

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

Aberdeen-Hoquiam Flood Protection Event

Speakers: Nick Bird, Engineer (Aberdeen City); Jay Inslee, Governor (Washington State); Derek Kilmer, Representative (Washington's 6th District); Steve Tharinger, State Representative (Washington State)

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[\[AUDIO\]](#)

Nick Bird: Alrighty, folks, how about that for an introduction? Pump Station. That's absolutely amazing. Thank you everybody for sticking around through that. I know, it wasn't really much of an option given we made you park your cars and other another place. So I apologize for that, but thank you all for taking time out of your busy schedules to come out here and hang out and celebrate this moment with us.

So my name is Nick Bird I'm the city engineer here for the City of Aberdeen. I'm relatively new to the position, but I can tell you over the last seven months I've really realized that we're seeing something special here. With the levee projects with this Rock Creek project, we have the opportunity to affect thousands of residents and property owners in both communities, both communities of Aberdeen and Hoquiam. So, thank you for coming out to celebrate this with us.

I think it's interesting, you know, when I when I look back through the history, the cities of Aberdeen and Hoquiam have been battling flooding for well over 100 years. And I've heard stories of great floods, you know, and these stories ranged from, you know, friends of mine sharing to their dad used to use a canoe down Cherry Street when it flooded. And even one city you know, placing a berm on Myrtle Street to keep floodwaters from another city entering, I can tell you those relationships have changed dramatically over the years. I'm happy that we're where we're at.

So digging through our hazard mitigation plan, I noticed that you know, between 1964 and 2015 so, you know, over the last 50 years, a total of 12 federally declared flooding events have occurred. So that's one out of every eight years it happens pretty regularly out here. A particularly nasty event in 2015 really changed everything. I believe that you know, change doesn't occur until you're sick and tired of being sick and tired and enough was enough for the communities. At that point in time, through the support of the offices of the Chehalis Basin and Congressman Kilmer, the communities came together and created what's called the Timber Works Master Plan and that effectively created an outline for the Aberdeen-Hoquiam Flood Protection Project.

Now over the years significant support has been provided for the Aberdeen-Hoquiam Flood Protection Project. And this has been provided by the Office of Chehalis Basin our state legislature and our federal representatives so it takes all parties involved.

The first step in physically addressing the flood protection for both the communities of Aberdeen and Hoquiam begins right here. Literally right, right where the tent used to be, was effectively where this this new pump station is going to be. So we opened bids yesterday and we'll be constructing a tide gate

structure and a pump station on this very site. We're tentatively scheduled to break ground in August and we're anticipating construction by the end of 2023.

Now this pump station has immense capacity and this is really hard for me to comprehend so I'll do what I can to kind of share this with you guys. The design flow rate of the pump station is 130,000 gallons a minute. That's really hard for me to comprehend an idea with flow rates all the time. So to give you a few examples, I don't know how long it takes to fill up your bathtub at home. This pump station when it's turned on running at max capacity can fill up 51 bathtubs in one second. It can fill or drain a 2,100 square foot house, from floor to ceiling and under a minute. Or, you know the last comparison it could fill or drain an Olympic swimming pool in five minutes. So once this facility is in operation area behind us, there'll be a noticeable reduction in flood hazards upstream.

So on behalf of the residents of Aberdeen and Hoquiam, I'd like to extend our gratitude to those that have assisted in making this project and the entire Aberdeen-Hoquiam Flood Protection Project a reality.

In no particular order. Thank you to the office of the Chehalis Basin, providing if you haven't heard the news, it sounds like an additional two and a half million is been allocated to this project just a few hours ago. And so that brings us to the total that the offices of Chehalis Basin has provided to all the various elements of the flood protection project up over \$19 million. With over 10 million of that being used on the construction of this pump station. So thank you very much. To the state legislature, including senators Vanderburgh and Wilson and representatives Derringer, Chapman and Walsh and McIntyre for securing two and a half million for the North Shore levee and almost \$9 million for construction of this project. Congressman Kilmer for securing \$9.95 million for the North Shore levee and North Shore levee West final design and Grays Harbor County for providing \$800,000 for both the North Shore levee and this pump station. I can't stress enough that we wouldn't be here if it wasn't for you guys. So thank you again.

