

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources – Hearing to Consider the Nominations of Honorable Lanny Erdos to be the Director of the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement of the United States Department of the Interior; Ms. Audrey Robertson to be Assistant Secretary of Energy for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy; Mr. Timothy Walsh to be Assistant Secretary of Energy for Environmental Management, and Mr. David Eisner to be Assistant Secretary of Energy for International Affairs.

July 9th, 2025

[[VIDEO](#)]

Sen. Cantwell: I congratulate all the nominees. Thank you, Mr. Walsh. My line is a little more detailed on this question about commitments to the Hanford cleanup mission, and that's one of the key responsibilities you'll have. This means, over the next 15 years, removing and treating 56 million gallons of nuclear waste, so hardly something that I would call an ongoing thing, that people you know, certainly the state of Washington, has a consent decree with the DOE because we want to see it cleaned up, not because we want it to continue. And so the notion that somebody would suggest that somehow, we want this to continue.

We have a mission, and we want to move on, and so we are happy to move on from that, but we also can't do it on the cheap. And oftentimes people look at the budget and they're like, oh, let's do it on the cheap. Or, you know, when we had cleanup all around the United States, people came together and said, 'oh, let's always get that budget.'

But as Colorado and South Carolina, and other places that were easy to clean up got done, then everybody, all of a sudden said, well, maybe we can do this on the cheap in the northwest. So, you can't, you got to get it done right, and we want to make sure that already leaking storage tanks get the priority that they deserve.

So, the major understanding here is the Tri-Party Agreement and Consent Decree milestones that basically say these are the milestones that need to be met in cleaning up 586 square miles of Cold War era nuclear contaminants. That's literally just what it takes -- you have to make these investments and continue.

So, do you commit to upholding the Tri-Party Agreement and the Consent Decree milestones that are part of this process?

Walsh: Yeah. Thank you for that question. Senator Cantwell, and you know, before I really look forward to getting out to Hanford, meeting you out there, and digging into this. It's a critically important mission. The people of Washington state and indeed, all Americans deserve to live in a safe, clean environment. I know this has been going an ongoing process.

Cantwell: This is a federal responsibility, right?

Walsh: It is.

Cantwell: So, it's the federal government's responsibility. We just are a little more of a watch dog just because we're there. Yes, and we have to be.

Walsh: And I'm a man of action. I understand the consent agreement. I understand the Tri Party Agreement. It has outlined the framework of the cleanup and responsibilities, and has, it's a living document that's been modified a few times over the last 20 years, and you have my commitment that we're going to work together and that it's going to be a priority in the Office of Environmental Management.

Cantwell: What nuclear waste understanding and technical expertise would you bring to the situation?

Walsh: Well, I can tell you that I'm a quick learner [and have] an engineering background. I'm a sort of an engineering geek, and like anything I've accomplished in my life, whether it was building a complex semiconductor plant, you rely on the experts. And I think what Washington, you know, Hanford site needs is really leadership and a good, solid plan that's well executed, and that's what I intend to bring.

Cantwell: Thank you. Thank you for that. Ms. Robertson, could you talk about the budget cuts to EERE?

Robertson: Thank you, Senator for the question. I am not in the department, so it's very difficult to me to talk specifically about decisions that have been made in the department at this time.

Cantwell: What do you think ... I mean, we have projects that are already, you know, underway, and you're talking about significant cuts to things like the Battery 500 Consortium. Do you believe in those kinds of activities?

Robertson: I am not familiar with the Battery 500 Consortium.

Cantwell: Okay, so you're trying to get a job with this level of oversight on energy efficiency and renewable and this is probably one of the [National] Labs biggest effort on storage, bringing grid scale storage.

Robertson: Is this at PNNL?

Cantwell: Yes, yes.

Robertson: Okay. I'm sorry. I didn't know that was what it was referred to. I am well aware of their activities in both grid -- they released a big report this week in both grids and battery innovation. My perspective on the budget as an outsider and a civilian...

Cantwell: I'm just asking you about this idea that we should be investing and trying to test bed to get to a higher level of battery technology, I mean battery mass grid-scale storage. Whether you support that concept ---

Robertson: I support battery technology and innovation as a very important function of the Department of Energy, absolutely.

Cantwell: And funding things like that at the National Lab?

Robertson: Funding at the National Labs, again, not being in the building, not understanding all of the demands on the budget, it's very difficult for me to speak about a specific program when I'm not in a position to evaluate all of the demands on the department.

Cantwell: Okay, thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.