

Senator Maria Cantwell

Pacific Northwest Waterways Association Remarks

October 13th, 2022

[\[AUDIO\]](#)

CANTWELL: Thank you very much for that great award and presentation. Thanks for the song too (laughter). I mean, amongst the many things that you guys do you to move Washington product, you also can sing in harmony (laughter).

When my team told me about this opportunity, I certainly wanted to come in person and receive the award, and thank you for everyone's hard work. And to thank you for the recognition of the work that we all try to do together back in the other Washington to continue to grow and benefit our economy.

I love the fact that you have a globe on this award. Because that is really what we're trying to do. We're trying to move Washington product and reach destinations around the globe. And the people who help make all of that a reality are the people in this room. From the people who grow the product to the people who ship the product, the people, the workforce that moves the product. It is a great aspect of the Washington economy. So thank you very much for this great honor.

I also want to say is this Vancouver on the move? I mean, isn't this great all the waterfront (unintelligible due to applause). Really amazing, everything that's happened. I couldn't even get into this hotel last night, that's how many people were here. And I think, really, it's just a sign of how our state continues to take advantage of opportunity.

But we know that there's a lot of opportunity coming, I keep saying that. We just happen to be on the Pacific in the era of the Pacific, but the Pacific is just going to continue to grow. And in fact, Washington freight exports are expected to increase by 47%. Over the next decade, that's \$654 billion. So a lot of economic opportunity for the future.

So what we tried to do in the last few years is just really focus on the authorizations and appropriations for infrastructure that will allow us to keep moving those products. We worked very hard on this trade economy, as I like to call it, and try to remind our colleagues all the time that we're one of the most trade dependent states in the United States. And if we want to continue to have trade opportunities, we have to move product. And we have to set goals. I loved the fact that the Obama administration set a goal of increasing exports by 50% over five years. When they fell short and only got about 80% there I said: "So what? Set another goal and double it again, and let's see what we can do."

So we worked really hard. And a couple of things I just want to make sure everybody knows about -- mostly because I want you to apply for the money. Okay, I want you to go and apply because this is what we are doing. You know, we also worked very hard on the big Chips & Science Bill. And as you can see, SEH America made a big decision to already expand here in Vancouver, and you're going to see other improvements, but we've got to get about the tasks that go along with that economic development.

So first and foremost, we in 2019, authorized the Port Infrastructure Development Program. Now, many of you might (not) realize that was there ... but it wasn't authorized. Why do you have to authorize

things? Because it helps standardize that program to get lawmakers familiar with it, and it allows us to write specific language about what we want that money to be used for.

So the fact that we were able to formally authorize that program was really important, because then when we came with the infrastructure bill, we were able to put \$2.25 billion behind that, which was really important.

So I'm sure most people know, but you can access that fund for ... port infrastructure, like construction, piers, cranes, railroads inside the port, and on shore site power. So we think it's a really strong program that we know people are starting to take advantage of.

We know in the past the Northwest Seaport Alliance has gotten \$25 million in improvements at Terminal Five; Bellingham got \$6 million for construction of a deeper draught. I know that people have ideas out here, but just please pay attention to that program, and let's keep on MARAD and keep focusing on the port infrastructure. We have to keep expanding capacity.

The second thing we did is something -- most of the stuff, I just try to take the torch from this Washington back to that Washington. We here have had a lot of problems. I don't know if anybody remembers the Category C programs. They would just dwarf our state budget and then they would never get fixed.

The same thing was happening federally, you have these huge projects. They never get funded because nothing else would get funded if you fund them. So you have to set aside a pot of money and we did that on the mega project. So we created and authorized through the Commerce Committee projects over a certain size, because they're so big, should get a set aside and put specific dollar amounts behind that.

And we definitely have the I-5 bridge in mind when we did this because we thought, well, how else will you get a project like this funded? And obviously, it's one of the worst bottlenecks that we have in the area 7-10 hours a day, you could have backups, and it's costing us a lot of money. So yesterday, the USDOT late yesterday afternoon, made the first announcement of infusion of federal funding to be awarded to the I-5 bridge replacement to do seismic analysis and engineering work. So we can get about replacing with a new bridge. So I'm very excited about that. (applause)

The third thing that we authorized that was really important was a new program for at-grade crossings, and specifically for communities, cities and counties and tribes to access the dollars. Because oftentimes communities get lost in the mix of how much an at-grade rail crossing impacts them.