Okay, now here's the key piece we need to get the mic out of the engineers hand and into some of our special guests hands here. Our first guest Senator Maria Cantwell has served as one of our US Senators since 2001. Prior to her election to the Senate, she was a state representative, a US House member and a high tech business executive. She is currently the Chair of the powerful Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee. She's also a senior member in the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, the Finance Committee, Indian Affairs Committee and Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee. I thought I was busy. She's a champion and prominent voice in the other Washington on many issues important to our region, including energy, international trade, health care, job training, affordable housing, a fair employment investment tax code, environmental sustainability, and as the Chair of the Commerce Committee, has been the voice in Congress, on providing the needed infrastructure to move freight and other goods on our nation's highways and railways and waterways. So on that note, I'd be remiss if we didn't thank you for your hard work on both the flood protection project and under advocacy for the US 12 project. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, Senator Maria Cantwell.

Senator Cantwell: It's a pleasure to be here and what a great occasion to get caught in a little rain squall and then have sunshine come out on us. So it just says we're blessed today. So thank you for everybody being here. I obviously appreciate being here with the Governor and Derek Kilmer. And you mentioned the State Reps and Senators here, Chapman, Behringer and Walsh. We got a lot of mayors here hopefully, Mayor Pete Schave from Aberdeen, Ben Winckelmann from Hoquiam, Commissioner Vicki Raines, Gary Nelson from the Port, Mayor Pauling from Cosmopolis. And obviously, Commissioner Tom Quigg. Tom Quigg, never ages does he. He just stays the same.

I want to thank all the leaders from Aberdeen, Hoquiam community for your hard work and participation on this project and your determination. It reminds me of the project we had to work on years ago after the big 100 year flood when we said we needed a new Doppler system and they said no we didn't. And then we had another flood and they were like, oh, yes, you need a new Doppler system.

So one thing that you can count on here is persistence and we're going to do it until we get it right. So more than 10% of Grays Harbor is population lives within this floodplain and the local residents and business owners have faced these difficulties and the financial burdens, you know, we've seen this across the United States go to New Orleans, what happened to them after the big hurricane, same issue. So you can't reinvest, you can't develop. You basically are stuck in the in the flood zone and it has major impacts on what you can do as a community or a homeowner.

So many local businesses have said it's too expensive to even rent space because of the insurance premiums. And residents here in Aberdeen and Hoquiam, pay over 2 million in flood insurance a year. This is simply just unacceptable, too high if we're going to continue to help this community grow and develop.

One of the things that we're here today on is obviously the Fry Creek pump station, which will better control the water flow through Fry Creek and the heavy rains. And we just heard an explanation about that. So I guess we'll get to come back in the future and see it all right, we'll get to see it, how it actually works.

But this is a critical first step in this project. That's the key point, it's a critical first step in the flood protection project that will help us protect more than 5,000 different properties, business owners and individuals and the infrastructure.

So I'm working federally to help secure \$34 billion in what's called the Building Resilient Infrastructure and communities grant program through FEMA. Now, I think the city has heard a little bit of, you know, feedback on their proposal all good. They want a few little tweaks. But we're hoping that this announcement will be made soon. And I wanted to be here to tell you how much I'm pushing for this FEMA grant to make an investment in the projects addressing the West segment of the North Shore levee.

The West segment of the North Shore levee will be 4.7 miles long and reach along the west side of the Hoquiam. This levee will help protect residents and better insulate them from the kind of extreme flooding that they've seen in the past.

Once done, this North Shore levee segment will remove about 1 million in annual flood insurance premiums. And so that's a lot to help the individuals of this area. We think approximately, as I said, 2,000 properties 360 businesses, it will help us maintain and create jobs, and it'll just be a good public investment.

So I'm also advocating for something that's called Congressional Direct spending of \$5,000,000 to also be invested in the North Shore levee. This will be about 6.22 miles long, and help further do the protections that we need to see.

So I just want to thank all of you for, you know, the combination and the state for the new pump, the improvements that we're going to see today and for the improvements that we are fighting for the future, so we can conclude this project.

