

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell
Highland Village Grand Opening
October 24, 2024
Sen. Cantwell Opening Remarks

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

Sen. Cantwell: Well, thank you, Deb, thank you so much for everything that you do as President and CEO of Community Frameworks. And thank you Michelle, for your leadership at Habitat for Humanity. It's so great to be here in Spokane this morning, what a joyous occasion.

These two individuals just told us that these decisions really matter. They change lives, they give people a new future, and they certainly give your families an opportunity. So we're excited to be here for this ribbon cutting, and excited for the people of Spokane to have more affordable housing.

I want to thank Albert Tripp, the city manager, thank you so much for dual responsibilities at Airway Heights and with the Washington Housing Commission, I'm so glad you mentioned them and that important program.

And I also want to thank Dean Oberst from Washington Trust Bank, because he said it at the end, it's all about just having a place to call home. We sometimes take that for granted, but then we meet individuals who don't have that opportunity, and you see how precious it really is. It gives people a start, it gives people an opportunity to get back on their feet, to have the life that they want to have, contributing to our community. So we're so happy about that.

And the stories here are stories that we hear all over the United States of what affordable housing can do. But it's clear we haven't built enough affordable housing. That is why we're so grateful for Habitat and for the Community Frameworks, for helping with these particular challenges that we face here in the Spokane region.

These 51 new rental homes in Airway Heights couldn't come at a more important time. There are 159 families close to Fairchild that need new homes. It's an extremely distressing situation to have to move, but Community Frameworks and other partners are prioritizing those residents and helping with that.

And these new affordable units couldn't come at a more important time, because we need more affordable units nationwide, but clearly here in Spokane. The Highland Village provides, already, 30 for-sale homes, and plans to construct another 49 units, I think, in the coming years.

And the commitment to family is part of this process. They're committed to helping families, which is so critical. That is, the family doesn't end at the point of purchase or leasing, residents have access to community managers, community services, coordinators, and as we just heard, it's a helpful education, or information, about how to move into home ownership.

I'm pleased to see that the project used some of the Affordable Housing Tax Credit, as was discussed. We're the lead in the United States Senate on that. I've learned so much that our state, if you just give people the resources, a little bit of help - and why don't people build more affordable housing? Because you can make more money building other housing. So we had to incent with the tax credit.

So, 95% of the affordable housing that gets built in the United States of America gets built because of the tax credit, or one of the elements is they use the tax credit.

So that is why we're fighting so hard now to increase the affordable tax credit at the federal level. We are trying to, in the lame duck, actually, I'm meeting with my colleague, Ron Wyden, who's the chair, next week, but we are trying to increase another 7,000 units here in our state over the next two years, and then hopefully a larger bill that would increase 64,000 units over the next 10 years. So that's what we're trying to do.

And why are we trying to do that? Well, we're trying to do that because in the Spokane area, we have seen the average rent of a two bedroom apartment hit \$1,300 a month, well beyond what many families can afford when the average renter's wage is \$18. And the average home price in Spokane County has gone up 60% since 2019, from \$225,000 to \$365,000.

So the only way we can help everybody in the community is to build more affordable supply. There was a study that was done nationally, for every 2,000 units, say, in a geographic area like Spokane that you build, you actually drive down the price of annual rent by about \$2,000. So if we just build supply, we're going to drive down costs.

I see everybody nodding the back, all the housing people. I think most people in America get it: build more supply, and you'll drive down price.

But here we're building more in Highland Village so that we can bring down the price and give people more affordable options in Spokane and in this region.

So I'm glad to be here with everybody. But I just want to thank our two individuals for their - Michael and Jen, for getting up here and talking. I was saying to Jen, it's always hard to speak from the heart, it just is. And we get emotional. But I think they said it best: not everybody has the same circumstances, in this case, healthcare and family challenges that mean you need to find something. We want our community to be a livable community.

So simply put, addressing housing and rising costs helps families across our state. And Highland Village should be a great site that everybody looks to as a way to solve our affordable housing crisis.

Thank you all very much.