

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell
Morning Joe Interview with Jonathan Lemire
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[\[VIDEO\]](#)

Jonathan Lemire: Meanwhile, more than two dozen Democratic senators signed onto a letter calling for Attorney General Pam Bondi and the Department of Justice to stop their push to gain access to state voter data.

The letter comes after the DOJ filed lawsuits against 24 states that refused to comply with their order to hand over that election information. Joining us now, Senator Maria Cantwell of Washington state. She is one of the lawmakers that signed that letter to DOJ.

Madam Senator, thank you so much for joining us this morning. We just played a few moments ago President Trump in [his] National Prayer Breakfast address. It's still ongoing. Again, repeated his false claims about the 2020 election, and you twin that with Tulsi Gabbard's recent visit to the polling place outside Atlanta. Certainly, election security and what the federal government may be up to – front of mind.

Sen. Cantwell: Well, it's a huge concern. We already have seen the civil rights and civil liberties of Americans stepped on. They militarized a response to free speech, and we have the tragic loss of life in Minnesota.

Now they're basically saying, I'm going to go after your civil rights and civil liberties and your right to cast a vote, and we're actually going to have intelligence agencies and the FBI investigate. What are you investigating? These are public [voter] rolls, that information is public, but no, they want to go behind those rolls and get personal information about American citizens.

For what purpose? To spy on them, to connect to this database, or like in the DOGE example, where they collected information and then it got out to the private sector, and onto the web. So we know this: vote-by-mail is a very secure way of voting.

No one under the penalty of five years in jail or \$10,000 is going to go and file a false ballot if you're an [undocumented] immigrant. So if this is somehow conflating these issues, it's just wrongheaded, and there was nothing about the last election that any court found wrong either. So this is just preposterous.

Lemire: And vote-by-mail [is] a very popular option in your home state. The attorney general, in her letter to the governor of Minnesota amidst these ICE operations, demanded voter roll information there, almost – as some local officials were saying – almost like in a blackmail kind of way, like, hey, we'll back off if you give us what we need.

What are your Republican colleagues in the Senate, the body that has at times pushed back against President Trump's more outlandish or dangerous schemes, [saying]? What are they telling [you]?

Sen. Cantwell: Well, I think you will hear libertarian voices express themselves. We had a hearing yesterday about automated vehicles, and several Republicans were asking, well, wait, what are you going to collect and in the automated vehicle response of the driver, and what are you going to keep and what are you going to do with it?

So, there is that streak within the Republican Party that understands that you can't spy on Americans. But that's literally what you're saying right now with the FBI and the Director of National Intelligence saying we want this information because we want to complete a database on Americans.

Now the President may want to discourage people from voting. As the economy gets worse [then] his demand for saying that there is something wrong with voter fraud seems to go up. But we have to show people that in the United States of America, we believe in your right to go cast a vote, and the penalties are there, and we have not seen this abuse.

So this, going back to the last election, is just more falsehoods and Republicans have to stand up for this. They have to stand up for these civil rights and civil liberties. And I think that's the case we made in Minnesota, and they've backed off a little bit, although it's hard to tell any given day, any moment, what the President says [and] where they really are.

Lemire: Yeah, you and Democrats, you and your colleagues, have found a way to push back against some of the DHS funding mechanisms by not voting for the appropriations and the fact there might be a limited government shutdown. Is there more that can be done on this, on the idea of actual election integrity, in terms of keeping the DOJ [and the] federal government out of what has always been a state and local matter? Elections are local in the United States.

Sen. Cantwell: Yes, I think, you know, there was an earlier effort here where the business community stood up and said, wait a minute, no. We believe in doing business in a democracy. We don't like the fact that now all of a sudden, you're going to create this environment where we're not clear about democracy.

They all signed a letter on securing the Voting Rights Act and standing up for this. So, I think the business community has to be a little louder [with] telling people, no, we have free and fair elections. We have the transfer of power. So, stop diluting it, and stop spying on US citizens to get their information in hopes of discouraging them.

Now the other issue we have to deal with is the notion that the Postmaster General is all of a sudden going to say, I'm not counting these ballots. So, you're going to go collect voter ballots and then deliver them to a [distribution] center, and all of a sudden you're not going to postmark them?

So, need this next election to be seen as every American who is a US citizen has the right to cast this ballot, and every vote cast before the election is going to be counted.

Lemire: Well, lastly, on a less weighty matter, [I] can't help but notice the pin you're wearing – Seattle Seahawks pin. Washington state, your Seattle Seahawks are playing my New England Patriots this Sunday in the Super Bowl. We agree it's going to be a close game, but you come to the table with a wager.

Sen. Cantwell: Well, I was thinking Jonathan, I kind of looked you up a little bit. Not only are you a sports fan, but being from Massachusetts, like, oh. Anyway, I put my Seahawk pin in. We're really proud of Jody Allen and John Schneider and Mike MacDonald. We're proud of this organization.

But I thought, well, listen, since Jonathan's got this great sports background: I think if we win, I interview you. Okay? I think if somehow something goes differently, I think you get to call the question on me whenever you want, which is a little bit of privilege because sometimes we're available, and sometimes when you really like us to be available...

Lemire: It's a tremendous shock to the audience that sometimes lawmakers don't want to take certain questions! So that is indeed a generous offer. Your questions to me, I think my answers are mostly about a little sleep I get, but we can certainly...

Sen. Cantwell: Oh, I didn't say what the subject was, okay.

Lemire: We will see. Let's hope for my sake it doesn't come to that.

Sen. Cantwell: Yes, let's do. All right, let's do but good luck.

Lemire: Thank you, and good luck to you as well. Seahawks, Patriots, Sunday will be a nice distraction for us all. Senator Maria Cantwell of Washington State, thank you. Go Pats.

Sen. Cantwell: Go Hawks.