

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell
Senate Committee on Indian Affairs Mark-Up

May 22, 2024

Sen. Cantwell Opening Remarks

[VIDEO]

Sen. Cantwell: Yes, Mr. Chairman, and happy birthday to the Vice Chair. I would sing but I don't quite have the voice. She does have a Hawaiian lei on, maybe you should try?

Chair Schatz: It is not my birthday!

Sen. Cantwell: Well anyway, I so appreciate the senator from Alaska and her hard work on behalf of Indian country and certainly on murdered and missing indigenous people, so thank you.

Thanks for having, this is the third hearing you guys have had on law enforcement, very much appreciate that.

According to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, tribal communities need over 13,600 additional law enforcement personnel just to meet the FBI's Community Safe standard. So that means that many tribes do not have enough law enforcement to tackle these big problems like fentanyl or murdered and missing indigenous people.

So these hearings, I think, have shone a light on the importance of passing legislation to strengthen that effort.

The Yakima Nation Police Department has less than one quarter of the police officers to patrol its 1.4 million acre reservation and serve 30,000 residents, so clearly they need more support.

Currently, state and federal law enforcement can provide retirement and other types of compensation benefits that tribes can't provide to law enforcement, and so this disparity means even though tribes have been trying to keep up, we've had a great deal of problem in keeping the commissioned officers.

The Chief of the Tulalip Police Department testified before this committee earlier this month, his department lost approximately 50% of their commissioned officers due to [recruitment] by non-tribal jurisdiction[s] overtime. The Kalispel Tribe lost nine officers over a five year period the same way, the Colville have struggled to keep three officers on duty per shift to patrol. The Colville is about basically the size of the state of Delaware. So pretty big geography to patrol.

So that is why Senator Mullin I introduced the Parity for Tribal Law Enforcement Act that we discussed, S.2695.

And, Mr. Chairman, I just appreciate, many of us know how bad the fentanyl problem is, and part of it is if you know there's not adequate law enforcement, it becomes a haven for people to locate and to try to hide production or trade of, or sales of that product. So helping law enforcement will help all our communities, so thank you for this hearing.