

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Hearing on the President's FY24

Department of the Interior Budget

Witnesses: The Honorable Deb Haaland, Secretary of the Department of the Interior

May 2nd, 2023

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

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to you and the ranking member for this hearing.

Madam Secretary, great to see you. Thank you so much for coming to the Pacific Northwest, visiting Mount Rainier, the meeting with the Tulalip Tribe and I really appreciate you visiting the Northwest.

You know, I am glad that we have someone at the Department of Interior who believes in stewardship. Not sure everybody gets stewardship, but it's about leaving the place better for the next generation.

And my colleague, Senator Collins, and I had asked the GAO how much was climate change costing the United States government and it's in the billions of dollars. We've asked them to update that and I'm pretty sure they're going to come back and tell us it's costing us trillions of dollars. So, I'm glad we're doing something about it.

I wanted to ask you though, about your work in the budget about Native American women who are experiencing violence and going missing.

This week is the National Week of action for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. This Friday is the National Day of Awareness.

In my state, an organization did a report that showed how many women really are affected in the United States of America over this. This was several years ago and really helped us move forward.

Our Attorney General has identified at least 113 unsolved cases in my state of indigenous victims. And the Seattle Indian Health Board, which I mentioned, who issued that report on 71 urban cities, found that Seattle and Tacoma have some of the highest cases of missing and murdered native women and girls in the country.

So, I know we've started to make change to address this crisis, but we need to do more. You helped create an initiative at the Department of Interior, which I appreciate, and a task force.

But we need to make sure that the resources are there. Some of these communities are immense without much resources.

One tribe in my state told me that they have only two law enforcement officers on duty to patrol a reservation of over 1 million acres. So, I want to make sure that these cold cases don't go unanswered. I want to make sure that we are putting the resources together with this task force.

So, would tribal members in Washington State be better served if we were able to have federal resources in state devoted to Missing and Murdered Indigenous People in these cold cases?

Sec. Haaland: Senator, thank you so much for your work on this and for highlighting it, it's incredibly important, and a priority for us. And that's why we started the Missing and Murdered unit at the department.

And so far, since its creation in 2021, it's investigated 681 missing and murdered persons cases. Solved or closed 204 missing persons cases and solved seven murder cases.

We have 32 of 63 of those positions filled. There are missing and murdered units across the country, I believe there's a dozen of them across the country.

And so that is a good start and of course, we would love to continue the staffing on that and make sure that they have the resources they need to solve these cases.

Sen. Cantwell: What about a unit in the state of Washington given it's such a high...?

Sec. Haaland: Thank you so much. Yes, and we understand that that area has some of the highest missing rates. And certainly, in small communities you can imagine if a dozen people went missing at one time.

We're so happy to work with you on this. And we'll take a look at what we have in the Pacific Northwest. But certainly, you raise an important issue and we're more than happy to continue to work with you.

Sen. Cantwell: Do you think we need more resources?

Sec. Haaland: Oh, absolutely. As I mentioned, we have 32 of 63 positions now filled. They are planning to hire a supervisory agent in Washington State soon to add to the agent already on the ground. There's one agent there in the MMU. Sure, we could use more.

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you. I think that's the answer I was looking for because clearly, we don't have enough resources here.

We're a target. We know that there is a lot of trafficking of women. We know that I-5 and vast amounts of land can lead to lots of different issues.

So, we need more resources. We need everybody working together to try to tackle this issue. So, thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.