

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell
Sec. Granholm AI Press Conference Remarks
February 23, 2024

[\[VIDEO\]](#)

Sen. Cantwell: Okay, well, I want to thank Secretary Granholm for being in the Pacific Northwest. We're here at the Pacific Northwest [National] Laboratories office, but she literally held a meeting with what I would call the West Coast collaborative of our national lab systems with Lawrence Livermore, and Argonne, and PNNL to discuss what we could do to accelerate the partnership between the public and private sector on making sure our nation stays competitive and advanced on AI.

And it was a robust discussion which the Secretary is taking back several of those initiatives she just described. And I'm pretty sure she's going to come over to my part of the Capitol and say, here's the things we need to also continue to get funded and worked on.

What are we talking about here? We're just talking about the massive amount of AI energy needs and why that's so important is because AI is driving so much more. If you think about driverless cars or you think about the applications in aviation or you think about it across many different applications, one thing we know is we need a lot more AI to help drive down those energy needs and basically keep Moore's Law going, if you will.

And so the labs and the companies here are going to talk about why they think that's so important in the partnership, why what they're doing needs a little bit more of energy R&D investment.

But a couple of things. One on the material science side, which we know well in our region obviously how important material science is, that DOE could probably provide some leadership here in answering some questions for us on the material science side and this is so important.

The secretary you might have caught was in Moses Lake yesterday on silicon anodes. Just the fact that the United States is saying hey, we don't have enough graphite, and we're not going to let the future of battery technology be dictated by graphite. We're going to switch over to silicon anodes.

So here we're saying okay, what are the material science questions that would accelerate us on computing and also on energy efficiency? What is it? And I'm pretty sure that Jason could talk about this, you know, from cloud computing, and quantum computing, and a scaling perspective.

What we need to do is kind of like what do we need to do to crack the code on the energy efficiency side of AI? And these days, all these companies have been working on it. So I'm so excited and I think this is a very important summit, if you will, between the leaders in AI and in chip manufacturing, and our national laboratories in the West to really try to get this next level of innovation done and done quickly. So thank you.

AI Roundtable Event, February 23, 2024

Sen. Cantwell Remarks

[VIDEO]

Sen. Cantwell: What I love about Secretary Granholm she is a frequent visitor to our state. I was sitting here looking and you can see the University of Washington from here and they also were pretty big player in all of this.

But Secretary Granholm has not just been to the national lab, but has been to visit us on sustainable aviation fuel, I was with her yesterday on next generation battery technology made from silicon anodes, instead of graphite anodes. You have been here on many, many other things and now today on AI. So we so, so, appreciate your leadership.

It's really, really exciting to have you at the helm when we're talking about this kind of transformation. And because what you just mentioned is you need to have a public private partnership and collaboration. And I know you knew that before you got to the Secretary's job as governor of a state where they also had to make a key transformation in a sector -- a huge sector, of your economy. And that was not an easy transition. And you really played a big role with that. So thanks for that leadership.

And it's great to be here at PNNL because they are our flagship here. But to be here with Steve Ashby, Dr. Ashby is I just can't say enough about his leadership on so many fronts. But thank you for the great storage launchpad efforts that they are leading and as you mentioned, some of the national security challenges. The problem is nobody knows what they do, because we can't talk about it. We have to go underground to see it and then you're not supposed to talk about it. So it's these little known activities, obviously at all our labs, this kind of effort.

And we just appreciate having this kind of collaboration with everybody this morning. So we love to collaborate in the Northwest, we love it, love it, love it. That's kind of the big picture thing. Right now when you think about it too we're trying to lead that charge nationally.

Thinking about this private sector lander that landed yesterday. It's like we're trying to unleash that next generation of AI technology that will help enable the private sector to go as fast as they possibly can, but do the things that we need to do to help enable those thorny R&D issues like how much electricity is needed in AI applications. And then trying to come up with good answers that can be spread across the spectrum. So I just want to echo those pressing issues on energy, on national security, and on science.

I just want to mention PNNL working with Microsoft and using AI to identify new material energy applications like batteries, everybody here we've already had a chance to chit chat a little bit -- it is about that huge opportunity to be really, really, really, really smart about the supply chain, and figure out what we need and bring it home or concentrate it so we can go faster.

And that is really interesting from a big economic issue which you guys probably don't have to worry about as much every day, but somebody in my job has to worry about every day. We are not growing the middle class. It hasn't grown. So this little brand we have, the United States of America, the land of upward mobility isn't happening.

