

MURRAY TO FBI: YOU'RE PUTTING STATE AT RISK - SENATOR CALLS FOR AGENCY TO ASSIGN MORE AGENTS

Seattle Post-Intelligencer (WA) - September 18, 2007

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- Edition: Final
- Section: News
- Page: B1

Sen. Patty Murray - in a direct appeal to FBI Director Robert Mueller - expressed concern over the "small number" of agents in Washington state, saying low staffing levels put the "safety and security of our citizens" at risk.

Murray, in a terse letter sent Monday, told Mueller that the number of agents in the state must increase in order to address both terrorist threats and basic law enforcement needs.

"The FBI's low staffing level not only increases Washington state's vulnerability to terrorism, it also affects the FBI's crime-fighting ability in Washington state," Murray wrote.

"I am very concerned about reports that the FBI may not have enough agents leaving our citizens more vulnerable to crimes."

The letter cites stories by the Seattle P-I that detailed how the bureau's traditional law enforcement efforts, including investigations into white-collar crime and civil rights violations, have suffered as the result of a national counterterrorism emphasis since 9/11.

Murray said the FBI's low staffing levels make the state more vulnerable for a terrorist attack, noting that Washington is "home to over 6 million people, industry-leading companies, international seaports and important military facilities."

The state is also home to 29 federally recognized Indian tribes and shares an international border with Canada, near "where terrorist Ahmed Ressam was apprehended on his way to carry out an attack on American soil, and where thousands of people will travel to attend the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics," the senator wrote.

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 and Puerto Rico, a U.S. dependency without federal voting rights.

FBI spokesman Steve Kodak said Monday that Mueller's office had received the senator's letter and planned to respond to it. He had no further comment.

FBI officials in Seattle could not be reached for comment.

Seattle Police Department officials Monday reiterated their call for more FBI agents to help fight traditional crime.

"We'd like to see more of them," Deputy Chief John Diaz said.

Attorney General Rob McKenna, the state's top elected Republican and chief law enforcer, praised Murray's call for more agents.

"We need to step up the pressure, frankly, on the FBI," he said.

McKenna said he is drafting a similar letter, which he expects to send later this week. He called on other elected officials, especially prosecutors, to do the same.

Charlie Mandigo, former FBI special agent in charge in Seattle, agreed with Murray's assessment that Washington is full of potential criminal targets - such as Naval Submarine Base Bangor, which houses strategic nuclear weapons, and The Boeing Co. and Microsoft Corp.

"In today's world, technology is a significant law-enforcement issue," Mandigo said. "With technology, you're dealing with foreign counterintelligence, you're dealing with terrorism," as well as sophisticated, high-tech crime.

Murray has established a track record of leadership in addressing national security threats to U.S. seaports through legislative initiatives.

It's unclear whether she will advocate in Congress for enhancing the FBI's resources and agent corps, which have dropped significantly in

the traditional crime-fighting arena since 9/11.

Murray was traveling late Monday and could not be reached for comment.

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THE TERRORISM TRADE-OFF

Read the P-I's ongoing coverage of the FBI's changing priorities at seattlepi.com/specials/fbi.

- **Caption:** Color Photos(1,2) Sen. Patty Murray and FBI boss Robert Mueller

- *Index terms:* POLICE TERRORISM

- *Record:* 0709180253

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