

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Nomination Hearing on Sean Duffy to be the Secretary of the Department of Transportation
January 15, 2025

Opening Statement, VIDEO

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I understand it's the first time a Texas senator has chaired this particular committee, the Commerce Committee, which is a very important committee in the United States of America, but critically important for the State of Washington.... The fact that the gavel is passing to you and passing to Texas, congratulations.

I do too want to welcome our new members, Senators Fetterman, Kim, Blunt Rochester, Moreno, Curtis and Sheehy, to the Commerce Committee. We look forward to working with all of you and the returning members.

I do believe, Mr. Chairman, we did accomplish a lot working together and with our colleagues – Ocean Shipping Reform Act, the Infrastructure bill, the CHIPS and Science Act and an FAA Reauthorization Reform. I'll put something in the record expanding on those accomplishments.

But I don't care whether we are in this chair or that chair [Chair and Ranking Member seats], this is about [accomplishing] ... for the American people. And while I think those bills led economic opportunity and manufacturing resurgence in the United States, the infrastructure investment we're going to talk to about today, was critical to that, I believe there's more to do in driving down costs as it relates to supply chains and making sure the transportation infrastructure is getting those people to work who need to get to work on public transportation systems. I look forward to talking to the nominee about that.

I hope that as we continue to work together...we can work out the rules of the committee. We haven't done that yet. I do think that getting paperwork in before nominees come before the committee, I think we got yours in 6:30pm Monday night, [is critical.] I looked with interest this morning on the New York Times coverage of all of that. It's about processing people so that everybody feels confident that we have done our review. So, I hope that we will keep that.

And on the rules of the Committee, I hope that we can work out something because I believe that the American people don't have enough confidence that we do work together. I tried to operate [by] working together because I want to show people that we can accomplish things that way. And I'm very prideful that after our markup on the CHIPS and Science Act, you came over to me and said, that was a good markup. I remember that because I think we processed over a hundred amendments. A lot of people would have done things differently and they'd try to come up with a deal and stick it in NDAA. Let's continue to grow the muscle of the Commerce Committee under your leadership and I look forward to working with you on that.

To this nominee, again, congratulations to you and your family. There's one thing the Northwest also appreciates besides the Commerce Committee, we definitely like lumberjacks. You will go down as a storied DOT Secretary in the eyes of Washingtonians, particularly if you run up a couple of poles or rolling while you're out there in Washington. So, we definitely appreciate that.

Mr. Duffy, you know how important transportation is across many sectors, obviously the aviation sector being one of those. And making sure that as we continue to focus on aviation safety following the FAA bill and ACSAA, we need to make sure that we hold the FAA accountable and build a strong oversight culture... I appreciate you saying that you would meet with the families of the MAX crashes and I know that Michael Stumo is here in the audience today.

I also want to talk about the Bipartisan Infrastructure law and those projects that are so important to us in growing our economy. And I think anybody here on the committee who represents a coastal state, or doesn't matter, or represent a big Western state, it is all about getting product to where it's being exported. So this infrastructure investment is critically important and we will look forward to asking you questions about that.

I also want to make sure that we're continuing to make the investments that the congress has already appropriated and assigned because obviously building resilient systems that can't be disrupted help us drive an even bigger economy in the United States of America. That's why programs like INFRA, MEGA, at-grade crossing elimination and some of those that you and I had a chance to discuss in my office. I look forward to asking some questions about that.

I also want to mention that as people continue to discuss other appointees to the Department of Transportation, Mr. Bradbury has been nominated [and is] one of the chief architects of Project 2025 and we will want to know from you what you believe we should continue to move forward on in investments in transportation. ...[E]ven looking at some of those issues as it relates to how we bolster U.S. competition in the international air space, which I very much appreciate, actually.

But we have to make the investments and we have to keep moving forward. I want to hear your views on a surface transportation act – that is something that needs to be authorized by 2026. Making sure that we continue to make these investments will be critical to American's opportunities. [A]gain congratulations to you and welcome to your family.

First Round Q&A, VIDEO | AUDIO

Sen. Cantwell: Mr. Chairman, I could go at least 20 minutes with questions in a first round, so I'm going to try to see if we can get short answers to things that makes sense. First of all, are you a supporter of the Jones Act?

Sean Duffy: Yes.

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you. Are you a supporter of the MEGA and freight and at grade crossing programs that we established under the recent surface transportation bill.

Sean Duffy: Yes, and I think this fits in with kind of the vision the President Trump has for those big projects that are so meaningful to communities that, I think you mentioned in your office, that oftentimes don't get done because they're really expensive. So yes, that's important.

Sen. Cantwell: Yes, and we worked with Senator Wicker so that states that may not have an economy, but yet there's still a MEGA project within that region also get funded. Because it doesn't matter the size of the population, you can still have a MEGA project because it has mega economic consequences and dwarfs the budget.

What about culverts? Supporting continued support for culverts.

Sean Duffy: Are we talking about the ones so we can have the salmon run and spawn?

Sen. Cantwell: Yeah.

Sean Duffy: I love salmon, and I love salmon spawning, so, and we've talked a lot about that. So again, we want to make sure that we are cognizant of the construction projects and what impacts they have on the environment, especially with – yes, I would answer yes.