As was mentioned, I believe in infrastructure, that's why we fought for the infrastructure bill. That's why we believe in that grade separation. That's why we believe that we need to move freight, I actually believe we need to move fish too, so you know, the fish infrastructure was an important win. But I just appreciate how hard the community has grappled with this issue.

One person who said to me a couple years ago now when we were talking about the challenges of this region, and we were talking about some of the issues at the hospital specifically. And I said, Derek, what do we need to do? And Derek said, Maria, the number one thing we need to do is fix the levees. And ever since then I have been focused in a partnership with Derek on that issue to try to fix the levees. And so I want to thank him for representing this area and for all of his hard work.

I just want to tell you, back in the other Washington, Derek is literally leading the nation on discussions about economic development strategies for areas just like Aberdeen and Hoquiam. And his proposal is part of a major bill that we're working on called the America COMPETES Act. And he's saying, well, how about recompetete? How about getting back some of the investment in areas that have lost a little bit because of changing and transitioning, and what can we do to get that back? So He's authored a major provision, and I'm fighting right now to get everybody to work with Derek and accept it, because it's a great idea. And I know the first place that will get additional resources, if that passes, will be right here in this congressional district. Thanks to him for having the strategy and wherewithal to think about what we need to do in our nation to help everyone compete.

So I, unfortunately, have a health emergency in my family that I have to get back to. But I just want to thank you all. I didn't want to miss this. I wanted to be on this part. So I don't get to go on the tour. But I just want to thank all of you for being here and including me in such an important project. We are going to be fighting with you every step of the way. Please give a big hand for your Congressman Derek Kilmer.

Congressman Kilmer: Thank you. All right. Let's give it up for Senator Cantwell. Thank you, Senator. She mentioned that America COMPETES bill which he left out as she is literally running the conference committee making sure that when that bill gets passed, and I'm hopeful that it will, better reflects the needs of our state. So we depend on her. And she has been an extraordinary partner. I want to echo the gratitude to all of our municipal leaders and state leaders. And Governor, thank you for being here as well.

This is a big deal. You know, there's a saying that change is inevitable, but progress is optional. And this represents progress for this community and its progress that as our coastal communities have faced flooding challenges, for decades and decades, it's been progress that we've talked about for a really long time. But now we're actually starting to see some forward momentum and that is a really big deal. And it's a testament to, you know, all of the people who have their oars in the water on this our municipal leaders. I also I should particularly shout out the city of Aberdeen for the weather today. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. But the progress we're making is because everybody has had their oars in the water rowing in the same direction, our municipal leaders our county leaders, the flood protection district our state leaders, the county leaders, everybody has been rowing in the same direction and that's how we make progress.

So what why is the federal government involved in this? Well, here's the thing we actually spent the morning with the regional FEMA Administrator, Brian Shade did a fantastic job as tour guide, showing the need. And we had folks from the city of Aberdeen and Hoquiam, actually, you know, presenting the problem statement. And part of the problem statement is, doesn't it make more sense for the federal government to try to prevent disasters on the front end, rather than paying for cleaning up disasters on the back end? That's why the federal government in a bill that the President signed just few months ago, is putting nearly \$10 million into this project. It's why the House Appropriations Committee just last week, put forward another \$5 million for these projects, because it makes a lot more sense for taxpayers to do that and it certainly makes more sense for taxpayers here in this community to make sure that the costs of this project are not solely borne by people here in this community.

You heard the Senator talk about why this matters is really hard to drive investment in economic development, and in affordable housing, if we don't fix this flooding problem. And I think when we get projects like this built and the levees built, you will unleash new investment in this community in a really positive way that will grow more affordable housing and more jobs. It is really important that we don't have people dealing with property damage when we have big flooding events. You know, everybody here remembers times where we had two feet of water in our community damaging local businesses damaged and damaging residents.

