

## U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

### Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Hearing on the President's Budget Request

April 29, 2026

#### Sen. Cantwell Q&A with Sec. Burgum

[\[VIDEO\]](#)

**Sen. Cantwell:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Secretary, good to see you. I wanted to bring up a community issue in the Lake Chelan National Recreation Area in Central Washington. You were able to send National Park Service and [Department of] Interior staff to visit there last Thursday. Very much appreciate that. It's about flooding.

First of all, we think we rival the Alps here. I mean, it is spectacularly beautiful. I see somebody in the back nodding their head. So it is unbelievable the access to this area, but we had a devastating 2024 Pioneer Fire that caused flood waters to run down the mountain side, and now a new wastewater treatment plant and boat landing was destroyed, [parts of the Stehekin Valley Road was damaged, and a section of Company Creek Road was washed out].

So, what we're trying to do is get a plan. It's been months trying to get the focus here. And we get that it's a very remote part of our state, but nonetheless, it is part of a giant recreational ecosystem that is, like, almost like a crown jewel within the Cascades.

And so I'm highlighting that you helped us get a temporary road. Park Service was able to contract with the Army Corps. And this last part of the temporary road has to get done, and then we need to get a permanent solution. So, my questions are, can you commit to working with the Stehekin community, the state of Washington, to complete the remaining temporary road?

And can you commit to working with us and the state to [address] the hurdles to implement a long-term solution for this region.

**Sec. Burgum:** Yes, and yes, and I understand we do have a particular issue here where we've got federal and federal and then a chunk of private [land] in between that we're working with the private folks to make sure that we've, across these different land ownerships, that we can get a permanent solution figured out.

**Sen. Cantwell:** Yes, and so you're committing to that. I appreciate that very, very much.

**Sec. Burgum:** And Senator, you're...

**Sen. Cantwell:** You're happy to visit. I'm happy to go with you. I'm happy to take you.

**Sec. Burgum:** That'd be great. I mentioned earlier, I think one of the things to think about, as you guys are thinking about doing this thing, is we don't have a DOT. We don't have funding for all the roads, and we don't have an emergency fund, but every year there's some road that washes out somewhere in a national park.

And just like we have the emergency fire fund, a piece of legislation that would actually set up an emergency road fund that you could tap into would be a great, great thing.

**Sen. Cantwell:** Listen, I got probably like 10 projects like that in the state of Washington devastated by fire. And then, you know, when you have mountains, and you have, you know, fire and you have rain, guess what? Lot of washouts. So happy to work with you on that.

I want to turn to LWCF. We've had a lot of conversations about the staffing at parks, but you know, the president played such a key role when we got the Land and Water Conservation Fund done, as did my colleague, Senator Daines and Senator Gardner, who's no longer here, but served on this committee.

The president literally said, "I'm calling on Congress to send me a bill that fully and permanently funds LWCF and restores our national parks. When I sign that into law, it will be historic to our beautiful public lands." Okay? So then he went on to thank those two.

So, my point is, [for] the Land and Water Conservation [Fund], making that permanent was about getting the funds to go [towards] acquisition. I'm a huge supporter of this. We just lost Jim Whittaker, [a] great American [and the] first American to summit Mount Everest, but more importantly, even, the founder of REI.

What is REI all about? It's access. It's an economy. It's third behind finance and health care. It is a juggernaut of an economy. But guess what it takes? A recipe of continuing [to make] investments in public lands.

LWCF was about making \$900 million in mandatory funding under the [Great American Outdoors Act]. And this demonstrated the support and the president's support for that. So I'm confused why we seem to be with your order changing that [and] not fully funding the public land aspect. This was your [Secretarial] Order 3442.

So, I'm just trying to ask if you will work with me to [make] sure that we actually fund the \$900 [million] in mandatory spending. That really was the key part of the debate, and the President bought into that. And we have a tweet from him saying he bought into it.

I know some of my colleagues here. I understand the chairman's long frustration about this issue, but I also know what the bill did, and I know what the President said, and so now I'm asking you whether you support making sure that that your budget really does uphold that law.

**Sec. Burgum:** Well, we will always follow the law.

**Sen. Cantwell:** That is what you said when I asked you at your confirmation on LWCF. That is exactly what you said. So I'm saying, could you give us an interpretation of how this [is] affect[ed] by your [Secretarial] Order 3442.

**Sec. Burgum:** Well, I would say again, as I encourage this committee and others on the LRF portion of this, which is the deferred maintenance piece that that is, to me, of a of high urgency, because that's where we've got the greatest need.

When I get in front of senators and representatives and governors, everybody's got a repair issue, and we never have enough dollars to do that. And so that's key. The LWCF does direct those dollars specifically. We had that debate last year. I'm not having that debate now, so we'll follow the law.

**Sen. Cantwell:** What does that mean? Do you think that land acquisition is part of LWCF, and that's part of your responsibility, and you will carry it out?

**Sec. Burgum:** Yes, I believe it is, and I hope that – when the federal government funds acquisitions but doesn't fund maintenance, that we just are creating a bigger problem on the back end.

**Sen. Cantwell:** The whole point of the Great American Outdoors Act, which we need to renew that first part of it, is about doing both.

**Sec. Burgum:** One part is permanent, and one part required reauthorization.

**Sen. Cantwell:** And I'm just trying to get, as a secretary, your commitment to the fact that acquiring more land is a great economic recipe for communities, particularly when they don't have any and it becomes a great recreation and creates jobs and it helps our economy.

**Sec. Burgum:** I believe that we've got a \$1.3 trillion recreation economy, but it is case by case specific on whether it's economically good or bad for an economy to move stuff from the private state to the federal state. That's just an economic fact. It isn't always an automatic good that the federal government takes care of it, particularly if the federal government doesn't have the money to take care of it.

**Sen. Cantwell:** I'm talking about whether you add land in Lewis County and grow an economy where people want to have tourism, but I'm going to come see you about this, and we're going to have this longer conversation, I do think there's a conflict still here and I would just – I see my time is way expired.

But I do hope that you will support – our state has less snowpack, which means we just have wetter, warmer conditions. I'm for aquifer storage. I'm for doing something about that. But we have a lot less electricity.

So, I would hope that we could work together on some of these – it can't just be, I'm just against anything that is solar or wind. We've got to get some electricity onto the grid in the northwest. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.