

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

**Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Hearing to Consider the Honorable
Debra Haaland for Secretary of the Interior**

February 23, 2021

CANTWELL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Congresswoman Haaland, congratulations on your historic nomination, and I so appreciate your leadership in the House. I tell you, you had one of the greatest moments I think for the state of Washington when you led the final passage of the Spokane settlement bill. To see a Native American woman standing there on the House floor, helping us get something passed that took such a long time. And I would venture to say that if you had been the Interior Secretary during that time period, we might have actually gotten this done sooner. So mark me down as one who very much appreciates the fact that the Secretary of the Interior being Native American will give us an extra advantage on BIA issues that are so important to Indian Country overall. So thank you for that.

And I'm so glad you mentioned the Great American Outdoors Act, I almost feel like your nomination is this proxy fight about the future of fossil fuels and you've already stated very clearly here are you are going to carry out President Biden's agenda and so we very much appreciate the fact that you're doing that, and that's what I think a President deserves with his nominee. So, I think with the Great American Outdoors Act, we saw the value of public lands. In fact we saw that the value of creating more outdoor recreation helped a juggernaut of an industry now become third just behind finance and healthcare as a very big job employer in the United States of America. So I hope that our colleagues will think about our bipartisan success there and how much those public lands mean to us from an economic revenue perspective.

So one of the things I wanted to ask you about on the coal leasing front is that under Secretary Jewell and the Obama Administration, we were trying to get accurate assessments of the value of federal leasing of coal revenues. When I was Ranking Member, we pushed for this because obviously we have a lot of coal trains that go right through the state of Washington. The impacts of that accurate coal price matter because of mining in places like Powder River Basin which counts for 40% of the nation's annual supply and impacts communities all across our country. So, I want to make sure, because the Trump Administration then came and overturned that assessment, so I want to make sure that despite that decision that you are going to work to make sure that there is a fair value for the taxpayers on the price of coal leasing and the economic and climate impacts that it has.

HAALAND: Senator, our public lands belong to all of us and taxpayers deserve to have a fair return. So I look forward to having more conversations about this, and I appreciate you raising this issue.

CANTWELL: Thank you. On the Arctic Wildlife Refuge, I wanted to make sure that you are committed to using a science-based approach when it comes to protecting the Arctic Wildlife. I'm glad that the president has taken action to put a stop on leasing but what can you tell me about your efforts to promote a science-based approach to protecting the Arctic Wildlife Refuge?

HAALAND: I can promise you that if I'm confirmed as secretary that we will be guided by science in all of those decisions.

CANTWELL: And then on the issue of wildfires which is a big Pacific Northwest issue, the Department of the Interior has key tools that we have now given to it in the last big fire package that we were able to work on together. This is new technology for everything from forecasting to locating firefighters to the implementation of coordination with air support. Will you commit to continue to work to rapidly implement those provisions of the last legislation on fighting fire?

HAALAND: I believe very strongly, Senator, that technology can play an incredibly helpful role in detecting fires, and yes, I appreciate you caring about that issue as well.

CANTWELL: Thank you. And then just lastly we were successful with Chairwoman Murkowski in passing the Yakima Basin Water Strategy Bill, which is really about focusing on helping the Pacific Northwest come up with better strategies for farming, for fishing, and for environmental issues, and I hope you'll continue to work with us on the Yakima Basin implementation and carrying forward on good water strategy for the Northwest.

HAALAND: Senator, this is our second conversation, I'm sure we'll have many more conversations, and I will look so forward to hearing more. And I think that, with respect, if I'm confirmed, yes, we need to keep moving issues forward for the American people.

CANTWELL: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.