Sen. Cantwell: Okay, so aviation safety, you will meet with the families of the max crash victims.

Sean Duffy: Absolutely.

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you. Do you believe that the FAA should have a robust oversight of aviation manufacturing, including listening to whistleblowers on the ground.

Sean Duffy: I 100% do.

Sen. Cantwell: I think that that's, you know, part of my concern is that what our committee has been able to, you know, understand and confirm, you know, through our efforts, and starting with, you know, Senator Wickers efforts, prior to ACSAA, that according to a most recent article in the Seattle Times, 90% of complaints submitted by airline and manufacturing employees through the FAA whistleblower program resulted in no violations. This underscores the concerns about how do we get a strong FAA oversight and listening to the people that are on the ground, the machinists and engineers.

Do you think that that there should be a mandatory safety management system at our manufacturers?

Sean Duffy: ...One more time?

Sen. Cantwell: You can take this for the record. Safety management systems are a redundant circle of continued safety improvements that the expert panel has suggested that we do. The expert aviation panel has suggested that's really what is missing. And I think in the prior administrations, people didn't really push for a strong safety management culture, and I think that's what we're still pushing to make sure that that is exactly the FAA is saying that's what Boeing should do. But we have to continue to push this.

Sean Duffy: There's been a missing link. Obviously, there's a lot more work to do, and so if this is part of the missing link, to make sure we get a better safety record at Boeing, I'm on board.

Sen. Cantwell: Great, and the issue about, you know, projects that, you know, I mentioned the I-5 bridge when we spoke, you know, the infrastructure investment that's already been planned, that the money has been out the door and has been, you know, it's on its way to doing the work.

Will you commit to helping complete these projects and continue the funding?

Sean Duffy: That are underway? Yes. And again, one of the complaints I've heard from the committee is oftentimes the money is not moving fast enough. There's been questions about why it's taking so long. So yes, I'd love to work with you and make sure the money gets out the door to the projects that are underway.

Sen. Cantwell: Great, and we have a very strong economy in the Northwest, but I expect, just like my colleagues, we have a lot of people who have to travel a long way to get to work. Why? Well, we haven't built enough housing, but public transit becomes a very key cornerstone of the investments. And so for us, that's the Sound Transit System.

All in all, according to AAA, car ownership costs, on average, over \$1,000 a month. Meanwhile, a sound transit pass costs \$100 a month. So, making sure that we're going to keep our investment in public transportation -- are you committed to working with this committee on public transit investment?

Sean Duffy: I am.

Sen. Cantwell: Yes. Thank you. And then I too, want to give my condolences as it relates to the fires in California. My state knows these issues well and how devastating they can be. And to your son and his family, I hope the best for them.

In the very near future, the World Cup and the Olympics will be coming to places like Seattle and Kansas and LA. Will you work with this committee on making sure that we have infrastructure investment to be the host for those kinds of facilities and those events?

Sean Duffy: Senator, I commit to working with you, Yes, and the committee.

Sen. Cantwell: And I think that's all I'm going to do this round, and we'll go back on to some of these other issues, but thank you for your brevity and commitments on those issues. Thank you.

Second Round Q&A [VIDEO](#) | [AUDIO](#)

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A couple of follow ups too. You know with the rule making authority that you have as DOT is incredibly important, and you know individuals that work within your organization, I brought up earlier about Mr. Bradbury's nomination to work with you as Deputy, and I note that in producing some documents, even Senator Wicker had frustrations in getting documents out of the administration. So, I hope that you guys will comply with requests from our Committees on that.

And on the rulemaking, I hope that you know your prioritization, in the Project 2025, he suggested maybe we should get rid of Essential Air Service. I think they probably hear a lot from people on this Committee about not doing that, but that you're not going to prioritize things that are going to undermine safety or consumer protections.

Sean Duffy: So just to ... I have never read Project 2025 so I'm not sure what's in it, but the President's going to decide policy, and he made me the Secretary. And so again, this is a great example, I didn't realize that Essential Air Service was in Project 2025. The President stepped away from it. It's not part of -- it hasn't been part of his agenda. But as I've been clear in like six questions, I think, I've been a supporter of Essential Air Service.

Sen. Cantwell: And just the notion of rulemaking, not to undermine safety or consumer priorities.

Sean Duffy: I am committed to that. And that point, you brought up transparency, and I think your team did, and I met with them yesterday or two days ago, I'm committed to transparency and providing the documents that you all have requested in a timely manner.

Sen. Cantwell: So, one thing, thank you for that. One thing is, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill that was done five years ago, obviously did advanced funding for five years of appropriations on those big grant programs because they want to get... well, it really becomes an agreement between DOT and the applicant -- both of their commitments to move forward. So, are you going to honor those commitments?

Sean Duffy: I would anticipate honoring those commitments, especially if the law has been followed and the agreements are being met. I think I might get some backlash from this Committee if you're halfway through a project and there's an effort to pull funding. So no, projects are going well, fundings flowing, and the deal is being met. I don't see an issue with that.

Sen. Cantwell: Great, great. Thank you, Mister Chairman.