

**U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell**  
**The Black Lens Relaunch Event**

**February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024**

[\[AUDIO\]](#) [\[VIDEO\]](#)

**Sen. Cantwell Remarks Begin: [2:09 - 8:06]**

**Sen. Cantwell:** I wanted to quote somebody who's really relevant today. And that is that, our work on continuing to protect the free press is really important. Thomas Jefferson once said "As long as the presses can be protected, our citizens may be advised. Presses can protect what we know to be trusted information." That's so important today, because if we don't have the diversity of voices, if we don't have people competing with information from a variety of sources, it affects all of us.

But today, we're here to celebrate The Black Lens and its relaunch and to talk about its view, and the voices that exist here in Spokane. I especially want to thank Sandy's family: Her mother Wilhelmina, her brother Rick, as well as Natasha Hill, the interim editor of the Black lens and Rob Curley from the Spokesman-Review for making this a reality.

We need more voices and certainly more diversity in the free press. I'm also happy that this is at the start of Black History Month, and not a better time to be had than to celebrate that with the relaunch of The Black Lens.

We were all heartbroken to learn of Sandy Williams and her partner Patricia Hicks, in the horrific accident that took their lives. She really was a force of nature in this community. And she was The Black Lens. She made it happen. As her brother observed, "It was really a way for her to keep an ear to the community."

Local journalism is essential. It's the strength of our democracy. And it has to be based on the truth, and it has to be transparent. Local journalists are on the ground asking important questions and countering misinformation and holding those in power accountable. Sandy understood this. She really did.

The newspaper's election issues and other Black Lens reporters never shied away from asking tough questions about important issues to the African-American voters. That community focus is why more than 70% of Americans today say that they trust local media outlets. A different story when you're talking about the national and cable news.

Small print and radio/TV [news]rooms we know have been cannibalized by the online digital world. And we have to fight to make sure that they can continue to have their voices heard. U.S. local news outlets are closing on average one every two days.

Here in Washington, the robust news ecosystem in Spokane is a little bit of an outlier. Thanks to the Spokesman-Review and Mr. Curley and now The Black Lens. It is showing that you can figure out a way to bring the diversity of voices to the people here in Spokane and to our region.

Sound Publishing's owner the Black Press just filed for bankruptcy last month. They own 35 newspapers and websites in Washington including the Everett Herald, the Port Angeles Daily News, the Aberdeen

Daily World and weeklies in Bellevue, Bothell, Issaquah, and Mercer Island. So papers we know in other parts of our state, like Yakima, Walla Walla are now only printed three days a week. So this situation is truly dire.

So what's being pulled off here today is monumental. It is the kind of counter event that we want to see. That we're growing journalism, we're growing the diversity of voices, and we're holding those in office and power accountable to answer the questions that the community most cares about.

Under Sandy's leadership, The Black Lens print edition grew from 12 to 24 pages, and about 1,300 copies. The new arrangement expands on that vision and today, The Black Lens will be able to reach the 60,000 Spokesman-Review readers. Quite an accomplishment.

These innovative community based models, like this one that helped local journalism survive, is something that people all across the United States should be paying attention to. I believe we need to look at this as more of a national approach. And that's why we have continued to lead the charge and tried to support local newspapers and broadcasters to keep journalists on the job during the pandemic and now to continue that.

As we continue to fight to make sure that some of the business models that have been undermined by the online world and continue to make sure that they are held accountable, so that we can preserve what Thomas Jefferson had said was so important to our nation.

So we're here to say local journalism is growing. That Sandy's voice is still alive. That this view, like The Black Lens, is the right direction for Spokane and the right direction for the state of Washington.

Thank you.