But guess what, if advanced manufacturing meets the information age, and you can have a renaissance in U.S. manufacturing, and the secretary could give you chapter and verse about how many jobs we already have enabled, we still have the workers to do that...

Secretary Granholm: 14.81 million.

Sen. Cantwell: There is this huge opportunity for the United States to go back to skilling and training people to your technical degrees with six-figure incomes, and who doesn't want that? And so then I think about the United States in general, just I'm telling you in the DNA of Americans is innovation. It is just there. Give them a challenge outline and I guarantee you they will come up with solution.

So I just want to make sure I -- there's something else - oh, you mentioned fusion and since Helion, Zap Energy, and Avalanche are all here on the road, same kind of dynamic. People were saying I want to be next for a manufacturing base. Since obviously, aviation was already here. We thought oh, if this hits we'll have a big manufacturing opportunity.

But it is that partnership, I guess I'd say between, you know, the information age, which is really what all CHIPS and science was saying was that you have to translate science faster, that we can't just tell university professors to publish, publish, publish and have the patent, patent, patent and translate faster, faster, faster, so we can be more competitive.

So that element was a big discussion and I was really proud of where the energy hat as the chair of the Commerce Committee, again, says, as one longtime Energy Committee staffer said, We know Cantwell ~~can't~~ was not going to leave the labs behind. And that was very true. Now there were some moments when some other people wanted to leave the labs behind.

And that was very true. Now there were some moments when some other people wanted to leave the labs behind. And we were like, no, no, we're not.

Labs are test beds. And that's really what we're talking about today, right? Are, what can we do to take the thorniest issues that the individual companies don't have the opportunity to solve, and what do we need to put testbed resources behind, so that we can help with that?

So, I just want to mention a couple of things. That in 2021, Todd Young and I authored the [FUTURE of] AI Bill draft, which became the National AI Advisory Committee. So, four years ago, we really did think about this, and we got everybody's input. And that became the focal point of what both the structure is today, and the President's executive order.

But now, Senator Young and I are working on follow up legislation that would really create those testbeds, in addition to the 500 scientists authorization.

I mean, we look at it as four pillars.

One, the United States cannot fall behind. And so, what is the key elements of our competitiveness?

Two, how does the U.S. government stay ahead, so that they know in their own decision making what they need to do, which is kind of growing our AI muscle as an organization.

Dealing with the immediate threat on the security side from deepfakes and Ryan Calo here at the University of Washington, they are a leader, literally in the deepfake paradigm. He told me a couple years ago, he goes, this will get so good, you won't be able to tell the difference. So we have to get to a

point. DARPA does a good job now, of publishing and distinguishing. But at some point, it'll become trickier. So we got to we got to move faster.

And then the last thing, as you mentioned, is the scaling of the workforce in general. So that we can educate and skill people. Not just for us to maintain our competitiveness, but also to think about economies in transition.

I have a young nephew that works in the tech sector, and he said, Maria, instead of a GI Bill, we need an AI education bill. And I was like, yeah, he's right, he's right. It's, it's the same thing. We need to skill and train a bunch of people in what will enable them in their current jobs to be more competitive, but also to then take an upward step in, you know, possible expansion of that.

One last thing I'll just mention, and I know, I'm sorry, I talked too much about all of that. But it's just I wanted you guys to know what's happening, physically, you know, on the Commerce Committee, as they have the lead in trying to deal with this. But always working directly with energy and our energy partners too.

And being a senior member of the energy committee, is that, we have tried our hand, and Jonathan Hale, who's with me here, has been working very diligently on something called the Guard Act, and the Guard Act is trying to give the United States some ability, legally, to shut down infiltration of things that we think are foreign influences that literally do damage either to U.S. citizens or U.S. military. Now, that's easier said than done, particularly from a legal perspective. But we have been in consultation with all federal agencies.

Anyway, but we still hope to get there is all I'm going to say. We still hope to get there, on the Guard Act. but we'd love to partner with anybody here, who either from a technology perspective might have some tools, because we think this is going to be, you know, continue to be pretty deep into the kind of activities that foreign entities might do. That, you know, will take a lot of technology to discover what they might be doing.

But the key problem we have is that we do not have a legal authority as a nation to stop this, and we're trying to create that construct.

So thank you very much, again, Steve, great to be with you at your PNNL facility here in Seattle.