

**U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell**  
**Senate Floor Speech on John McCoy**

**June 14, 2023**

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

**Cantwell:** Thank you, Mr. President. I come to the floor to honor a distinguished Washingtonian, State Senator and tribal leader, and my dear friend, John McCoy.

State Senator John McCoy passed recently, but he was a man who dedicated his life to public service. He served in the Air Force for two decades, was a steadfast and fearless leader at the Tulalip Tribes in the State of Washington, and was a member of leadership in Indian country across the United States.

He was one of the longest serving Native American legislators in our state's history. His story was an inspiration and testament. He did overcome unbelievable odds. And most importantly, he showed what one person could do in achieving great service in the cause of others.

John led a life and career that will be remembered for generations. He was born in 1943 in Tulalip, Washington. He was the eldest of five children and a member of the Tulalip Tribes. He was born in the middle of World War II and he started his career as a commercial fisherman in Puget Sound before he joined the Air Force. And then he served in the Air Force for 20 years, retiring as a Technical Sergeant at Andrews Air Force Base near here, in Maryland.

He was then recruited as a Computer Programmer, before computer programming was really hip, and was assigned to staff the Reagan White House situation room. His skills as a computer programming and technical expert led the late Stan Jones, another one of our other tribal legends, who was then I believe the chair of the Tulalip Tribes, to recruit him back to Washington to help transform the Tribes' own communication system. And at the time, the Tribe was struggling to build infrastructure and to take advantage of economic development and if you will just continue to move forward on their plans.

But John took this project in telecommunication infrastructure and helped the Tribe to build one of its' greatest economic engine successes, Quil Ceda Village.

Quil Ceda Village is about 500 acres of unique business park that was approved in 2001. And it was so successful that in 2005, the Puget Sound Business Journal named John the 'Executive of the Year' for his contributions in this great success. He not only brought computers and high speed internet access to Quil Ceda Village, he made the whole thing a reality for the Tribe.

But John McCoy never lost his ideas about public service. And in 2003, he was elected to the Washington State Legislature. At the time, we had an opening, I know the county council played a role, and he served our State Legislature for 17 years. Senator McCoy served what was then the 38th Legislative District covering Tulalip, Marysville, and Everett.

And during that time in the legislature, he really became a standout legislator for the State of Washington. A tireless advocate for K-12 education, healthcare, environmental policies, and very importantly, a member of our legislature and an important outspoken person on tribal issues.

One important piece of legislation John championed and created was the *Since Time Immemorial: Tribal Sovereignty in Washington state* curriculum which, Madam President, is now taught in all Washington State Public Schools.

*Since Time Immemorial*, endorsed by all of Washington's 29 federally recognized tribes, is curriculum that focuses on their history in the State of Washington. The lessons help students understand the importance of treaties, the history of tribes in the Pacific Northwest, and the challenges of reservation life.

It also teaches students the influence in geography and where tribes are located in the State of Washington. And importantly, the distinct cultures of the 29 federally recognized tribes in our state. The knowledge of our students and what they're gaining about tribes because of this has been invaluable, but it's just one example of what Senator McCoy's leadership at the state level helped provide.

He also expanded dental care. He passed legislation requiring telecommunication companies to provide call information to emergency responders. He helped emergency responders locate victims and patients more quickly. And he passed a bill that allowed our state to provide jurisdiction over criminal and civil matters on tribal lands to help with our government and government efficiency. These were all important roles and we can never say enough thanks to him and his family for that.

He too, was elected by his colleagues to serve as caucus chair for the then Senate Democrats at the state level. And he served as chair on committees in the legislature and chair of the Executive Committee of the National Caucus of Native American state legislators. So he played this role nationally too to help connect us. And something he always took pride in, not only serving the Tribe he grew up in, but he took great pride in serving the rest of Everett and Marysville.

He never lost sight of what it meant to represent the people of the 38th District. That's the kind of person he was -- dedicated to his Tribe, but also dedicated to all his neighbors. He retired from the Washington State Senate in April of 2020 and he said quote, "Through the changes in committees, leadership roles and even chambers over the course of my legislative career, it is always an immense privilege to represent my neighbors... I am deeply grateful for that privilege," end quote.

Senator John McCoy, will go down in our state's history as one of our most effective local leaders, someone who came up against roadblocks, but found ways to bypass those things to get progress for our state.

He will be missed by all of us, but especially missed by his wife of 58 years Jeannie McCoy. My heart goes out to her and her family, and his 16 grandchildren. And of course, the rest of his family: his brothers, his sisters, his children, Angela McCoy, Sheila Hillaire, and Cara Tohannie, we all thank you for sharing your father with us. He will be missed not only as a leader in our state, but also as a leader that helped us across the United States better understand Indian country, and certainly the leadership of the Tulalip Tribe.