It also matters in that if we get this fixed, it means the \$2 million each year that currently go out of the community to pay for flood insurance can stay in people's pockets, and can circulate in the local community. That really, really matters. And so I think it's important that the federal government steps up and helps it's why we've been working on this. It's why we were working over the FEMA regional administrator for that BRIC grant that you heard the senator talk about earlier. Today, we're really pushing to see that happen and have the federal government step up and support this project. And please know you have my commitment and trying to make that happen.

I also want to just recognize our state leaders before I invite up our governor. Certainly as the chair of the of the Capital Budget Committee in the House, we were really lucky to have Steve Behringer holding the pen, and helping direct dollars to this community, we're really lucky to have him and his tag team partner, Mike Chapman. Appreciate the degree to which you champion the needs here in our region. Thank you. Thank you for that. And we're also lucky to have a governor who's invested in rural Washington as well. Now I will say you owe this community because as I understand that you ripped away a state high school basketball title from this community. I don't know if you're willing to acknowledge that, but we're very lucky to have the governor paying attention to this community, paying attention to this community's needs, signing a capital budget that's directing dollars to this community. And we're really lucky to have him here today. So please welcome back to our community Governor Inslee.

Governor Inslee: You know, we were thinking about coming down here and I was thinking, I don't know, I heard the other 86 inches of rain in the harbor and 85 of them are usually in early July. But I'm glad we've come to see the great leadership and the partnership congratulations, have a round of applause for the mayors who all work together, I just appreciate their leadership thank you.

You know, we have a competition, who can see to be the most vigorous and successful advocates to realize the economic potential of the Grays Harbor between the federal government and the state government. So Mike, and Steve, and Kevin and others, and I represent the state government. And we hear the Feds all the time. Oh, we gave you \$9 million from the federal government. I hear that from

Maria and Derek all the time. But I know, we all know, on a per capita basis, the state has contributed 50 times more than the federal government. Let's be very clear about that. Okay, can we Derek? I do remember that meeting, I said, \$9 million. That's a lot of money. That's a huge slug of money. And these guys came in and said, you went you owe it to the Quigg brothers. That's what I heard. And indeed, indeed, that's true.

I want to make two points about this. We are always looking for economic development opportunities in the harbor. This is an issue for the business community. It's an issue for the unemployment rate. It's an issue for homelessness that we're all working on so hard on, we are always looking for opportunities. And building infrastructure that will allow private development is probably the single best thing the state and government can do to build those opportunities. And this is first and foremost an economic opportunity infrastructure project because not only will it help a thousand homeowners, not be underwater, but it's been estimated ultimately can mean 1500 jobs, with business opportunities on the land, or getting our nose above water. So I'm extremely happy about taking yet another step in the economic development of the harbor. We see across the road REG we're very excited. Some of your legislators and myself that passed a low carbon fuel standard bill this year, that's going to drive demand for the products from this manufacturer in the harbor. That was an economic development decision by state legislators. We've seen multiple things we're doing. And I just want to tell you, I'm excited about making another economic step for the economic basis of the harbor.

Second thing I want to say is, this is a very farsighted project. And I've seen multiple reasons why the Grays Harbor, to some degree is ahead of the rest of the world, in understanding the future. Because we understand sea levels are going to rise because of climate change and we understand in the harbor, that there will be more precipitous rain events. While I'm here, Conconully, Washington up in the Okanogan has entered three to five feet of mud, because that like two inches of rain, like in an hour or so. But the harbor is looking ahead. So when you'd make this project you're trying to accommodate with climate change efforts, or consequences we know are going to happen. But the harbor is not just doing it on the on what do we do about this? You're trying to prevent it.

I was just at the Coastal Community Action Program, which is leading the state in their advanced ways to help people out of homelessness, and I really respect what they're doing. A lot of people around the state are looking to the harbor for leadership on this homelessness issue. What do they have on the roofs, solar panels? What do they have down the road wind turbines? What do we have across the street, clean, renewable energy to fuel our vehicles in the light. So the harbor is addressing the future, both from developing infrastructure to avoid the consequences and to prevent the consequences, stepping up to the plate against climate change, and that takes leadership. So hats off to what you're doing. I look forward to it. Now we're not done here. We got levees to build and if we're gonna have levees to build, we have to have some money in our coffers to make money in these levees. So we can't just zero out the budget or the taxes. We got to make investments and those taxes that citizens are paying are going right here so we can create more jobs in Grays Harbor. I think that's a great investment. Congratulations, everybody. Go Bobcats, go Grizzlies?