For me, I live in the town of Edmonds, and literally, there is no other way when the railroad crossing gets there at the ferry terminal, we literally had a woman on the boat who was pregnant and needed to get to the hospital and they had to carry her through one of the cars. And so we need to give communities the ability to access this federal program and fix some of their regional at-grade crossing problems. So we were able to get a new program authorized and a significant chunk of money into that program. I think it's something like \$3 billion. I mean, there's not a city in our state that doesn't have an at-grade crossing problem. Everybody has them. I tell people: "Look at the map, look at where the rail comes into Spokane, goes down through the Tri Cities, through the gorge up through Vancouver all the way to the Canadian border. What city doesn't have an at-grade crossing problem?" So we have to fix that.

Fourth, the most important thing is to continue and we did make huge improvements on freight. You know, the program that was mentioned that is to - again, we had the freight program in our state, we said: "Federally, it makes more sense to prioritize the movement of goods. Give it some priority and it will grow jobs."

So that program, we were able to get a significant increase in the transportation budget, it was a 78% increase. So we ended up getting \$5 billion over a five-year period of time. So that will help us with all these projects that we are trying to do in our state for the long run.

You might have just seen that the Secretary of Transportation was here and he announced that that freight program, it was oversubscribed. We had so many projects, but we were able to do the Apple Capital Loop, which is just helping get all that traffic out of the downtown and being stopped by rail again. And it was helpful with the West Seattle Bridge and the Salmon Bay Bridge. So keep, you know, putting money into freight and the freight corridor. So yeah, I don't care what I'm called, Sen. Freight, I'll take it (laughter).

So where do we go from here? Obviously, we have a lot to do on the WRDA Bill and maybe I think I'm going to get a question on that. But recently we were in Kalama to look at the turning basin and what we need to do here. And so we stand ready to work with everybody on these projects, as we are busy right now on the reauthorization of the water resource bill.

So, anyway, thank you so much for this award. I look forward to continuing to work with all of you, glad you're down here having this great conference on a beautiful day and go Mariners (laughter, applause).

PNWA Q&A #1

October 13th, 2022

[\[AUDIO\]](#)

QUESTION: Ports and waterways are incredibly grateful for your focus and funding on maintaining and building infrastructure. Thank you.

However, in order to implement infrastructure funding on the ground, we need a predictable and timely permitting system in place to realize the economic benefits and build sustainably for the future. We're working with agencies to come up with responsible solutions for current challenges. But do you have thoughts on how we can work together to improve the permitting process?

CANTWELL: Well, we got to have the people so that they can go over the information. We were able to put some money in the infrastructure bill to give NOAA more resources. I know it sounds crazy, and some people in particular in this disinformation environment are "like don't grow the government don't do that."

But you know, we authored a huge improvement at USTR to stop... There were like three lawyers over at USTR fighting against trade violations. And we're like, wait, the economy is growing. We're an export country, go get the workforce.

So we were able to use some of the customs money and get a workforce, lawyers over at USTR, and the result was they filed some great cases where we got results in Chile against our timber. Anyway, you got to have the workforce. So we're putting more money into NOAA so that they can get the work done and process this in a timely fashion.

I definitely think you know, we've had lots of discussions about how you can get on the same page earlier in the process. Several years ago, we authored some changes to the dam relicensing process, where people could come to the table earlier and have discussions about solutions and put them forward without any kind of fear or penalty. And that would help identify issues across several agencies and the project issues and get them in front of people sooner. So happy to keep working on this besides the resources that we got to get a smoother process.

QUESTION: Senator Cantwell, Ryan Hart, Port of Vancouver, thank you for celebrating your birthday with us today. Appreciate it. The flood control portion of the Columbia River Treaty expires in 2024. Of particular concern to us is the potential for changing river flows and the impacts to navigation. We greatly encourage you to offer any encouragement to the administration and the State Department to reach a new treaty. And I was wondering if you might be able to provide any updates or insights on the Columbia River Treaty as it stands today?

