

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

Kuiper Kirkland Production Facility Ribbon Cutting

June 27, 2024

Sen. Cantwell Opening Remarks

[VIDEO]

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you Brian, and I just want to give a shout out to all the legislators that are here. I think it just shows you how important this project is, and how important Kirkland is. I used to represent this area in the state legislature a century ago.

But I want to thank, because they're all already talking to me about these broadband issues, but Senator Wellman, thank you for being here, Senator Lovick, Senator Monka Dhingra, and Representatives Springer and Rue. And I feel like I'm missing somebody, but Claudia Balducci, just thank you for your leadership on the council, and my long time colleague, that's what we say, Dr. Morrison, when we've known each other as long as you and I have known each other, we say long time colleagues.

So thank you for your leadership, and thank you for everything that that you are doing as part of this partnership.

So I want to just thank everybody and congratulate everyone for the great success that we're seeing here, the opening of this impressive facility. Just about a year ago, I had Administrator of NASA Bill Nelson here in the Pacific Northwest to partner and talk about what Washington state's space economy looks like, and how important it is for projects like this to get underway.

Participants in that forum were Blue Origin, Kuiper, many of the STEM educators that are represented here today, and a coalition of the supply chain that is such a dynamic part of this effort that we have.

I'm going take my speech out, because it's a little unwieldy up here on this.

What Brian alluded to, which is really worth mentioning, is just how big the Washington space economy has become. We basically have a \$70 billion industry here, and it supports 250,000 jobs, 100 companies and a cluster that includes many of the people that I just mentioned, including, I didn't mention Aerojet Rocketdyne, which people here on the east side are very familiar with.

So today represents another big step in that space economy, for Washington, and project Kuiper, with their goal of increasing global broadband, which I can tell you is a very hot topic, not just in Washington, D.C., but around the globe. And the United States' leadership, and how that is going to play out, also a very, very big discussion. So Kuiper's deployment of over 3,000 small LEO, low Earth orbit, satellites is critically important to America's competitiveness.

We all share the same goal, prioritizing affordability, performance, reliability, and that is what some of the legislators were already talking to me about, the BEAD office, so glad to see the state represented here. The CHIPS and Science Act was literally about how to have innovation happen in more places. Well guess what's key to that: having broadband access in more places.

So this 172,000 square foot facility here in Kirkland will serve as that manufacturing hub for those 3,000 LEOs, and it will help this facility with testing chambers, and simulate thermal shocks, and run vibrations and acoustics and other tests, which I just got to witness.

That is all about how do you prepare a product for space? Now, can you imagine that right here in Kirkland's backyard. That's the kind of testing that's happening in these rooms, getting product ready to survive in space. No one's going up there to fix it, I can tell you that. So you got to get it right here on the ground.

The manufacturing capabilities of this facility will be more like a consumer electronics or automobile assembly line than it was really about traditional manufacturing of say, like aerospace. That's why these goals are so important, and the kind of product production I was just querying the team on, Steve, so thank you so much for that.

We need to build quality into the build process. What's really happening in Kirkland is this unbelievable manufacturing rate that is going to put Kuiper on the map. But you have to build the quality into the production.

So this facility is going to create over 200 aerospace jobs, and Amazon has already had 2,000 employees working on Kuiper, so it is going to be about this very important high-rate piece part production.

There's somebody else around here that needs to learn from this kind of build quality into the process. So I'm rooting for you guys, I'm rooting.

I think this is so important for our region. Right now our region is having a renaissance in manufacturing, again, the CHIPS and Science Act is part of that, but it is advanced manufacturing meets AI meets cheap electricity.

But to pull this off, we need to have a skilled workforce and that production quality that is going to be the hallmark of our region. So I really do think there is going to be other applications that will learn from this.

So that is why the whole process here about STEM education and partnering with Amy, Dr. Morrison, on this important certification program, I'm sure she's going to talk about it. But having a skilled aerospace science and technology workforce program right in the backyard is going to help us build that workforce for the future.

Right now, Washington ranks third in a STEM workforce. And we have, I think Seattle is the number one STEM workforce in the United States right now. But even with that we already have 60,000 workers that we need here in Washington with a STEM education. And nationally, we need about 3 million [by 2030].

And that is why again, CHIPS and Science really focused on the highest prioritization, tripling of the previous authorization for STEM workforce, and now we just got to get appropriators to understand this connection between the jobs of tomorrow that are here today, and getting the skills that people need to compete in these jobs.

So I also just wanted to mention that this is very important on the defense side, because the Defense Innovation Unit awarded a hybrid space architecture contract to Kuiper to optimize our satellite network and architecture and design. I think that's something that has to do with this design right here. It looks very complicated, very challenging.

But again, United States of America and the communication system of tomorrow has to make sure that all of that works, and so very proud that Kuiper is doing that DOD work in addition.

So I just want to leave on the note of thank you, congratulations to everybody here today. Steve, thank you, congratulations on this facility. Look forward to working with our region to continue this very, very aggressive effort. We like to say we're the Silicon Valley of space here in Puget Sound, and Kirkland now is joining the fight and helping us deliver not just better service, but a skilled workforce, and great attention to how the United States is going to be very competitive in space communication.

Thank you. Thank you all.