

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

Apple Growers Press Conference at the Port of Seattle

February 20, 2024

Sen. Cantwell Remarks

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

Sen. Cantwell: Well, good afternoon. I want to thank the Consul General for being here today and for India's commitment to the Pacific Northwest, particularly Seattle and the state of Washington. This is a new day in trade relations between the United States and India. And the fact that you're here today expanding the conversation about Washington agricultural products in India means so much to our growers.

I want to thank Todd the president of the Apple Growers Commission, and Bryan, [...] and Chuck all for being here. And to thank John Wolfe, and Kristen Ang, and Hamdi, all from our port, to thank them because they're the ones who are ultimately going to move these products and strengthen those trade relations with a real workforce.

I want to point out though that our apple growers, really apples, are the pride of the Washington agricultural economy. They are known worldwide and I guarantee you I've been to countries where people have actually taken our labels and put them on their products because they thought we would be fooled. Obviously we weren't.

And so continuing to grow our apple economy means a lot to us in the Northwest. [Consul General] I want you to know we are very committed to growing the Washington-India relationship on many fronts. In aviation, in technology, in healthcare, and especially in agriculture.

We think there are lots of rich opportunities for us to partner in agriculture. But unfortunately when the Trump tariffs came into place and the retaliatory tariffs affected our agricultural economy, it literally decimated a \$120 million market for our agricultural products.

And while that as a number may sound like something we can survive, I guarantee you with 68,000 people employed in Central Washington in the apple growing economy, it had an impact. And for these growers, who literally, some orchards couldn't hold on. Literally, we started losing jobs and we started losing acreage.

So it was really incumbent upon us to go to India to say to Prime Minister Modi, that this was affecting thousands of families in our state, and something that we needed to rectify. The good news, is on the heels of the CHIPS and Science Act and a new relationship with India on many technology fronts, the door was opened to reconsidering and ridding us of these terrible tariffs.

The success of that, just as was mentioned last September, is already yielding benefits. Some had mentioned the \$120 million market that existed with India before. My sense is this year we are well on our way to surpass that at over \$200 million in agriculture products if we continue to have this dialogue and continue to push the doors open for these products.

As the Consul General said, this is a growing relationship. And while we appreciate the technology of the Apple construction unit you have there, we want you to embrace our apples, the Washington apples. And to know that so many people in India could have the benefit from such a great product.

This will help us in Washington. It will help stabilize the growing that we have in the central part of the state. To have this market grow for the future gives our producers the ability to continue to do what they do best. The types of research and production, the types of new varieties, and of course we at the federal level need to get a farm bill done and continue to make the investment in AR research that is so important to agriculture.

So today is a celebration because for five years now we have not seen this volume of apples leaving these docks and traveling to India. This is a guarantee that they are going to reach their destination and have shelf space. And as Todd was mentioning, that means we want more shelf space. We want them to be a permanent part of the India economy and we want to grow the relationship.

So I will just say Mr. Consul General, we're so happy that you're in Seattle and opening an office. When Prime Minister Modi addressed the United States Congress in his recent visit he said we're going to increase trade with the United States. And then he said and these are the places and the first state he mentioned was Washington. I always like to point out it's not because we were in alphabetical order. It's because India believes with this new [Consulate] and with this new export cooperation, that it is a very unique relationship. We are going to put in a lot of effort in to grow for the future.

So thanks, everybody, and thank you to the ILWU. We want you to grow the number of jobs down here on the port by moving agricultural product.

This is a very important time for our country. It needs to recognize that we are very interested in increasing trades on all fronts, just like in the apple sector, because it literally increases jobs in our state.

Thank you all very much.