

Senator tells Vancouver union officials that I-5 bridge decision must be made quickly

VANCOUVER — U.S. Sen. Patty Murray told Southwest Washington union officials April 8 that federal funding for a new Interstate 5 bridge over the Columbia River could be delayed by as much as eight years if pols from both Oregon and Washington don't put their egos aside and quickly find agreement on what type of bridge they want built.

"I know people are worried about impacts and have different ideas, but look, we can't let the perfect be the enemy of the good on this," said Murray, who sits on the Senate Appropriations Committee and chairs the Transportation Subcommittee, which means she has significant influence on funding for the project.

Murray, a Democrat, said she remembers first discussing expanding capacity on the I-5 bridge with former Republican Oregon U.S. Sen. Mark Hatfield. He retired in 1997. Since then, thousands of hours and millions of dollars have been spent studying what type of bridge would be suitable to replace the old one. [The I-5 Bridge is actually made up of two side-by-side drawbridges. The northbound bridge was built in 1917 and the southbound bridge in 1958.]

In March 2008, the Columbia River Crossing Project Sponsors Council unanimously endorsed building a 12-lane bridge with light rail, and lanes for bicycles and pedestrians. The cost was estimated at \$3.6 billion.

The Sponsors Council is composed of mayors from Portland and Vancouver, directors from TriMet and C-TRAN, transportation department directors from Oregon and Washington, the president of Oregon's regional



Washington's senior U.S. Senator Patty Murray mingles with labor officials prior to a 20-minute question and answer session April 8 at the Fire Fighters Hall in Vancouver. Murray is up for re-election this year.

Metro Council, and the chair of Washington's Regional Transportation Department.

Unions are unanimous in their support of a 12-lane replacement bridge.

Since that unanimous vote in 2008, however, some members of the Sponsors Council have back-tracked, suggesting that 12 lanes is too big.

"Every single transportation project, big or small, has people who are for and opposed to them to start with because of different little issues," Murray told union officials April 8. "But I'll tell you, every single one of them — when you do the final ribbon cutting — everybody's standing there because they want their picture in the paper."

Murray said if political consensus isn't reached soon, the bridge project

will be left out of the 2010-2016 Highway Reauthorization bill, which is now under discussion.

"If I don't have agreement about what it's going to look like, we're going to miss out for probably the next six or eight years before we'll be able to ask for federal funds for that," Murray said. "I know there's a lot of egos involved, but people have got to get past these differences."

On other labor issues, Murray had no answer as to the fate of the Employee Free Choice Act, a bill to amend the National Labor Relations Act to establish an efficient system to enable employees to form a union.

"This has been a huge frustration," she said.

The bill needs 60 votes in the Senate

to kill a filibuster — which the Republican leadership has promised to do. Each time it got close, something happened, Murray said. First, the Senate had to wait for Minnesota Democrat Al Franken to be seated before taking a vote. By that time, Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts became gravely ill and was unable to work.

"As we got to actually 60 votes, we had a few of ours (fellow Democrats) who were squishy," Murray explained. "The question became, 'do we want to bring it to the floor and lose by one vote, or do we want to keep working and try to come up with a compromise that doesn't give away everything, but is enough that we can live with and get 60 votes?'"

As Senators were working on that compromise, "Massachusetts happened." Kennedy had passed away and voters elected a Republican to complete his unexpired term of office.

"So, here we are. (Democratic) leadership is talking about what to do next," Murray said. "Do we push forward and show you where the votes are, or do we compromise more? I do not have an answer for you right now."

A senior member of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, Murray also is pushing for legislation that would allow the GI Bill to be used in apprenticeship training programs. She said the unemployment rate for returning soldiers from Iraq and Afghanistan is nearing 22 percent, and that veterans face too many barriers to getting hired.

She said she was using labor's Helms to Hardhats program as an example of how to connect military veterans back into the civilian workforce.



SHERRY PARKER

Clark County Clerk Parker announces re-election bid

VANCOUVER — Clark County Clerk Sherry Parker announced her run for re-election April 10 at the Clark County Democratic Convention.

A former member of Office and Professional Employees Local 11, Parker has almost 19 years experience in the Superior Court system in Clark County. She has served as County Clerk since January 2007.

Parker holds a bachelor's degree in education from the University of South Florida and an associate's degree in data processing from Clark Community College. She recently completed the Certified Public Officials program offered by the State of Washington.

The County Clerk is the administrative and financial officer of the Superior Court. The role of the Clerk is to provide the public with equal access to a fair, accurate and independently established record of the Superior Court's opinions, decisions and judgments. The Clerk's office has an annual budget of approximately \$3 million and a staff of 45 employees working in four separate locations.

"The last biennium has been difficult for all Clark County employees, but the staff of the Clerk's Office has met every challenge with innovative ideas and teamwork," Parker said. "I am proud of our accomplishments and would consider it an honor to serve as County Clerk for another four years."

Parker believes, "to be a part of the community, you must serve the community." She serves on the board of trustees of Clark Community College; on the Public Trust and Confidence Committee of the Board for Judicial Administration; as secretary of the Clark County Volunteer Lawyers Program; as a member of the Clark County Law and Justice Council; as an Executive Board member and past president of Salmon Creek Lions Club; and as a member of the Clark County Lions Hearing Committee, which provides hearing aids for Clark County residents who are not financially able to purchase them.

Parker is married to Philip Parker, a vice president of International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 48 and chair of the Southwest Washington Labor Roundtable. They have been married over 40 years.

Sen. Cantwell listens to labor's concerns

Several dozen local labor leaders met with Washington U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell April 6 in a wide-ranging half-hour long exchange at her offices in the Marshall House in the Fort Vancouver National Historic Site.

Cantwell has an 89 percent lifetime rating from the AFL-CIO. At the meeting she showed strong familiarity with labor's issues, hitting the mark with talk of jobs as the number one priority. Clark County is officially at 14.5 percent unemployment, and Cantwell talked up several upcoming opportunities for federal infrastructure spending.

On the Employee Free Choice Act, a union-backed labor law reform that is stalled in the Senate, Cantwell said there've been discussions behind the scenes about when to proceed with it. Cantwell is signed on as a co-sponsor of the bill, which would make it easier for workers to unionize and get a first contract.

She spoke approvingly President Obama's recent recess appointment of



Washington U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell listens to Jeff Anderson, secretary-treasurer of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555, and Cliff Davis, business manager of International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 48.

AFL-CIO associate general counsel Craig Becker to the National Labor Relations Board, and disapprovingly of the firing of teachers in Rhode Is-

land. She praised AFL-CIO president Rich Trumka for keeping her informed.

Wall Street needs more regulation,

Cantwell said; along with Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), Cantwell is sponsoring legislation that would reinstate the Glass-Steagall restrictions on mingling commercial and investment banking, which Congress lifted in 1999. She also faulted the 2000 passage of the Commodities Futures Modernization Act, which left derivatives unregulated, for the current financial crisis. She voted against the 2008 bank bailout known as TARP.

Asked if she would support a bill in Congress to give union pension funds more time to make up for the recent investment losses, she said "yes" without hesitation.

Labor's only quarrel with Cantwell is her record on NAFTA-style trade agreements. She voted for NAFTA during her one term in the House, and in two Senate terms has voted for all NAFTA-style trade agreements that came up, including CAFTA, a treaty with five Central American nations and the Dominican Republic.