

BIT TO STRENGTHEN FBI IN NORTHWEST GAINS GROUND

Seattle Post-Intelligencer (WA) - October 5, 2007

- Author/Byline: DANIEL LATHROP P-I reporter
- Edition: Final
- Section: News
- Page: A5

Sen. Patty Murray's quest to increase the strength of the FBI in the Pacific Northwest took a step forward Thursday, when the Senate approved a Murray proposal requiring the bureau to disclose exactly where and how its agents are deployed.

Murray said the proposal is a prelude to getting funding for more agents in Washington state if the measure becomes law.

The bill also includes increased funding for the FBI, but not enough to restore hundreds of positions eliminated in the Bush administration budget proposal. It was expected to pass next week, but faces a presidential veto threat.

"We'll have good, solid evidence to make the case," Murray said after a voice vote approved the requirement as part of the bill funding the budget for commerce, justice and science.

Murray called on the FBI to beef up its presence in Washington in a mid-September letter sent in response to a Seattle P-I report revealing that the FBI has substantially fewer agents per capita than the national average despite being home to a plethora of terrorist targets, national security-related facilities, ports and border crossings.

The P-I reported dramatic drops in FBI prosecution and investigation of fraud, civil rights violations and other federal crimes, largely because large numbers of agents have been assigned to counterterrorism duties since 9/11.

The Bush budget for 2008 concentrates the loss of thousands of unfilled staff positions across the bureau on its criminal program by transferring hundreds more agents to terrorism-prevention operations.

Since 2001, more than 2,400 criminal investigators have not been replaced, and the 2008 budget called for cutting more than 650 positions from the criminal program. Congress restored more than 100 anti-crime agents, but still not enough to reverse the damage.

Although Murray didn't request a specific number of agents, a P-I analysis found that Western Washington would need 53 more special agents, for a total of 186, to be on par with the national average. Washington has 2.1 FBI agents for every 100,000 residents - fewer agents per capita than 34 other states.

Murray said she recently expressed her concerns to FBI Director Robert Mueller. "We had a very frank conversation," she said.

The FBI budget is a small part of the \$56 billion Senate spending proposal, and is one of many bones of contention between the White House and Congress - part of a standoff over congressional plans to spend \$22 billion more on non-war spending than proposed by the White House.

The Senate bill enjoys bipartisan support, having backing from Sens. Barbara Mikulski, D-Md., and Richard Shelby, R-Ala., the chairwoman and top Republican of the subcommittee that wrote the bill.

"This bill," Shelby said, "makes sure that law enforcement has the resources it needs to combat the rising level of crime."

Mikulski was more forceful. "We reject the president's cuts," she said. "We'll be there for the FBI."

Murray said senators are frustrated with what she called White House intransigence.

"I personally find it ironic that the week the president says he needs \$200 billion more for Iraq he's refusing to work with us to get a few million more for the FBI," she said.

P-I reporter Daniel Lathrop

can be reached at 206-448-8157

or daniellathrop@seattlepi.com.

TERRORISM TRADE-OFF

The P-I has been investigating how the FBI's focus on counterterrorism since 9/11 has drained efforts to fight traditional crime. Read the

series online at seattlepi.com/specials/fbi.

- *Index terms:* CONGRESS US TERRORISM POLICE
- *Dateline:* WASHINGTON
- *Record:* 0710050103
- *Copyright:* (c) Copyright 2007 Seattle Post-Intelligencer (<http://seattlepi.com>). All rights reserved. Reproduced with permission of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer.