

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Hearing on the President's Budget Request

April 21, 2026

Sen. Cantwell Q&A with Sec. Wright

[VIDEO]

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Secretary Wright, I was hoping when you went to Hanford, which I'm glad you did go, in December, that we might get on the same page as it related to those milestones for the Hanford cleanup.

And yet, the President's budget has a massive cut suggested in it. I think, \$3.76 billion less than what was [required] to meet those Tri-Party Agreements, including some [demolition] of the Hanford 324 Building and radioactive leaks at 1000 feet from the Columbia River.

So, I'm trying to understand, is the department intending to seek modification to the Tri-Party Agreement or the consent decree? How do you expect that you could possibly meet those legal requirements with [those] kind cuts to the timeline?

Sen. Wright: I don't think the cuts are – the cuts are modest. The cuts are about efficiency improving. We're not planning to revisit the agreement or not meet any of the targets. In fact, our plan is to exceed the targets.

And the monitoring you mentioned going to the Columbia River, the monitoring of those of those groundwater things are going on. We'll pump a lot of groundwater out to treat them. No change in the scope or the urgency of the project Hanford cleanup.

Sen. Cantwell: Where [are] the savings coming from? Because you will become in a long line of energy secretaries – I think I'm going to create a plaque in my wall of every energy secretary that ever said – my colleague from Idaho was laughing, because he knows it's true – that basically said I can do a clean-up on the cheap and cut the budget, and then basically couldn't.

And then the literal agreement between the federal government and the state that is just holding the federal government accountable basically gets met, and then people come up with the resources. So we're definitely disappointed. The workforce is definitely disappointed.

And when you think about the progress that has been made at the [Hanford] Vit Plant, now is not the time to short [change] that. But I've got to go on to another subject that's affecting our economy, and that is just this high fuel cost.

Obviously don't agree with what the President is doing in the Middle East, but as my colleague from California just said, you're also cutting these [energy] programs that are the future for how we get out of this situation.

And so for us, we are a very expensive fuel state writ-large, because we're an isolated market. No one is dragging fuel from the Atlantic all the way up to the north Pacific, where we are. That's not going to happen.

So, our fuel comes from Alaska, and we refine it and we use it for jet fuel. So this whole process of us now having flights canceled – front page of the Seattle Times this morning – flights canceled because of the high cost of jet fuel.

In fact, the story says that Alaska Airlines is expected to spend \$600 million more in expenses this quarter because of these high fuel costs. Okay, so you can complain about the Middle East. I'm not even complaining about the Middle East.

I'm complaining about the fact that you're cutting the hydrogen program and that in the Big Beautiful Bill, they cut the sustainable tax credit in value. And so you're really crippling the next generation of jet fuel.

And so I want to hear what your answer is to do you believe in those cripplings of this or do you believe in us continuing to lead as a nation [that] is going to diversify off of the high cost of jet fuel as a way to have our airlines grow. It's a very big export for us as a country. So I want a strong, healthy airline industry. I want a strong aviation innovation sector.

Sec. Wright: Absolutely, and so do I. I would say it is frustrating to see a little bit higher energy prices right now. They're still well lower than they were four years ago in the middle of the Biden administration.

Sen. Cantwell: I want to stop you right there. There's nobody in the Northwest who thinks that. There's nobody in the Northwest that thinks what's going on right now is okay, not when they wake up and airline flights are being canceled because of high fuel costs or diesel is at, whatever it is, six or seven. No one thinks it's okay.

Sec. Wright: I didn't say okay. I just said, cheaper than they were during the Biden administration, and they will be cheaper as time goes forward. They will continue to come down.

Sen. Cantwell: And things were horrible during Katrina, but does that mean we want to still have hurricanes and devastation, or do we want to try to get out of the way in front of them?

So I think here we're trying to say, let's get out of the way [...] of diversifying our fuel source so that we're not so dependent on Middle East oil, and certainly diversify off of a jet fuel source.

But if you cut the hydrogen hubs, and you basically are supportive, and that's just what I want to know: are you supportive of this cut that was done to reduce the Sustainable Aviation Fuel Tax Credit that was done in the Big Beautiful Bill.

Sec. Wright: The sustainable aviation fuels to date are meaningful drivers of upward prices for jet fuels. We want to have affordable, reliable energy for everyone. We want to have choice in that. And as we get better fuel technologies that can drive down the cost of alternative sources, we're all for that.

Hydrogen hubs, for example, had a target production cost of \$2 a kilogram. They couldn't demonstrate anything on their plan below \$8 a kilogram. And there's a lack of infrastructure to move fuels on the West Coast as you said.

Sen. Cantwell: Well, I know you've been in the private sector, and I know you've been in innovation, and you know the difference between early tax credits for things that haven't been developed – where no one else will development, and the government does – and long term stable companies that no longer need the tax credits because the market has been well established.

[Sustainable] jet fuel, the market isn't established, okay? Alternative, sustainable jet fuels. And so if you could for the record, just write me something that says whether you agree with the cut, the non-hydrogen cut that was in the Big Beautiful Bill as it relates to the Sustainable Aviation Tax Credit.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.