

Senator Maria Cantwell

Inland Northwest Women of the Year Awards 2022

Host: Spokane Councilwoman Betsy Wilkerson

Participants: Senator Maria Cantwell, Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers, Astronaut Anne McClain

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

(Timestamp - 4:53) HOST: Senator Maria Cantwell, could you come and join us?

[Applause]

WILKERSON: Senator, as Chair of the Committee on Commerce in Congress, you led the passage of the CHIPS Bill through the Senate. How will this impact women?

CANTWELL: Well, thank you for that. First of all, it's great to be here in Spokane. I love Spokane. And I think that the CHIPS and Science Bill is the story about the next phase of America and how we need more women in science. So it's great to be here with Anne McClain, who is going to come out and join us and talk about one particular science position I would guess is going to come up. [Laughter]

But the CHIPS and Science bill I was looking at - first of all, my condolences to the Williams family. Losing Sandy is such a tragic thing, but reading the story of her [unintelligible] and her accomplishments reminded me of a colleague who was honored last week, Eddie Bernice Johnson. These are two women who wanted to be in science careers and literally lived in segregated states. So they had to travel to non-segregated states just to get their nursing degrees.

And so here we are today, with shortages across every sector of the sciences. We need more women, you can't have 50% of society sitting it out. We need them to help us. So the CHIPS and Science bill specifies [millions of dollars] for universities and institutions to help increase the number of degrees for women in science.

I was just up in Stevens County, and I saw some Kettle Falls women engineers up there, and they were ready to get it done [unintelligible]. And you know, the notion that we just need to give people that opportunity, that it remains [unintelligible], really believed in what they could do with science. But now we need to make it even easier than in the past and get the great contributions that we're going to get out of those women.

WILKERSON: That's really exciting. I heard something that resonated with me just last week. So representation is the lens through which we dream. So if I can't see somebody who looks like me, it's hard for me to dream of myself in that space. Even though we may see others around us.

What does that look like to see Anne when she comes out or to see [unintelligible] for young girls, but young people, period? How do they dream it because they see it and say I want to do that too? So I think that's really important.

In the world of science, is there anything else that's coming down that could support it? I know we talk a lot about STEM, and I don't want that to get lost because we just say that like a flip word, "STEM field." And I don't think we really realize how critical that is to women and minorities for their future for them and the future of our country as well.

CANTWELL: Well, we just got not going to be competitive as a nation to the peak as the nation if we don't have women join that effort.

[Applause]

And let's have these women lead on so many ideas. I worked in software for five years, and I can tell you we didn't have enough women in that particular field. But I probably would have never thought about that field either.

So we have Anne McClain's mom here. She's a teacher in the sciences. And we have to get the educators, and as you said - So the University of Washington decided they needed more women in their engineering school. So they [hired a lot of women professors] and they had a huge increase in the number of students who were women. Because, as you said, they saw people that look like them, and they said, "Oh, we can do that."

(Timestamp – 16:15) WILKERSON: I want to ask you a little bit about relationships. Do male networks look different than the networks women have? Anyone can answer that.

CANTWELL: Well, I think you just look at the people that you're honoring tonight. And you look at what they decided to do. They saw a gap somewhere, whether it was the foster program, whether it was taking care of veterans, whether it was just getting empathy through getting together and creating a circle.

People picked up and created something that wasn't being addressed. Probably [unintelligible] nobody knocked on their door. They saw a need, and they went and answered it. I think that's very - what I see a lot of and enjoy, and it's great. It's just great that they will step out and just step up and solve a problem.

(Timestamp – 21:31) CANTWELL: But to Cathy's point and to your question Betsy. This next phase - so Cathy is right, I think I'm the 30th woman in the history of our country, so like 250 years, and we've had up to 58 women in the United States Senate. And so we've got a ways to go. We're only 24%, we're 50% of the population, and we're only 24% of that body.

But instead of Cathy's Mom now just saying, okay, it's either nursing or teaching. We want to say there are so many aspects of what we need. We want to see a world with women in all of these roles.

