

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) - Today, The Seattle Times and Hearst Corporation announced an agreement to settle their ongoing dispute through binding arbitration. Below is Senator Murray's statement in reaction to this announcement:

"Like everyone who calls Puget Sound home, I rely on our local newspapers to help provide me with the information I want and need about our community and the world we live in. A healthy, vibrant, and independent press is vital to the functioning of our society, and I believe our state is uniquely blessed with both a public eager for information and a robust press that is able to fulfill that need.

"After watching the ongoing dispute between The Seattle Times and Hearst with no end in sight, I was concerned that a protracted and costly litigation process could jeopardize our access to a strong newspaper industry for years to come. So, in the fall of 2004, I reached out to the leaders of both companies - Frank Blethen and Victor Ganzi - and asked them to consider mediating their dispute. I was glad when they both agreed to do so.

"In October 2004, I asked my friend and former colleague, Senator George Mitchell, to help mediate, and was pleased that he and both parties agreed to meet. Despite much effort, that process ultimately failed, but it helped lead the parties to conclude that protracted litigation was not in the best interest of either resolving their dispute or the public that they serve. I couldn't agree more.

"Today's announcement does two important things. First, it provides a framework under which the Seattle Times and Hearst can settle their dispute. Second, it assures the public that their access to the news they need will rest on a stable foundation.

"The future holds many questions regarding the outcome of this dispute. Both The Seattle Times and Hearst are to be commended for committing to a process in which these questions can be answered in a thoughtful, rational way.

"This process is about much more than the financial future of two companies. The outcome of this dispute will affect access to news for all who live in our region. Two adequately financed papers is the outcome most of us would

prefer. Although none of us can predict what an arbitrated agreement will look like, it was clear that lengthy litigation would not achieve that goal, and indeed could undermine the strength and balance of the entire industry.

"My goal is to have both parties - with the arbitrator - reach a decision that will ensure that Washington residents have access to quality information and news. I am confident this is the best process to answer the questions and provide industry stability for years to come.

"I believe strongly that it is in the public's best interests to see a resolution to this dispute, and I am pleased that we now appear on the path to get there."