

**U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell**  
**Opening Statement at Executive Session**  
**May 20, 2021**

Cantwell: The committee is considering the nomination of Dr. Eric Lander to be the Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy. This committee held the nomination for Dr. Lander on April 29th and I want to, again, thank my colleague Senator Duckworth for filling in for me and taking the lead on that hearing and all my colleagues for participating.

This position of Director of Office of Science and Technology Policy is charged with advising the president on a broad range of scientific and technical policies to address the nation's problems. We are at a critical moment when science and innovation has never been more important to our health, to our economy, to our well-being, to our planet, and to our way of life. For the first time in our country's history, President Biden has elevated this position to a cabinet level post, underscoring its significance and importance of the role that science will play in decision-making. Dr. Lander, in the hearing we went through the accomplished geneticist, molecular biologist, mathematician, in some of the work that was previously done as President Obama's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, and obviously a variety of issues about past backgrounds and issues.

I will say that I intend to support Mr. Lander today. He is the President's nominee, and while I appreciate the President has added diversity at various cabinet positions, I would have loved to see our woman here in this position, but no doubt Mr. Lander and the President have surrounded the Office of Science and Technology Policy in these positions within the cabinet with a variety of women who I expect to play very key leadership roles. But most importantly, Dr. Lander and I have come to a focus and understanding that the very first task that you should focus on is helping all of us add diversity of women and minorities in the science field. So he and I will be working aggressively on that, we hope that we can continue to give the committee and all our colleagues almost a six month update, every six months, of where we are on this process.

In doing the Endless Frontier Act, we have seen and understood how important an active and aggressive approach that we need to take to this. I'm very proud that the University of Washington had an NSF grant and worked on this very issue, and their most important recommendation to us is we couldn't be passive about this issue. This issue takes an aggressive approach, you have to change the faces of people who are doing science, you have to accommodate women in the challenges that we face that we saw during COVID, of the fact that women were both caregivers and scientists at the same time and thereby didn't have all the resources they needed to get their science work done. And so I'm hoping that we will continue to unpack this issue, that this committee, this committee will not in five years look back on this period and say, "we didn't really move the needle much." I'm hoping that working together, we will be able to move the needle on this very, very important issue.

Why do I care so much about this issue? Because I have seen the work that happens when women participate in science. I see where Melinda Gates did unbelievable work in attracting prizes for people who were dealing with infant and mother mortality at birth all across developing nations. And who showed up to win the prize? A lot of women scientists. Why? Because they really cared about infant and mother mortality at birth, and they didn't like our statistics.

So I know that adding diversity to the sciences will help us change what science we focus on, just as if when we added the number of women to the House of Representatives, we had a 32% increase in the amount of women's health care research that was done. So by adding diversity, we will be more representative and so I appreciate the fact that we will be able to work together and move forward on this issue.