

**U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell**  
**Laurel Forest Opening Ceremony**

**March 27, 2024**

**Sen. Cantwell Opening Remarks**

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

**Sen. Cantwell:** Well, thank you. I was thinking maybe I'd get a dance out of you guys!

I definitely, Adrienne, thank you so much for your leadership, and for your commitment to affordable housing. I wish I could take you to Washington and have you testify, because I think you epitomize that there are leaders within the community. If you have the resources, you can solve these problems. And there are dedicated people who are willing to do that, so thank you.

And also, want to thank the Opportunity Council, and Greg. Thank you so much. I appreciate what you are doing, and the fact that the Opportunity Council is really focusing in on this particular problem, and adding capacity.

That is really what we need to do, capacity building, in my opinion, around the country. Because I think what Colin just said, he wasn't sure what he's feeling. I know what he's feeling. He's feeling community. Community, community, community. And together, we can solve these problems.

I'm so excited to be here because I think this is a model project. Laurel Forest is certainly affordable places to live, but the fact that it's focused on seniors, and also has this daycare element to it, just means that it is the model for the nation.

Both of those problems are big national problems, and you are hoping to solve both of them at the same time.

I also want to thank Mayor Lund and Executive Satpal for being here and for their leadership. And Satpal, look I, good job. I didn't know there was this much, this much heat on this particular land site.

But I do think that is part of what's holding us back in this discussion. Maybe we could take this video and show it to other parts of the state, and maybe people will hustle in the same way you did. And that is to find the land. Because, the rest of the people will do the rest, that is, build the units, make them affordable, solve some of these problems. And that is what we need to do.

So, I also want to thank Environmental Works for their great architectural work, Enterprise Community Investment, Dawson Construction, and Banner Bank, and all those others that participated in making this a reality.

The Low Income Housing Tax Credit, which you heard about, is, a little secret most people don't know, 95% of the affordable housing that gets built in the United States gets built with the tax credit. That means that if we don't increase that tax credit federally, we're not adding capacity.

So that is why we're in a big fight right now, in the United States Senate, on legislation that I've sponsored to increase that tax credit and provide 200,000 more units nationwide, 7,000 more units in the State of Washington over the next two years.

This project is a great boost in showing why affordable housing works, with 56 units for those seniors that we just talked about. And people aren't really explaining that, Colin, I bet you have a very loving daughter, you know. But at some point in time, even her ability to help with this situation gets out of hand. And so that is why these rents for downtown apartments, either at \$540 or \$900, far more affordable than the region's average of \$1,500, makes this a godsend to seniors.

And as he just said, he didn't plan it this way. We have to do more, I think, to help people in retirement. But we, he's explaining to everyone that Social Security and lack of pensions isn't going to deliver him affordable options in his later years. That is why we have to, right now, think about how fast we need to expand this credit and celebrate today as a perfect example of how this can work. So, hats off to Bellingham.

The model for solving this problem, having senior housing and child care, and doing something else too, celebrating this intergenerational commitment. This is a very important commitment as seniors live longer and we have more childcare needs. So, integrating those two things I think is a great way to show the community what a stable community looks like.

But these opportunities here, for Bellingham, is exactly what we need to be doing. When Adrienne and I worked together before, and we looked at a project, they came out and made me stand on the street and they said, "which one of these buildings is a market rate housing and which is an affordable housing project." After three minutes they just told me because I couldn't decide, I couldn't tell.

And I think what building more affordable housing does is help us solve these big problems for our seniors, that, I guarantee you, if they don't have an affordable place to live, if baby boomers reach retirement and don't have an affordable place to live, you're going to see an impact on our Medicaid budget. You're going to see people go into different types of housing that are much more expensive.

So, today is a celebration of something that also drives down the cost of housing, one of the largest factors still left in inflation. [Of 3.2%] inflation, [half] is related to housing. And so, we need to make sure that everybody who is part of the solution here understands that getting this done at a federal level, building [many] more projects like Laurel Forest, has to be our nation's priority.

Senator Todd Young and I have introduced this legislation in the U.S. Senate and Suzan DelBene, and Representative LaHood from Illinois have introduced it in the House of Representatives. And literally, got over 300 votes when it passed there a few weeks ago, so. 357 to be exact.

So, we need housing. It's stimulative. Expanding the credit will do a great deal of work, but today we just want to celebrate Laurel Forest. The mayor, the executive, all of the people who brought this project to reality, and everything that people are going to do here to celebrate it, intergenerational community, and shows that we can have affordability in the United States of America.

Thank you all so much.