

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

Remarks at Washington International Trade Association 2026 Annual Awards Dinner

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[\[VIDEO\]](#)

Sen. Cantwell: Being able to address you tonight at the Washington International Trade Association dinner, it is a big group. But I have to tell you, when I mentioned about tonight, I actually thought it was my Washington trade association that was in town.

Is there anybody from the State of Washington here tonight? Okay, a few. Trade is very important to the State of Washington, and so I'm so honored to be honored tonight, along with my colleague Senator Young from Indiana.

He is a hard-working senator from the Commerce Committee, and he and I have joined forces on many pieces of legislation, the CHIPS & Science Act, an AI role for the U.S. government, and many other pieces of legislation. And we have begun to talk about what to do to increase trade policy in the United States of America in this era of a global economy.

I think what's most exciting about the State of Washington is that we're in a very remote part of the United States, and because of that, does anybody know Edgar Martinez? I was a big advocate for Edgar Martinez making it into the Hall of Fame, but since we were way out in Seattle and nobody watched baseball late at night, nobody knew who Edgar Martinez was, and it took him several tries to get into the Hall of Fame.

In fact, many sportswriters would go around saying, "Well, he's a DH. He doesn't deserve to be in the Hall of Fame. Which then I responded, "If Edgar Martinez had played for the New York Yankees, would he be in the Hall of Fame?" And everybody would always say, "Absolutely." And he ended up in the Hall of Fame.

And that is a perfect example of the mentality of the Northwest. We are in a remote part of the country, and so we believe in trade. We know that we can't just exist on the relationship between Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Alaska, our Canadian neighbors. Although there is a movement in the Northwest where two provinces and three states, we want to become our own country.

But because we're so remote, it has made us focus on trade. It has made us focus on trade policy. It has made us advocate for trade policy, and it has made us efficient at the policies around trade, whether that's the EXIM Bank or – [applause] – Big support for the EXIM Bank. In fact, fought hard and got Mitch McConnell – even though the Heritage Foundation didn't want it – to reauthorize and fund the EXIM Bank, and we now have to do it again.

When I was in our state legislature back in the 1980s – long, long, long time ago. Even then, there were organizations that went around to chambers of commerce, to business meetings, to organizations, and said, "You've got to be an exporter. You have to think about the global economy." And it's strange to think now how successful many of our exporters are because of that endeavor.

And it was at the same time that Microsoft was being founded in the 80s. That probably also helped the ethos of a place where national companies were becoming multinational and how they looked at the

world and getting their products adopted, and it certainly helped that Boeing was there, and a big part of their economy was shipping product overseas.

So the Pacific Northwest has always looked at these policies as central to our state economy, and we are one of the most trade-dependent states in the United States because of it. But it isn't just simple. It isn't just software and airplanes.

It isn't just agricultural products. It isn't just lots of things that we are selling on an international basis to our Asia-Pacific partners in the era of the Pacific, when we're on the Pacific – it is literally an attempt by all of us to say that we want all our small businesses to have at least 25 percent of their sales in over six markets.

Now that sounds strange, but I guarantee you, you can go knock on a door in Ballard, Washington, where we sell a lot of beer, and they will tell you that these trade policies made their beer popular in Nordic countries and helped make them successful.

So you can imagine as the tariff discussion started here in the new administration, Washingtonians, we were definitely not down with that. And that is why I introduced with Senator Grassley the proposal to say that the United States Congress, under our Constitution, is in charge of trade policy, and any trade deal should come before the United States Congress, including any tariffs.

And Senator Grassley and I were successful at getting seven Democrats and seven Republicans to join us, and now we're asking our colleagues, even in the face of the court's decisions, to still help us clarify that these trade agreements and trade deals are still now ready and ripe for us to do if we would just come back together and try to get them done.

I'm so excited about the global economy opportunities that we live in. I've proposed ideas for a technology NATO that is saying take the most sophisticated technology countries like the U.S. and Japan and India and others, and make an alliance and basically say that these are the rules of technology. And if you don't apply those rules to your market, then people should not buy your product.

And that is the way the United States of America could get an upper hand on some of the competition that we face from China. I'm also for a U.S. / Middle East Free Trade Agreement. It is time for the United States not only to think about how to better stabilize that region of the world with new technology development led and aided by Israel, but also to figure out how to get those countries to standardize on U.S. technology and the U.S. stack instead of what will happen if we ignore it, and China becomes the dominant force there instead.

So, with 95% of consumers outside of the United States, I want us as a nation, I want us as Democrats, I want us as members of Congress and the United States Senate to say part of our economic strategy is reaching those consumers outside of the United States.

And when people stop and think about what happened in the pandemic, right before the pandemic, the global middle class reached a top 50% of the world population. So that meant that there was a better income population to sell products to, but it got eclipsed by the COVID pandemic, and everybody just hunkered down and realized what supply chains meant.

But now that we're out of that pandemic, and now that we can look more importantly about why supply chain resiliency really matters, and we can build alliances, we also can't forget the unbelievable opportunity that exists.

So when there is a world demand for what is it, 40,000 airplanes on a global basis? When you look at the world demand for agriculture products, when you look at the world demand again, just on AI alone, the United States needs to be smarter. We need to be more strategic about trade, and we certainly need to be more global.

So thank you. Thank you for this. Thank you for this award tonight, and thank you for being who you are and working so hard on these policies for the future of our country.

I had a chance to see the Biden administration Secretary of State once, and we were talking about the national security issues and foreign policy, and I reminded him what a 21-year-old kid who drove me around Washington State.

He happened to be from Bellingham, Washington, which is right on our border. So if you grow up in Bellingham, you kind of already are a little international, just from that basis. And he said, "Senator, everybody knows trade changes culture," and so that's what I said to our secretary of state.

Because our foreign policy cannot be about military might, and it can't be about cutting people off with tariffs. Our strategy has to be opening markets, delivering great U.S. products, building a better world, and surviving on greater alliances. Thank you all very much.