Election Day – and not just because of the great folks we have on the ballot here in Washington state. I’m excited because – after eight long years – we are finally going to see change in the White House!

I don’t know about you, but I am fed up with this Administration, which has been anti-worker in everything they do. For eight long years, they – and their supporters in Congress – have been doing everything they can to help their friends on Wall Street at the expense of American families. And what are the results? Recession. Job losses. A foreclosure crisis. An endless war. And gas that costs over \$4 a gallon. And just last month, the White House said it will leave a \$490 billion deficit.

While they have been busy racking up debt, they have also done everything they can to deny you rights and dismantle the progress our country has made for working families. They’ve blocked a bill that would give workers a real choice to form a union. They’ve pushed policies that cut wages and put worker safety at risk.

And now, with the clock running out on their control of the White House, they’re trying to sneak through last-minute rule changes, including one that would make it tougher to limit on-the-job exposure to dangerous chemicals. And they’re doing this even while they drag their feet and fail to implement critical safety measures – like a standard for cranes and derricks that would protect workers from deadly falls.

Now, I’ve been holding their feet to the fire on every one of these issues. But I say we can’t afford to keep going down the George Bush/John McCain path. It’s time for an Administration that puts working families first again. And it’s time to strengthen our Majority in Congress so we can take our country back!

Now, I know we can do it. We've already seen the power you have to make a change. Two years ago, working families helped Democrats take back control of the House and take a narrow Majority in the Senate. And what a difference that has already made!

Last year, we increased the minimum wage for the first time in 10 years. And we've made college more accessible. And just last month, we passed – and the President signed – critical legislation that will help hundreds of thousands of families avoid foreclosure and preserve the value of their homes. But we have so much more work to do.

We need to make sure no one goes without health care. That's why I fought this summer along with Democrats in the Senate to preserve Medicare for millions of seniors – and turned back what would have been a devastating blow for health care in this country. The President and his Republican allies were trying to pull a political maneuver that could have forced doctors across this country to stop taking Medicare patients. Our seniors – who have worked hard all their lives – deserve reliable health care when they retire. And Democrats weren't about to let Republicans take that away. So we fought the President, and we won.

But I know – and you know – that we have to *keep* fighting to make sure health care is affordable for everyone. Too many families can't afford insurance – and too many can't afford to see a doctor when they need one. I know that's a priority for you – I want to commend Robby Stern and the Healthy Washington Coalition for their work on that here in Washington state. But for too long, it hasn't been a priority for this Administration. And it is time for a President who really cares about the health of working families.

We also need to make sure we are investing in our roads, bridges, ports, and mass transit systems. Federal transportation investments put people to work and help our economy grow. Every billion dollars we invest in road construction and repairs in this country translates into 35,000 good, family-wage jobs.

Last week was the first anniversary of the bridge collapse in Minnesota. It's a tragic reminder of just how important it is for us to maintain and improve our country's infrastructure. But President Bush and the Republicans just don't get it. For eight years, they've been throwing up barriers by trying to cut funding for transportation.

And now we're facing another transportation crisis. Unless we take action soon, the nation's Highway Trust Fund – the pool of money that funds federal road and bridge construction across this country – will go bankrupt by next year. I've been sounding the alarm about this problem for over two years now. And we have a bipartisan agreement to solve it. But the President and a few Republicans have repeatedly blocked our efforts. If we don't find a solution, it will mean two things – states will lose the ability to make urgent road improvements. And it will cost us half a million jobs across our nation.

We need an Administration that gets it – one that is ready and willing to invest in our communities – and one that cares about our safety and our economy.

But I also need a partner in the White House who understands that caring for our veterans must be a national priority. These brave men and women – and their families – have answered the call of duty

with honor and dignity. And we need to ensure that when they come home, they have every opportunity to thrive in the civilian workforce.

But when it has come time for this Administration to fulfill its obligation to provide the care and services our veterans have earned, we have had to drag them along kicking and screaming.

I've been working to hold the Administration accountable. We fought hard to pass bills that will help our wounded warriors get their benefits. And this summer, Congress approved – and the President signed – a landmark new G.I. Bill that updates education benefits we provide our veterans. The new G.I. Bill will help ensure that college is within reach for millions of veterans, and it will help them make the transition from the military to civilian life.

Not only do we need to care for our veterans, but we also need to make sure that we are investing in our workers. As Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Employment and Workplace Safety, I've been leading the fight for better workplace safety. And I've been working to increase resources for job training.

But I've had to fight the Bush Administration and Republicans in Congress every step of the way. For example, I've been working to reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act – the legislation that establishes our workforce development system. But in the last couple of years, it has become a target for politically-charged riders that have blocked it from getting to the President's desk.

Well, that bill is too important to use as a political football. I'm going to continue to fight for WIA. And I'm going to keep standing up for the skills-training needs of our workforce.

I'm also working on new initiative that will help us invest in our human capital at home. That includes a plan that builds on feedback I've gotten from you – as well as from students, business, and education leaders – that will strengthen the career training students get, and ensure they have opportunities that prepare them for the full array of options after high school.

I am really excited about this effort. And we need an Administration – and we need more members of Congress – who are committed to working on it with me – and who will work with me to put working families first.

And finally, it's time to invest in America again. So I want to talk for a moment about that misguided decision by the Air Force to give a French company a \$35 billion contract to build our military's refueling tankers.

It has been five months since the Air Force made its decision. And in that time, I have not stopped fighting for you. We know that contract should have gone to our workers. And we know this country has no business outsourcing jobs to Europe as we slip into recession.

Now – we've had some victories so far. The Government Accountability Office reviewed the Air Force decision, and it found eight major errors – including that the Air Force *couldn't prove* that the Airbus tanker was even capable of refueling all of our aircraft according to the Air Force's own regulations.

Let me say that again – the Air Force picked Airbus even though it couldn't prove that its tanker could do the job. I don't know about you – but I wouldn't buy a car if no one could prove its transmission worked. And I certainly don't think our country should spend \$35 billion to buy a key piece of defense equipment unless we know we can use it.

In response, Defense Secretary Gates has decided to re-bid the contract. But now we're hearing that the Pentagon is trying to change the rules of the competition in overtime to benefit their already chosen winner. So we're going to have to keep fighting to make sure the Pentagon runs a fair and transparent competition – one that doesn't tip the scales to favor one bidder. And I think you'll all agree with me that it's time we had someone in the White House who understands the need to preserve our domestic aerospace industry – someone who values our workers and our leadership in that field.

And we certainly don't need someone who is fighting for the other team!

So we have a lot of work to do if we're going to turn this country around. But the goals are clear. We've got to make sure that we put people in office who will truly champion working families. That means we need to put Barack Obama in the White House. We need a bigger Democratic Majority in Congress. And we need to return Chris Gregoire to the governor's office.

I know we can do it. You've already shown that you have the power to make a change. And together we're going to stand up for this country, and put working families first again.

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