

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell
Senate Floor Speech on EFA (now USICA)
June 8, 2021

Cantwell: Madam President, I come to the floor, hopefully today will be the day we wrap up debate on the America Competes Endless Frontier legislation now known as the USICA, United States Innovation and Competition Act of 2021. We come to talk about this today, primarily because we know that the research dollars invested today are going to decide the jobs of the future. And we know that we all believe a significant increase in the investment in research and development dollars will help us spur innovation, continue to help us compete, and continue to be competitive in key sectors of our economy that are so important to us.

We know that we've been having this debate literally now for more than a decade, started with President Bush's 2006 report saying America needed to invest more in the National Science Foundation office. And at the time, I'm pretty sure we thought we were in a track meet where our competitor was, oh I don't know maybe half a lap behind us. I'm pretty sure now as the decade has moved on, we're looking over our shoulder and realizing that the competition is gaining. So we need to make this investment in research and development to stay competitive, to grow jobs for tomorrow, and solve some of our most pressing problems, whether that is climate change, national security on cyber issues, or the advent and usage of artificial intelligence, and what that will mean both for our opportunities, and for our challenges.

So we are making a renewed commitment to the National Science Foundation, I thank my colleagues again, Senator Schumer and Senator Young, for their innovative legislation. They're telling us a couple of things: they're saying one, invest more money in research and development, so this bill not only increases the NSF budget, it increases DOE's budget and floor action, and increase the Defense Authorization Program Agency's funding as well by \$17.5 billion. So it is saying, yes, basic research is still very important. But it is also saying for the first time, we need to get more out of the research that we do, and we need to have more translational science. That is, taking the basic research and applied research and actually using the applications of that in a more robust way so that we can translate more of that into actual science and manufacturing.

Why is this so important? Because we know that our competitiveness as a nation is suffering from the fact that people are looking at our own research and development. They're looking at our teachings and our publishings at universities, and actually going and implementing this. So we need to do better on tech transfer. This underlying legislation not only helps us do that by helping to help universities who are our number one research partner with federal dollars, it allows those universities to help us with more tech transfer in innovative ways, that universities not just do the research, but help commercialize it. It also makes investments and helping them protect the patenting of that critical information, so no longer having that patentable information used in other places around the globe, but actually capitalizing on the jobs here in the United States.

It also makes a huge investment in STEM, the science, technology, engineering, and math jobs that we need for the future. And clearly you can't make a major investment in research and development if you don't have the workforce to carry it out. And we need a workforce to carry it

out. So this underlying legislation helps us not only diversify our workforce by a major investment in STEM, going from an annual budget of about \$1 billion in the year 2020 to about \$4 billion a year by 2026. So we are going to get a more diversified STEM workforce with women and minorities participating.

And we're also trying to distribute more of our engineering and science capacity around the United States. Our colleagues, Senators Schumer and Young, were adamant that we also look at innovation infrastructure happening in more regional places in the United States, where they may not currently have the R&D capability of some of our major institutions. So this legislation promises 20% of the research and investment dollars go to those EPSCoR states established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research, an already identified landmark in how we distribute research dollars, that tries to grow the regional research infrastructure in more places in the United States. Again, I thank my colleagues Senator Wicker for leading the charge on that and helping us make that investment. And it also triples the Manufacturing Extension Partnership Program, so that we get more out of manufacturing workforce training and resiliency of our supply chain for the future.

As I mentioned before we left, it also includes an authorization for NASA and the Artemis mission, and making sure that we are staying competitive. As Senator Nelson said in a House hearing on our mission and challenges, as China has made it clear, they're going to Mars, we are going back to the Moon to ready ourselves to go to Mars, and we think that it too deserves the funding and support to make us competitive.

So Madam President, I think the bottom line here is that we know that American innovation drives the economy of the future. In a lot of ways, in passing of this legislation today, and just so our colleagues know, we'll have a couple of votes here before we get to a final passage, we really are doing our part. People hopefully will support this legislation enthusiastically well past a majority of members, because you believe in the history of the United States research and development that we have achieved innovation goals. Whether that's what we did with the Internet, whether that's what we've done on biosciences, even on some of our issues as it relates to energy. We have achieved big breakthroughs.

So today's vote is about investing in that innovation economy of the future. I'm pretty confident because I've met some of these innovators across the United States. I don't know if everything that we've done so far will be absorbed by universities, our researchers, and our labs, but literally we are trying to dust off R&D skills and make them more competitive for today. I guarantee you, though, these dollars that reach American entrepreneurs, who reach American innovators, they are ready and willing to take up this challenge. Give them those collaborative research resources through innovation at universities, through tech hubs, through more collaboration on workforce training, through investments in semiconductors, and I guarantee you these entrepreneurs in America will innovate our economy and create the economies of the future.

And what's at stake? If my colleagues have a better idea, I'm willing to hear it. But I know this: Americans want us to lead on their regional economies, on the U.S. economies, and on global economies. They do not want to get left behind. They look at this time and era as a challenge to the leadership we've provided in the past. So, settling for being the lowest percentage of GDP in 60 years doesn't cut it. What cuts it is making an investment in R&D and empowering those

entrepreneurs so they will create those future economies. I thank the President and I yield the floor.