

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

Senate Floor Speech on the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act

08/10/2021

CANTWELL: Madam President.

PRESIDING OFFICER: The Senator from Washington.

CANTWELL: Madam President, I ask that the quorum call be dispensed with.

PRESIDING OFFICER: Morning business is closed. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 3684, which the clerk will report.

CLERK: Calendar number 100, H.R. 3684, an act to authorize funds for federal aid highways, highway safety programs, and transit programs and for other purposes.

CANTWELL: Madam President. Many states in the United States need infrastructure investment, but I would put the State of Washington high on a list of states that desperately need infrastructure investment. We've been blessed with a growing economy and big trade economy based on the Pacific Rim and the actions of the Pacific Rim. So we need to keep moving product, we need to keep moving services, and we need infrastructure investment to do so.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the work done by the Commerce Committee and those who worked on the Infrastructure Investment Act, specifically, Kara Fischer, Michael Davisson, Joanie Lofgren, Zeb Schorr, Ronce Almond, Alex Simpson, Gigi Slais, and Nicole Teutschel, Jennifer Quan, Matthew Bobbink, Jami Burgess, David Martin, Amit Ronen, Stacy Baird, Devin Helfrich, Patrick Eckroth, Naseem Mehyar, Hannah Albert, Eric Vryheid, Elle Wibisono, John Branscome, Shawn Bone, Brian McDermott, Mary Claire York, Jared Bomberg, Shannon Smith, John Beezer, Noam Kantor, Jordan Blue, Tiffany George, Lucy Koch, Hunter Hudspeth-Blackburn, Kelly Ryan, Dave Stewart, Melissa Porter, and David Strickland. These are just some of the individuals that were involved in putting together the Commerce piece of this underlying bill. About 20% of the underlying bill was the focus of the Commerce Committee in its jurisdiction. I want to thank Ranking Member Wicker and his staff for the hard work to pull off what was the bipartisan bill that came to the Senate floor as part of this package.

Our legislation, I think, is an historic investment to rebuild our transportation infrastructure, including investments for things like megaprojects, basically helping to eliminate our problems at at-grade crossings, improve our freight network, improve our environment by removing culverts, and helping Amtrak better serve the United States of America. All of these were important investments, but we should look at the firsts.

First, we're authorizing for the first time, megaprojects. Megaprojects often take up so much of our budgets in our states, and federally, they never get funded, but that doesn't mean they aren't critical to the United States. In the Northeast Corridor, we certainly have megaprojects, and in

the Pacific Northwest, we have megaprojects that will be critical like the Columbia River Crossing between Vancouver and Portland, or the Highway 2 Trestle in Everett. These projects deserve the attention of the nation and with this first time authorization, will get so.

This bill also puts a historic investment in freight and in Amtrak. As I mentioned, the economy of a global nature is demanding that we be able to move competitively our products. But if we don't continue to invest in freight, we're not going to get that job done. So this provides \$66 billion to improve our passenger rail and freight system, the single largest investment that we've had in our Amtrak system that was funded 50 years ago. The Commerce Committee bill laid the foundation for this funding which I believe will do three things. It will mean more investment to fix the problems in the Northeast Corridor. More specifically, it will give us the ability to have more sequencing of trains throughout the United States of America. And it will provide for new service in city pairs that I hope will help economies all across the United States with more investments.

I know specifically, the Senator from Montana, Senator Tester, was very adamant about our Amtrak funding and the services that Montana demands. I want to thank him for his help on this. And I want to thank Senator Duckworth for her hard work in making sure that Amtrak complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act. This is so important for us to do, and her language making sure that we also have someone from the disabilities community on the Amtrak board is the kind of thing that should be followed in other examples in this legislation.

I also want to say, for the first time, we are addressing specifically at-grade crossings. This is the instance where congestion and freight, in my state, multiple times the increase in freight traffic. Again, you know, a lot of Midwest product moving to Asia has increased demand in safety and transportation. Somebody quoted one of our reports that it took freight three days to get through just the city of Chicago because of the amount of congestion. So our job here is to make sure that our product made and grown in the United States of America gets quickly to its destinations or we will be outcompeted by other nations that have an infrastructure system that can beat us to those marketplaces. So this provides for the first time a focused program on improving at-grade crossings to continue to make the investments that need to be made to keep our freight moving and our public safe.

It also for the first time authorizes transportation improvements to repair culverts. Culverts and other transportation infrastructure have done damage to our environment. They have done damage to fish. They have basically blocked spawning grounds. They have caused other infrastructure challenges to species all along our coastal states. This program will help to improve that situation by repairing some of the fish passage that has been blocked for so many years. This is so important for us in the Pacific Northwest, but it's also important throughout the South, and for our many, many coastal communities.

So this transportation legislation that went through the Commerce Committee, as I said, also makes other investments. This bill also makes other investments for bridge repair, for transit systems, for climate resiliency, and specifically, for our airports. You probably haven't heard too much about that out here on the floor, but in the Commerce Committee, I can tell you that aviation, transportation, and competitive, I know the presiding president knows this very well,

that in Las Vegas or in Reno, that infrastructure like our airports is essential to our economy's continuing to grow.

Sea-Tac is probably one of the fastest growing airports in the United States right now. Under this legislation, we will also see an important improvement for our airports so they can continue to grow, so we can continue to make investments. I also, as I mentioned, I want to thank Senator Wicker in the title for vehicle safety. These are important provisions that he and I and others on the Committee, Senator Blumenthal, for his work on safety legislation that related to both the Northeast Corridor and to individuals in transportation, including with Senator Wicker, the lifesaving technology like automatic emergency braking system and preventing child heat stroke deaths, and impaired driving facilities.

So, Madam President, I again thank all of the members of the Commerce Committee for their hard work in getting this legislation as part of this package. I think we can see that we have some firsts here. First investing in megaprojects, first cleaning up our environmental problems with culverts, getting our freight product through our most congested corridors with improved at-grade crossing, and making the major investment so that Amtrak can continue to expand. So, I look forward to working with my colleagues as we move through the legislative process and continue to make improvements in our transportation infrastructure. I thank the president, and I yield the floor.