

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

Opening Statement at Senate Commerce Committee DOT Nomination Hearing

Witness: Mr. Peter Buttigieg, of Indiana, to be Secretary of Department of Transportation

January 21, 2021

Cantwell: Well, thank you Mr. Chairman, and I certainly appreciate the great collegial working relationship that we have established thus far and I look forward to growing it in this Congress. As you know, we were able to work together productively and pass landmark aviation safety legislation, and many other pieces of legislation, including the Coast Guard bill that moved out of this committee and then on to other moving legislation and successfully implemented into law, so thank you for that productivity among other legislative priorities.

I do want to take a second since we have both the members of our committee who were able to successfully pull off yesterday's celebration just thank Senators Blunt and Klobuchar for getting us safely through yesterday and having the magnificent celebration that it was and look forward to working with them. And certainly want to again thank, as you mentioned, Secretary Chao for her work on many transportation priorities. I think this committee is a hallmark of bipartisan cooperation. A lot of the subjects we deal with are just hard problems to solve, and we've been able to continue to work together in a bipartisan fashion, so I hope that will continue. I think transportation, of all the sectors that we deal with, transportation should be one of those, in which we should be able to use facts and information and come together on priorities.

So, I am very excited that the President has nominated Mayor Pete Buttigieg to run the Transportation Agency. And I look forward to his vision in leading that Department of Transportation. As a mayor, I know you're no stranger to the challenges that a region faces on transportation infrastructure issues. I know that you earned national recognition for your "smart streets" project that created a safe environment for all road users, the project resulted in over \$100 million in private sector investment. You used your experience as Mayor to help forge that and I hope that you will do that for communities across the United States of America.

For us, in the state of Washington, we're a big export state. Not only do we export our own products, so everything from cherries and wheat and apples and airplanes, but we also are a big pass through for many of the Midwest agricultural products reaching Asian destinations. So, to say that we need infrastructure investment is an understatement. The growth of the Pacific and the demand for U.S. products is a good problem to have, we just need to deal with the bottlenecks. And congestion in Puget Sound is at record levels. We need to address projects like the I-5 Columbia River Bridge replacement, the West Seattle Bridge replacement, the North-South Corridor in Spokane. And we need to make infrastructure investment all around the United States of America, including in public transportation. Projects like Sound Transit are facing a \$1 billion shortfall as a result of COVID-19, which jeopardizes the much needed investment throughout Puget Sound.

Today marks the one year anniversary of the first case of the COVID pandemic with a man from Everett, Washington, being tested positive. One of the most impacted sectors in the United States, not the only sector, but one of the most impacted sectors in the United States has been transportation. The Chairman alluded to the fact that this committee played a very aggressive role in trying to come up with solutions for the impacts to the transportation sector whether that was aviation, or most recently, with infrastructure and with Amtrak, but that will continue. The needs to move product and people will continue whether we have a COVID pandemic or not, and so I hope that you will help us in facing these shortfalls.

I also want to point out that, as I mentioned, the movement of freight is particularly important and we will look forward to your leadership and moving, improved ways to move freight around the United States. I continue to think that the legislation that ended up being in the INFRA grant program was very helpful to states across the United States. And I just want to mention the fact that aviation safety and security in the legislation that this committee passed and was implemented into law has to now be administered by the Department of Transportation and the FAA. So, we're going to be looking for your leadership, your success in holding them accountable to the many aspects of that legislation, and helping us move forward. If we want to be the leaders in the United States of America on aviation, we have to be the leaders in aviation safety as well, so we'll look for your leadership on that.

So Mr. Chairman, I'm excited about this nominee's ability to help us focus on transportation issues, and look forward to seeing his leadership at the Department. Thank you.

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Q&A With Witnesses at Senate Commerce Committee DOT Nomination Hearing

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Cantwell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and so I'm going to try to as quick go through a whole variety of things as quick as possible so just, if you can help me out there that would be great. One, just want to clarify the chairman did a great job of talking about INFRA and BUILD and your support for it. Do you think we need a significant investment in that? I look at what--in 2018, we were \$18.9 trillion worth of goods shipped in the United States, and that is expected to increase by 40%. So I look at that and say, that's part of our economic strategy: get exports, get them to market quickly. So would you say we need a significant increase in those programs, INFRA and BUILD?

Buttigieg: Absolutely. There needs to be a major investment in order to deliver.

Cantwell: Okay. Would you say that the issue of at grade crossings is also an issue that might need more attention? We just had a derailment in the Northwest, we have a lot of traffic moving through our communities and we hear constantly about safety issues. Do you think that at grade crossings need more attention?

Buttigieg: Yes.

Cantwell: Okay. On aviation, I mentioned in my opening statement about the issues of the legislation we passed and getting the FAA to do its oversight role. There was a report by rank and file FAA employees that 49% of the employees responded and it came they believe safety concerns or incidents would not-- were not being addressed, and that 43% believe that FAA delegated too much. So we've tried to focus our attention here on that issue. But in describing the engagement with aviation, one FAA employee said, "It feels like I'm showing up to a knife fight with nerf weapons." So I want to know that you will make the safety reforms at the FAA a priority.

Buttigieg: I'm committed to doing so. We need to make sure that engineers and the FAA are in the driver's seat when it comes to safety, and we'll be working right away to implement the legislation that you've advanced with regard to ensuring that we have every confidence in safety at the FAA.

Cantwell: Are you willing to make changes in personnel if necessary?

Buttigieg: Yes.

Cantwell: Thank you. I want to go back to transportation again, sorry here, we have a lot of things we want to ask you about. One primary tool for DOT to support transit agency is the

Capital Investment Grant Program. Would you support increasing a federal share of funding for grants to the recently approved project to ensure the pandemic does not halt or delay transportation investments?

Buttigieg: I'll certainly want to take a look at this. I think often we have not created as much predictability and capital planning as we have on the operational side. I'd be eager to look at how we can better fund that.

Cantwell: Okay, and back to aviation manufacturing: my colleague I'm sure will be here sometime today, Senator Moran. Chairman Wicker mentioned a lot of the COVID dollars that were set to focus on aerospace and to focus on aerospace manufacturing. We want to make sure that aerospace manufacturing, impacted again because of the lack of demand in air travel, we don't lose that skill and workforce. So we want to know that you will help us make aviation manufacturing a priority and making sure that retaining a workforce in the United States is as important as retaining the workforce that we see in our air transportation today on the flights and flight attendants, and the pilots.

Buttigieg: Certainly, it's important both economically and strategically for the country so you have my commitment.

Cantwell: Thank you. And then lastly, I am a big Jones Act supporter, and the state of Washington and the trade that we have related to the Jones Act to make sure that we have US flagged vessels, sometimes it gets under attack but I just want to hear that you support the Jones Act.

Buttigieg: Yes, I share your support for the Jones Act, it is so important to a maritime industry that creates hundreds of thousands of jobs, as well as the shipbuilding industry here in the US.

Cantwell: Thank you.