

US Senator Maria Cantwell

**Senate Energy Committee Hearing to examine the President's budget request for the U.S.
Department of Energy for Fiscal Year 2026**

June 18th, 2025

Senator Cantwell Q&A

[VIDEO]

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Secretary, good to see you. We had a chance to say hello earlier. I invited you again to the Tri-Cities. You said you think you're coming sometime soon this summer or fall. So, we look forward to seeing you there and being with you.

The Hanford budget and the Tri-Party Agreement, there have been cuts to the Hanford Office: [they] lost 94 people out of their 308 Department of Energy workforce. These are managers. There's various issues with the budget request. So, how do you plan to meet the Tri-Party Agreement with the budget and workforce depletions.

Wright: Yeah, a huge part of the effort at the Department the first few months has been to right size the Department, which is to look at how do we do things today, and what's a more efficient way to do that. The Department head count grew well over 20% over the last four years, and I would say no evidence that it was more productive at the end of those four years.

So again, as a businessman, except for during COVID, I never laid anyone off in my entire career. So, I don't take the personnel decisions lightly. In fact, I take them very heavily.

Sen. Cantwell: I think a big moment is coming at Hanford. So, I wish I could -- anyway, we'll see each other in the Tri-Cities, and we'll go over it.

Wright: Yes.

Sen. Cantwell: But, for a long time, there were lots of schemes about how we were going to clean up Hanford. But guess what? Vitrification is on the move. So now, there's so much more the federal government can do in meeting the budget to meet the Tri-Party Agreement because we're actually on our way.

So, I guess, we'll talk about this in more detail, but that's what's at stake here. The normal funding is missing the opportunity to actually get this project, that has cost us so much over such a long period of time, where we really need it to be. So that's the key point. But we'll go over those details.

Do you support base load hydropower online?

Wright: Absolutely, hydro has been a great resource for this country.

Sen. Cantwell: Okay, do you think you consider that part of base load power?

Senator Murkowski and I have a bill basically giving tax credits at very low cost just to help keep the efficiency of the hydro system. As we look at all the challenges we face with new power demands, making that system as efficient as possible is really critical, and we consider that base load power. So, I'm just asking, maybe you can look at the Murkowski-Cantwell bill?

Wright: Yeah, I would view it as base load power, and the extent that we can repower and increase the yield from existing hydro assets.

Sen. Cantwell: That's exactly what we're talking about.

Wright: They are quite beneficial to our electricity grid.

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you. They're beneficial in a lot of ways, but definitely to the grid. So, thank you for that. Do you support eliminating 45V -- maybe this was asked by my colleague while I was gone -- but 45V hydrogen production tax credit was proposed to be eliminated. Do you support that? Or where are you on this hydrogen tax credit?

Wright: The government record in picking winners and losers and subsidizing in energy is a very poor one. So my default position is, the less government involvement on the scales of energy sources, the better. I realize in the real world, that's not possible. So, we got to get rid of you -- got to prioritize which ones are the most offensive. And I mentioned wind, solar and batteries, certainly as technologies that we've subsidized and they've led to more expensive electricity. I would put them maybe at the most offensive.

Hydrogen. it's tough with the math to see how, in the long term, it becomes a meaningful commercial energy source.

Sen. Cantwell: Well, again, there's lots of chapters here we could again talk about, but I actually think getting rid of the tax credits that we have, some of the other ones, broadly, are going to lead to electricity increased cost.

And so, can I get you to tell me about the hydrogen hubs, whether you believe you support the hydrogen hubs and moving forward on this?

Wright: So, we put together, as I'm sure you've heard, and we've published it on the website, this project review process. We have a cross-functional team that evaluates every project. We're going through 500 projects.

Sen. Cantwell: But is that data call a way to kill the projects? Or no, you really believe in funding some?

Wright: Oh, absolutely. No, we are funding plenty of projects right now, and we don't stop funding any project. We're funding all of the existing projects right now, and when we evaluate them -- no, plenty of projects will pass. Plenty of projects will pass. Other projects we'll say, "Hey, can you modify it this way to make it much more beneficial?" Some projects will be modified, and some projects will be ended.

Sen. Cantwell: What application are you most excited about in a hydrogen hub area? What application? Fertilizer, jet fuel, something else? What are you most excited about?

Wright: Well, so the highest value use of hydrogen, right? So, it's expensive to produce, but there are high-value uses of hydrogen. Like we produce it today commercially, because in refining, it's very high value. In fertilizers, in materials, in chemistry, the problem is: What's the cost to produce the hydrogen? And are there uses of it that their value is above the cost? I say energy is about two things: it's just about people and math.

Sen. Cantwell: Well, we think even going back to the 45V -- my time has expired -- but in looking at green hydro, which we have in the Northwest, drives down the cost and provides sources for very hard to serve, hard to decarbonize big sectors of the economy.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.