

**U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell**  
**Senate Floor Speech on Spectrum Legislation**

**June 18, 2024**

[\[VIDEO\]](#)

**Sen. Cantwell:** Today, the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation was slated to consider the Spectrum and National Security Act.

This bill, a hard-won compromise months in the making, would have provided a balanced approach to spectrum management, protected our defense by ensuring our military has the telecommunications capacity they need, promote innovation by unleashing spectrum for commercial use, and essential for America's economic and international competitiveness.

It also funded key bipartisan priorities that make our nation more secure and also increased opportunities for Americans to be competitive in higher-wage jobs.

This bill was to be considered in a markup today, and those shared priorities by the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Secretary of Commerce. In fact, they all released a joint statement last week in support of bill.

I ask unanimous consent that their statement be put into the record.

Why did these agencies stop sparring and finally agree to a path forward?

Simply put, it's because spectrum helps each of them meet their responsibilities on behalf of this nation.

The spectrum deal would have put policies in place that give federal agencies equity at each part of their agencies, and a seat at the table in spectrum decision-making.

It eliminated the disruptive interagency disputes that we have come to know, that literally have impeded spectrum policy progress in the past years.

It also reinstated the FCC's spectrum auction authority without compromising national security. The FCC has been without its auction authority for more than a year because the fighting among these special interests threatens our economic growth.

Establishing a sustainable spectrum pipeline would not only spur our own economic growth and promote innovation, but it would have also raised revenues to fund important critical security and economic opportunities across the United States.

One of those key priorities, funded through this legislation, is the continuation of the Affordable Connectivity Program. And I will note that the presiding officer, the president, is very vocal in his support for the Affordable Connectivity Program. I thank him for his leadership.

This Affordable Connectivity Program provides affordable broadband to more than 23 million American households.

Americans need broadband to speak to their doctors, to do their homework, to connect to their jobs, to stay in touch with loved ones.

It's interesting, Mr. President, you will know that there are parts of the United States where people either can't afford broadband, nor are the fees and services requirements affordable enough for people to purchase them. I'm pretty sure there's places like that in Vermont.

So, it's so important to have a program like the Affordable Connectivity Program.

The pandemic laid bare how important broadband access was to every American and to businesses, no different from having access to affordable electricity, or heating, or telephone capacity.

Who are these 23 million Americans?

About half of the ACP households are military families. About a quarter are African American. Another quarter are Latino. 300,000 ACP households are on tribal lands. Over 10 million Americans who use the program are over 50. So, a lot of people on fixed income, elderly, but still count on affordable broadband for their daily lives.

Not surprising, just as in this article that was in yesterday's newspaper in my state, "The end of the internet subsidy puts health care lifeline at risk." And it describes the story of a woman in Idaho who literally was trying to fix her home in a rural community, and actually fell down and broke her leg and then needed that connectivity to maintain connection with her doctors and her health care.

These are the Americans who need this program. They're in every state.

One school employee told me about a student who hadn't done their homework for weeks. Her teacher called to find out. The student didn't want to say. They didn't want to be called out in school. They didn't want any of their friends to know they just didn't have internet services.

She wasn't trying to get out of the work. She was just trying to protect her family and protect herself.

We can't be asking parents to choose between a child's food and their education.

But despite this demonstrated level of need, the Commerce Committee, my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, offered amendments to actually reduce the ACP program. They wanted to get rid of the program that helps these families who cannot afford connectivity.

I'm not surprised because some members on the other side don't even support the ACP program.

But blocking the Committee's progress will have serious consequences.

For example, this legislation also funded a program called "Rip and Replace" to remove Chinese spyware from our telecom system.

Some providers in rural communities and telecom networks don't have the resources to, as we say, rip out the Chinese spyware and replace it with American products. This legislation would also help them.

Releasing more spectrum also would lead to greater adoption of new technologies, like the Open RAN system, another alternative that would help our telecom providers upgrade our infrastructure to new spectrum and get rid of the Chinese technology.

Getting more of the secure technology will protect our communities from network adversaries and allow Americans to be in the lead again on telecommunication network equipment.

Additionally, the all-of-government approach to spectrum management in this bill allows the United States to maintain our commercial and military leadership around the globe, including at important standards-setting bodies where adversaries are going to make inroads.

This bill would have funded an historic investment in our technology advances that we voted for in the CHIPS and Science Act, particularly in what are called EPSCoR states, Tech Hubs, and essential programs to maintain the U.S. competitiveness.

There is no way, Mr. President, that Rip and Replace should be a partisan issue. We don't want Chinese spyware in our telecom system.

There is no way that ACP, affordable connectivity for people who can't afford it, should be a partisan issue.

This is about tackling the cost of expensive broadband for the working poor, and it should not be a partisan issue.

Pushing ahead with grant funding enhances America's innovation and competitiveness, it protects our national security, and it helps us with the economic innovation that we all want to see happen throughout the United States.

I hope my colleagues will stop with obstructing and get back to negotiating on the important legislation that will deliver these national security priorities, and help Americans continue to have access to something as essential as affordable broadband.