And so that's why we're so excited about what Anne's doing. She is going to put a face to, an image to, what someone could accomplish in something that, I don't know, [unintelligible] to the fact that the background, the preparation in science that it will take to complete this mission. So I can't wait because I just want to excite every young girl in the United States of America to think about what barriers they may break.

(Timestamp – 26:40) CANTWELL: Well, we have a little joke in the Senate. We say when the TV cameras come, there are two types of Senators. One that runs to put their hair and makeup on, and then there are the women. [Laughter and Applause]

Now going back to the nominees. Again, I just think the skill set that Anne mentioned is like, we are very good at identifying problems. Very good at identifying problems. It's almost like we are more encompassing of, "well, who is affected by the problem?" "Where's the challenge?" And we see we see the picture clearly. I think that's why a lot of people just go out and then do the solution.

And I think what we need now is a little more collaboration. Our problems are going to be solved because people collaborate, not because somebody dictates. We just have too much information in the information age to have something dictated.

But we have a lot of projects in our state that we've been able to accomplish, the Yakima Basin as an example. Where people who totally disagreed came together and acted because there's information, and they can come around the table and they can have this discussion. They basically move forward, and they did in this particular case in this part of the state.

I think women are - I'm not saying men aren't collaborative, but I do think women come to that table a little more open to who's affected. Where's the problem? How do we solve it? And I just hope that we can broaden the horizon with other people and then show that women are very good collaborators. And I see that in the Senate today.

(Timestamp – 31:50) WILKERSON: So just on that thing, how do you see men leaders reacting differently to you in the spaces that you occupy? Especially when you are at the head of the table?

CANTWELL: Trust me, I've seen as we've gotten more women in the Senate, it's definitely a different reaction. I mean, I think that there's just say [...] if there really hadn't been a lot of women in the Senate, you know, maybe made them more aware of some of those issues. But when you get to be about 24% of the body, then people start paying attention.

Now I've encouraged women, well we should fight for something that we all believe in. Again, whether it's funding for women's health - we ended up with what was called the year of the woman in 1992, where we elected a bunch of women to congress, and we got a woman on every committee. And then that allowed us to increase the level of research that went into women's health.

A lot of the research at NIH was going to things that we're probably focused on men. Not that we don't care, but the women said what about the research that just affects women? How about getting research dollars for that? And then they were able to increase that.

So I think you want diversity, and I think now our colleagues see 24% of the Senate, and they immediately think, well, what do the women think? That's the good thing, what the women think. [Applause]

WILKERSON: And if they don't ask us what we think, we'll probably tell them. [Laughter]

CANTWELL: I think they think if they don't fight now, it could be a problem. They think, "well, we better ask them what they think." And that's important, again, because there may be issues that we represent that we care about. It could be child nutrition, it could be a whole host of things that we've been very, very passionate about. And we want to understand why this issue is important.

(Timestamp – 42:35) CANTWELL: Well, I want to say I talk to a lot of girls, a lot of young women and I've never had a young man ask me about imposter syndrome. I'm not saying they don't think it, but they never ask about it. And we have to ask ourselves why young women ask this too much.

So I'm asking all of you young women who are here tonight, our nation needs you. You have something to offer. Here's an example of someone from your own community [motions to Anne McClain], and she's stepping up. So I'm saying seize the day.

And if you need to think about these characteristics, about as Anne was saying, how you curtail it or throttle it back or have both aspects of a career and family. All good. But don't hesitate to think that you can lead, that you have good ideas, and that you can help our society move forward in the future. We're counting on you.

WILKERSON: Is that a challenge?

CANTWELL: I get way into sports, and I think guys play sports, and they're aggressive, and they learn how to be aggressive when they're young. And they learn how to compete, and they don't think about it, it becomes second nature, and they just get in there [...], but I'm asked too often by the most talented groups...

I mean, literally, the Jackson Institute at the UW, the foundation name after Scoop Jackson, works on foreign policy and leadership. These are the most talented people. You can't get into that master's program if you're not talented. And these young women will come in and say, "Well, what about imposter syndrome?" I mean, they literally - it's just part of this. We just have to help women stand up and lead.

And again, we need the diversity, and we need the ideas. But I do think that maybe we haven't gotten that [unintelligible], so I want them to know our nation needs them.