Steve Tharinger: Well, hello, everybody. I am Steve third your state representative for the 24th legislative District along with Mike Chapman and since we redistricted this is now in the 24th it used to be the 19th and now is in the 24th we're more than happy to bring money into this district. But I just want to underscore a lot great things have been said, I think the problem statement has been defined well. But I do want to underscore the partnerships from the local level, the mayors, the county, the port, working together, sharing expertise, engineers, mapping, all those things that go into a project of this

magnitude to get it to the point where it is and as was mentioned, we've got a long way to go still. But that foundation of partnership is huge. And I think you've seen today, there's a partnership, a vertical partnership between the local government, the state, and the federal government. That's what it takes, is working on together to get these sorts of things done.

I will say, we did have a little challenge. So I've been the Capitol Budget Chair for seven years. And, you know, I've learned some things. And one of the challenges was this a lot of the there's two sort of funding streams for the state in this project. One was just a straight appropriation. And that was partly recovery money. But the Recovery Act did not have any money for levees and so we had to kind of figure out, well, where are we going to put it? We want to put this money into this project. So working with Brian and the consultants and the engineers, there was money in the Recovery Act for storm water. And obviously, Fry Creek is a storm water facility, right? It's very important to the levee, but it's a storm water facility.

So we were able to find the right bucket the right category to put that \$9 million in, we were actually the last money that went in. Except, you know, there's been huge cost overruns. The other category that we put money in in the state is the Chehalis Basin, the flood protection district of the Chehalis Basin and we've been doing that, and about two \$50 to \$70 million biennials for the last four biennials. And that's been a big difference in the Chehalis basin.

The governor spoke about the need for resiliency and making investments on resiliency. And that's what the Chehalis Basin does and as Capital Budget Chair, I'm certainly encouraged and, you know, feel the value of making those investments in that basin. And then that's a very local process, bottom up process that I think chooses some of the best projects throughout the basin.

We have a ways to go on this. It's exciting to hear what Senator Cantwell had to say, and what Congressman Kilmer had to say. And you know, we're really lucky to have those two folks in the positions they're in and their knowledge of what the needs are here in the harbor. And moving forward, we will certainly partner with them to try and, you know, make sure that the state can fill any gaps that might appear as we move forward. But it sounds like this is a great first step and we're going to be with you for the rest of the journey to get this done for all the reasons that have been cited in the importance of this project.

I guess I should mention, even though we're in the 24th district, I do want to mention the delegation from the 19th representative Walsh, Senator Wilson, and I don't know is Representative McIntyre here? But this used to be their district now it's in the right district. And we will work with you to move it forward. So thank you, everybody.

Nick Bird: Thank you, again, speakers, that's I love the unity that we have top to bottom that that that just gives me chills. But remember, we're here for groundbreaking and it wouldn't be a groundbreaking unless we turned some dirt. So I'd be honored if you guys could join our mayor's in turn in a little bit of dirt. We can snap some photos and have some fun. After we get a few photos here. I'd love members of the office of the Chehalis Basin and any of our other funding partners to come turn some dirt with us and have a little bit of fun. It's not quite a sandbox, I know, but you know, we can have a little bit of fun with it.

So we do have about 15 to 18 minutes until we have the bus scheduled for departure and so those that have RSVP to on the on the tour bus that begins at 2:00, you want to be hopping on the Grays Harbor

transit bus. If you're intending to go back to the parking lot, that's one of those scenarios where you'll want to hop into the white bus. I apologize for making it confusing, but fortunately, we do have two different bus systems. One will be going on the tour. The other is going back to the back to the parking lot. So again, just the regular white bus if you're intending to go back to the parking lot, if you did RSVP, please, please go ahead and hop on the buses if you didn't RSVP. Please make sure that there's room before you hop on but we love have you on the tour as well? So that's what we've got right now. So we're gonna go take a few photos. Thank you everybody for coming out. We really appreciate the time today.