

Ranking Member Cantwell Opening Statement
Executive Session 19
Wednesday, March 4, 2026
[\[VIDEO\]](#)

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for today's markup on two very important pieces of legislation. I too would like to thank the hard-working minority and majority staff for working on these bipartisan priorities for literally years.

First, we will consider the NASA Reauthorization Act. And I want to say that both of these pieces of legislation represent, I believe, critical green lights that use science to basically move the United States forward on technology and innovation, so the United States can lead in both space and weather. The NASA [Authorization] Act from myself and you, Senator Cruz, also with help by Senators Duckworth, Moran, Peters, Luján and Schmitt. And you and I first introduced this in 2024 as a one-year transition bill to provide direction to NASA to maintain America's leadership in aeronautics and exploration. And since we first introduced this, we have worked [extensively] with other members of the Committee, NASA, and stakeholders to make important improvements and to reaffirm our support for NASA's mission and its workforce at this pivotal point.

The State of Washington -- I know the state of Texas as well -- plays a leading role in the nation's aerospace economy. Aerospace is a \$71 billion industry in my state, and supports more than 250,000 jobs, with more than 1,500 companies forming a robust aerospace supply chain, including over 40 Artemis suppliers.

At a hearing in September, four witnesses told this Committee that returning astronauts to the Moon and establishing a presence there is a vital national interest. But we also learned that NASA's plan, with its dependence on a single human lander for the Artemis III mission, was not going to get us there before China. This legislation supports a path forward for our safe return to the Moon that will get us there as soon as possible. And for the first time, our bill establishes a program to develop a permanent moon base and reinforces existing efforts related to lunar surface power and lunar exploration vehicles.

We also extended the operation of the International Space Station for an additional two years -- that will allow NASA...to end operations on ISS [and] to successfully shift to utilizing one or more commercial space stations. We require NASA to evaluate existing potential crew rescue capabilities for the return of astronauts from orbit and from the Moon in emergency and non-emergency scenarios.

This legislation also maintains research into the U.S. competitiveness, including the development of safe and energy-efficient hydrogen-powered and electric propulsion aircraft. In addition, we support the Flight Demonstrator program, developing the efficient thin wing design for future commercial aircraft. The authorization also supports the HiCAM program. This is a high-rate composite aircraft manufacturing project that has strong partnerships with the Aerospace Materials Tech Hub.

And finally, our bill authorizes funding levels for NASA that far exceed what the President's request was. And I think this is important for us to continue to show how enthusiastically Congress supports this. We refuse to accept cuts. And Mr. Chairman, you played a leading role in getting NASA funding in other vehicles. And so we want to continue to keep our focus on this.

Many members of the Committee contributed to this final product. Just two examples. The bill implements an active debris remediation project consistent with the ORBITS Act from Senators Hickenlooper, Wicker, Lummis and myself. And it incorporates the ASCEND Act from Senators Hickenlooper and Cornyn.

Administrator Isaacman likes to say that NASA should take on challenges that are nearly impossible. To do this, NASA needs robust funding to support an ambitious agenda for exploration, science, discovery and technology development, and I think the bill that we're putting forth today will help us accomplish that.

Next, Mr. Chairman, the Weather Act. As you mentioned, there's a lot packed into the Weather Act -- but it has a short title -- but we should not underestimate how important this is to our nation's continued success in letting our citizens know how important science is to determining where we put resources and how we help our citizenry. The 2026 Act from you, Mr. Chairman, myself, Senator Blunt Rochester, Senators Sullivan, Schatz, Moran, Rosen, Sheehy, Klobuchar and Budd, I believe, is a great product. Similar to the NASA bill, it was introduced in 2024 and we continued to work on modernizing our nation's weather forecasting infrastructure and increasing preparedness in the event of extreme weather.

In the State of Washington, we know firsthand how extreme weather has become costly and dangerous. In December, Western Washington endured back-to-back atmospheric rivers that dumped nearly 5 trillion gallons of rain causing massive, devastating floods. Over 70 landslides were reported, blocking major transportation routes, disrupting communities, threatening lives and livelihoods. The devastating floods in Kerrville and Asheville, the fires in Palisades and Lahaina, and too many other natural disasters have shown us that providing Americans with more timely and accurate weather information can avoid billions of dollars in property losses and save lives. In 2025 alone, weather disasters cost the United States \$115 billion. That is why this bill matters.

It establishes an atmospheric river forecast improvement program, modernizes hazardous weather alerts, [weather] radio infrastructure -- as the Chairman mentioned -- strengthens landslide preparedness and helps rural farmers plan for drought and bring new tools to better forecast wildfires, hurricanes and heat waves. This legislation advances many of the recommendations in a Five-Point Plan I outlined last year, to the President and to NOAA. That plan -- we need to continue to make more progress on. But the Weather Act will ensure that America's weather enterprise is nimble, innovative, and equipped to meet the evolving challenges of the 21st Century.

I just want to -- almost every member of the committee has contributed to this legislation including Senator Schatz and Sheehy's Extreme Weather and Wildfire Act, Senator Wicker's

Tornado Act, Senator Sullivan and Baldwin's HABs [Harmful Algal Blooms] legislation...and Senator Markey's FORECAST Act. I also want to thank my colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

Mr. Chairman, I do want to bring up--I know we were going to do a Coast Guard nominee, Jesse Millard. I want to enter into the record a letter we received from a whistleblower about how...Commander Millard retaliated against this individual, and I'd like to enter that into the record. We, in the advent of what we've seen with Fouled Anchor, need to take these issues very seriously, and so I would ask that it be entered into the record.

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