

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell
Island Health Helipad Ribbon Cutting

July 17, 2024

Sen. Cantwell Remarks

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

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you, Elise, and Dr. Garde, what an incredible story. Thank you so much for sharing all of that, and I can't imagine what all of that was like, and what you have to do on a day-to-day basis.

But we can say this: we're sure glad you came to Anacortes.

I also want to thank Elliott, thank you so much for leading the foundation and for your work. I want to give a shout out to the city council members who are here. Ryan and Anthony, thank you for what you guys do to bring leadership. And Senator Lovelett and Representative Lekanoff, thank you so much for being here as well. So thank you so much for your leadership.

And to the team at Wellman & Zuck for putting their money and building into this incredible facility that is so important for this part of Washington State.

You know, I think people understand that our state is growing, and that there are very beautiful places to live. But it also means we have to continue to upgrade our health care delivery system so that people can have those opportunities. So Island Health has done just that.

And it reminds me of the power of communities working together to solve problems and celebrate accomplishments. We're here to celebrate that modernization and this facility with the helipad, which is going to help save people's lives. That important transportation in a timely fashion to higher care facilities, like our Regional Trauma Center at Harborview.

I can't say enough how important Harborview is to the entire region. I don't think people understand how much business they get from Montana and Idaho and various places throughout our state.

But this is a perfect example of how working together in partnership, we are raising the standard of care in our state.

Island Health not only serves as the primary Level 3 Trauma Center and primary Level 2 Stroke Center for communities surrounding Anacortes, you are the emergency hospital for everyone living or visiting San Juan Islands. So that's a very big responsibility in and of itself.

And as I mentioned, rural hospitals need modernization of their facilities. If we want them to solve these problems, we need to give them the tools to solve these problems. The new helipad will allow Island Health to better serve remote communities like the San Juan Islands, and provide more reliable emergency service to other health care providers, and this is critical.

Skagit County, as I mentioned, and Island County, are growing. From 2020 to 2021 we saw a 48% increase in patients transported by air from San Juan Island. So something's happening here, I doubt that

people are getting sicker. It's just that we're growing, more people are there, and we need to deliver the infrastructure.

So the helicopters will no longer need to land in a parking lot. As we took a tour earlier, you could see how dangerous, really, that parking lot is, or challenged, I should say. Having to fly in between telephone wires, having to land next to cars, having to transport a way down at a decline. Not the kind of situation you want when people are dealing with such important, challenging situations.

So for the patients coming from Island health emergencies, that helipad means they can reach the emergency room faster. And we saw a tour of that, so very much appreciate everybody in the community who is helping to upgrade the hospital in general.

The helipad isn't just for taking patients, it's for transporting patients with traumatic injuries who need to get to Harborview, and that all has to be done in such a timely fashion, because literally critical seconds make the difference.

And right now, when the helicopter lands here with a patient, the emergency team has to run the length of a football field. So it's not exactly like it's optimized. And not just the landing pad itself, but the whole structure isn't really optimized to getting these people out of the helicopter and into the hospital. But now that's transformed, and a much easier path will be available to our workers.

Rural facilities without a helipad have to drive patients in an ambulance to the nearest airport and then reach services. But that's not what's going to happen here.

So this is a victory for quality health care in Washington, it's a victory for Anacortes, and for the communities around here. The community needs to be congratulated for coming together and articulating the need for this critical support.

I also want to thank Dr. Garde for her comments, and the notion that Washington can deliver this quality of care in rural communities. Believe me, there'll be many other rural parts of our state who will look at the situation and say, we want that here, too, we want to deliver that quality of care.

So we must continue to invest in rural health care, we must continue to deliver on modernization, we need to continue to deliver on obstetric care, and these important quality issues that are making this a great place to live.

So thanks to everybody at Island Health. Thank you for everybody coming out today and seeing and witnessing truly a celebratory moment. Thank you.