

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation Executive Session

February 2, 2022

Opening Remarks

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

Cantwell: The Commerce Committee will come to order. I appreciate members being here for the Committee's Commerce, Science, Transportation executive markup. This morning, we are holding an executive session on several nominations.

First, I want to say a few words about our dear friend and colleague of our committees, Senator Ben Ray Lujan, who isn't here with us today. We all know that he is recovering back home in New Mexico, I can tell you his leadership and voice on this committee has been a very important voice in telecommunications issues, national lab research issues that we took up during USICA, broadband issues. So we wish him a speedy recovery. And we're all thinking about him, and appreciate that he has been such a steadfast member of this committee. And if someone in your family actually lets you watch something on your little device sometime, Ben Ray, just know that the Commerce Committee loves you. And we're all we're all thinking about you during this important time. We also obviously, he has been an important member for our committee as far as the committee process.

And so we'll work together to have the ranking member has brought up concerns about the process. And so I want to assure members on both sides of the aisle, we will be working together to have a consistent process of getting updated information on nominees to make sure that we're aligning these concerns. Many of these nominees will consider today and at future markups have appeared before the committee and have received bipartisan support. So my goal is to make sure that these nominations continue to move forward as quickly as possible because I believe the President deserves to have his people in place to tackle the big issues facing the nation.

The nominees we will consider today feel key roles across our federal government and provide necessary leadership to implement historic legislation to improve transportation address supply chain issues, increase access in public programming. Last year, we passed this historic bipartisan legislation that will transform our nation's infrastructure and improve safety for the traveling public. We need leadership at the Department of Transportation and the Department of Commerce to implement the law and ensure incoming federal funding is used efficiently and effectively. It is critical that we confirm key DOT nominees like John Putnam who was nominated to be the general counsel and Victoria Wassmer, who was nominated to be the chief financial officer were Admiral Ann Phillips is nominated to be the administrator of the Maritime Administration, and Admiral Phillips who will be responsible for implementing the

bipartisan infrastructure law. This includes a historic \$2.25 billion in Port infrastructure grants needed to shore up our supply chain and make more progress in decarbonizing our maritime industry. We also will consider Steve Cliff to be Administrator of the National Highway Safety Administration where he will carry out the agency's mission of saving lives preventing injuries and reducing the economic costs associated with traffic accidents.

Just yesterday NITSA reported an estimated more than 31,000 people died on our roads between January and September of 2021. This is the highest number since 2006. So we need a permanent leader in place to implement the department's new safety strategy to combat these rising numbers. The pandemic has also exacerbated the deep flows in our supply chain and over the last several months this committee has had several hearings to address supply chain challenges. I'm sure we will do more in the future.

Today, we take an important step in confirming Max Vekich, who has been nominated to be on the commission of the federal Maritime Commission. He has decades of experiences on the docks as a longshoreman as a civic leader. His voice, I think will be an important one in addressing supply chain issues at our busiest seaports around the United States.

Additionally, Jed Kolko, who was nominated to be Undersecretary of Economic Affairs, the Department of Commerce, where he will be responsible for important data and, and important analysis of economic trends that are addressing our supply chain. So this analysis will be very important for our solutions. And today we also will vote on four nominees Kathy Im, Thomas Rothman, Laura Ross, and Elizabeth Sembler to fill roles on the public, the board of a corporation for public broadcasting, so I look forward to working with them.

And finally, we'll be voting on Coast Guard promotions. We've been working diligently to vet these nominees who will serve as the next group of leaders in the Coast Guard.

So I thank our colleagues and everyone for working together now I turn to my colleague, Senator Wicker.