CANTWELL: Well, very important question. So thank you so much.

Senator Risch and I are just dedicated to this cause. I mean, we are. I wish we had something, you know, better to say. Do I think that we've been pushing our government, their government to get some place? Yes.

And well, I actually took on the premier over this issue at a very small meeting and discussion where I just... you know, they were upset about some of the things that we were talking about on our side as it relates to electric vehicles. And they said, "We're not going to address this, the Columbia River Treaty until you address that." And, and I just thought that wasn't where we needed to be not that conversation.

I mean, it's almost like they showed their cards, they don't want to renegotiate. But we have to find a way to show that there are efficiencies on both sides of the border that we could implement, that would make this a better system. Why not do that? Why not make this the state of the art system and enjoin everybody in the region to do that.

So we have been working specifically with PNNL lab and some of our energy partners, and tried to incent you know, and intertie that would give Canada more access to our markets. And as a way to say, get back to the table and negotiate on this.

And so we've, we've had that conversation with them, we hope that they will pay attention, and we definitely believe that we want to get this done sooner than later. But as somebody whose job (unclear) the Obama administration, the Trump administration, and now the Biden administration on this, you know, it's very challenging, and I think, Senator Risch just, you know, a lot of people think we'll just pull the plug on that agreement. But I think there's some aspects of how an international commission would look at resolving the issue that we weren't really comfortable with.

So let's go back and get an agreement that obviously changes the scenario that we're currently under and reach an accord that benefits both sides. That's what I think we need to do and I'm hopeful that,

you know, the challenges that any administration faces - Now, one thing I mean, I certainly don't know, is anybody here from BPA? Does anybody know? Okay, well ask him later (laughter).

But I had said, you know what, I get it, you wake up every day and you got Putin in Ukraine, and you got the OPEC in their craziness. Like I get it, you're not sitting here. But if you're not going to get it done, then let's then give the region, give BPA and somebody at, you know, up in British Columbia, the ability to resolve it here, regionally and propose something from the bottom up instead of the top down.

I just don't know, we can keep waiting for the top down. I just don't know that we're always going to get the mindshare that we need on this issue because of the complexity. So, anyway we, Senator Risch, and I just, I'm not kidding, we've had so many meetings, and if you could've seen Senator Risch, myself, Senator Crapo and Senator Wyden going at Trudeau over this issue, you would have been like, "oh yeah go get em!" (Laughter) But it didn't result in anything.

And I think we just - I still believe that making this system the most energy efficient and state of the art system, and using PNNL and its resources to upgrade and do that is this is the smartest move. Now I'm not the expert that some other people are, but I know this, people don't want to keep paying on this system, and we got to figure out a better solution. Thank you all very much.

PNWA Q&A #2

October 13th, 2022

[\[AUDIO\]](#)

QUESTION: ...for pushing to keep the word on a two year cycle, we understand that currently the Senate and House are negotiating that. How can we, how can PNWA, best advocate for our priorities? As we're coming down the stretch on the final negotiations? What can we do?

CANTWELL: You mean, as far as getting it done, or...

QUESTION: To make sure our priorities are in the word of the final version.

CANTWELL: Everybody needs to keep talking to us with the data and information about the projects and what they are, and why there.... Look, the WRDA bill always gets done, it always gets done. And I mean, you're right, maybe not always in a timely fashion. But there is great bipartisan support.

I mean, if Jim Inhofe and Barbara Boxer can deliver a WRDA bill then anybody could deliver a WRDA bill (laughter) I think it's, you know, it showed that the two of them, different ideologies in general, but we're able to do that on a consistent basis.

So, I think for us, we have to figure out what these - there's a lot, we have a lot of need, and what can I say we have a lot of need. So just get us the information, get it as soon as possible, and help us answer questions. Answer the phone, I guess is the right way to say, sometimes these come late at night and you're just like, I need to know this data and information. Okay. Thank you.

