

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

Opening Statement at Executive Session

June 16, 2021

Cantwell: The Commerce Committee will come to order. I want to thank all my colleagues for being here for this important markup. We have several bills to consider and some nominees, so this will be a very busy markup, and at the outset I want to thank the Ranking Member, Senator Wicker, for his great work and collegiality in addressing many of these issues that are before us today. I certainly appreciate the bipartisan nature on working on infrastructure and certainly appreciate his leadership on representing infrastructure investment, just like on EFA, that needs to address both rural and urban issues at the same time. And look forward to continuing that partnership on broadband.

So we have a bill before us today that Senator Wicker and I introduced, the Sports Fishermen Restoration and Boating Safety Act. This bill would support our conservation and outdoor recreation economy. We also are considering Ranking Member Wicker's Regional Ocean Partnership Act, which would support federal, state, and Tribal cooperation for managing our oceans and coastlines and Great Lakes areas, and authorizes \$1 million annually to support Tribal participation.

I also want to thank Senator Wicker for his hard work on other important bills. We have in this markup Majority Leader Schumer's Fluke Fairness Act of 2021, the bill would require management of the fluke fisheries based on best scientific information.

We also have Senator Scott's South Florida Clean Coastal Waters Act, which would require federal action to reduce harmful algae blooms in the greater Everglades region. Senator Klobuchar has the Protecting Consumers from Travel Fraud Act that would direct the FTC to study and describe scams that target travelers during the COVID pandemic and report its findings to Congress, but obviously those bills are important for us to move out.

The main focus of today's markup is the Surface Transportation Act of 2021, and Senator Wicker and I introduced this legislation last week. It makes a big down payment, \$78 billion, on rebuilding and revamping our nation's critical transportation infrastructure, a key to our economic future and creating more jobs. A recent Brookings study found that more than half of the world's population now have reached middle class, just about 4 billion people, and to me these represent customers for the future. About 95% of the world's customers live outside the United States. And before the pandemic, over 86% of real GDP was outside of our country. So making sure that U.S. products can reach those new markets are one of the key things that we focused on in this legislation. We want Midwest agricultural products to reach their destination and be able to compete, we want our ports around the United States to be cost effective and competitive, and we want to make sure that our transportation infrastructure works.

Prior to the pandemic we had already seen about a 23% increase in freight shipments, and we know that between now and 2035 we're expected to see another 40% increase in freight products. So again, if the U.S. competitiveness depends on getting our products to those markets cost effectively, we need an infrastructure that can help us do that.

So included in this bill is a \$20 billion freight program to support multimodal and freight infrastructure. The Department of Transportation INFRA program, which funds freight and freight-related project has been oversubscribed for years, averaging 7 billion a year in applications for less than \$1 billion available. So our bill would double that funding for INFRA over the next five years and try to address that backlog. The bill also creates a new program to fund bigger dollar projects for things of national significance. I'm sure all my colleagues could tell stories of projects in their state that basically just dwarf the state

transportation budget, and thereby never get funded. So by creating this program we're hoping to help those projects get moving and get repaired.

The bill also authorizes for the first time in the U.S. DOT's BUILD, RAISE, TIGER grant program-- somebody explained to me now why every year somebody changes the name of these programs but nonetheless, we are increasing the funding and authorizing it. I'd like to thank Senator Blunt for working with me to include a \$500 million grant program to improve congestion and safety at rail crossings. I'd also like to thank Senator Thune for his advocacy to enhance railroad rehabilitation and improvement financing program to make it more attractive to potential borrowers.

And obviously, another cornerstone of the legislation is the investment in Amtrak, providing \$25 billion for Amtrak and states to repair and expand our rail system. We have many passenger rail advocates on this committee but not more fierce than Senator Wicker in restoring the Gulf Coast service, and this provides the funding that will make that a reality. It also provides opportunities for unserved communities to get access to rail, and continue to connect communities throughout the United States.

Senators Blumenthal, Markey, Tester, Moran, and Peters deserve many kudos for fighting for increased Amtrak funding to the northeast corridor, and to help create new services between city pairs, and helping to project Amtrak's long distance service. I want to thank Senator Duckworth for her work to ensure Amtrak stations comply with Americans with Disability Act and to advocate for a voice on the Amtrak board and share the perspective of many people with disabilities. Our legislation also makes big investments, about \$13 billion, to make our cars, trucks, and railroads safer and requires concrete steps to reduce roadway crashes and fatalities. In particular I want to thank Senators Lujan and Scott for the Ride Act which is included in this bill which require new cars to advance anti-impaired driving technology. I want to thank Senator Duckworth for working to improve safety for roadside first responders and require automatic emergency braking on new trucks and cars. Senator Klobuchar for her work on ensuring more states are able to access critical funding to enforce distracted driver laws and Senator Fischer should be commended for advocacy in improving rural grade crossings.

Senator--I think we're going to know everything that's in the bill but I'm going to keep going--Senator Blumenthal and Markey are leaders on vehicle safety and work to address the seat back safety driver engagement, recalling reporting a notification and preventing carbon monoxide poisoning in vehicles, we thank them for that. And Senators Fischer, Young, and Tester for working with me to improve two trucking amendments that have been incorporated in the bill. Senator Schatz deserves credit for working to improve the crash data development performance criteria and updating the new car assessment program, and Senator Peters' bill which improved the vehicle safety equity by studying ways to improve crash dummies to account for the differences in in different passengers.

Finally, this bill authorizes the first large scale program directed the Secretary of Transportation to work in partnerships with states and local governments and Tribes to remove physical barriers impacting migratory fish populations. Appreciate all my colleagues working on this, this is something that affects us all across the United States and making sure that transportation takes into consideration these impacts is something I think is very important.

We have 244 amendments filed, the bill, and staff has been working diligently over the past few days to accept about 50 of those amendments, so I want to thank the members on both sides for all of this work. Hopefully we can have a successful markup on these and many other issues that we have before us this morning and nominations. I'll now turn to the Ranking Member.