



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE & TRANSPORTATION

Senator Maria Cantwell, Ranking Member ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE POLICY RECORD 2017–2026

OVERVIEW

Since 2017 U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) has pursued an AI policy framework that combines U.S. innovation and competitiveness with federal AI safety standards and independent testing, workforce preparation and consumer protection, and national security. Her record predates the generative-AI boom: In December 2017, Cantwell joined Sens. Todd Young (R-Ind.) and Ed Markey (D-Mass.) to introduce the bipartisan [FUTURE of AI Act](#). The legislation called for federal attention to AI's effects on jobs, privacy, bias, competitiveness and security, and its core advisory-committee provision became law through the FY2021 National Defense Authorization Act, leading to the National AI Advisory Committee (NAIAC).

As Commerce Committee Chair (2021–2025), Cantwell was a key architect of the [CHIPS and Science Act](#), which made AI one of ten key technology focus areas for federal research and development, and used the Committee's jurisdiction over NIST, NSF, technology, consumer protection and interstate commerce to move a [bipartisan package of AI legislation](#). On July 31, 2024 the Committee advanced eight bipartisan AI bills addressing research access, testing, assurance, accountability, education, small-business adoption and the federal AI safety/standards infrastructure.

As Ranking Member (2025–present), Cantwell has continued pressing for a national AI framework with strong federal standards for frontier AI models. In 2026, she reintroduced major innovation and workforce bills and increasingly focused on independent testing of frontier models and risks involving cybersecurity, biodefense and national security. She led the opposition to Republican legislation preventing states from enacting AI regulations. In July 2025, the Senate voted [99-1](#) in favor of her amendment with Sen. Blackburn (R-Tenn.) to strip a ten-year moratorium on state AI regulations from the Republican budget reconciliation bill.

2017–2021 | Building the Federal AI Policy Infrastructure

FUTURE of AI Act. In December 2017, Cantwell joined Sens. Todd Young (R-Ind.) and Ed Markey (D-Mass.) in introducing and ultimately passing first-of-its-kind legislation that laid the groundwork for modern U.S. federal AI policy. It created a federal AI advisory

committee to examine the emerging opportunities and risks posed by artificial intelligence, including impacts on the workforce, privacy, competitiveness, civil rights and national security. This legislation led directly to the creation of the [National AI Advisory Committee \(NAIAC\)](#).

Legislative result. In July 2020, the Commerce Committee approved the [Future of AI Act](#) creating an advisory committee and it was enacted through the National AI Initiative Act in the FY2021 NDAA. The Department of Commerce established the NAIAC and appointed its first members in April 2022.

National AI Advisory Committee. The NAIAC brought together experts from industry, academia and civil society to provide recommendations to the federal government. They included:

- Federal standards for AI safety and security to ensure trustworthy and reliable AI.
- Stronger evaluation and capabilities to test model performance, vulnerabilities and emerging risks.
- Expansion of government testing infrastructure to independently assess advanced AI systems and verify safety claims.
- National public-private partnership that combines federal funding, frontier model availability and high-performance data infrastructure to accelerate AI-enabled scientific discovery and innovation.

2022 | Building U.S. Capacity to Compete in AI

CHIPS and Science Act. As Commerce Committee Chair and a lead architect of the law, Cantwell helped advance a major federal investment in science, semiconductor manufacturing and technology development. The law identified artificial intelligence as one of ten key technology focus areas for the NSF technology directorate and Department of Energy R&D. The law authorized:

- \$20 billion over five years for NSF's new technology directorate focused on translational science across ten key technology areas, including AI.
- \$13 billion for NSF STEM education, including scholarships, fellowships and traineeships intended to expand the U.S. technical workforce.
- Nearly 40,000 scholarships, fellowships and traineeships.

Committee oversight. In September 2022, Cantwell convened a [Commerce hearing](#) on U.S. leadership in emerging compute technologies, including AI, quantum information science and distributed ledgers. The hearing focused on international competition, public-private research collaboration and workforce shortages.

2023 | Generative AI Raises the Urgency

Future of AI Forum and workforce preparation. In August 2023, [Cantwell hosted a Seattle forum](#) with AI experts and regional companies and university programs. She called for an AI-era workforce initiative modeled on the GI Bill, built around public-private partnerships, labor, community colleges and vocational training.

Transparency, scams and privacy. At the September 2023 Commerce Subcommittee hearing, “[The Need for Transparency in Artificial Intelligence](#),” Cantwell tied AI policy to privacy, provenance, detection and consumer protection. She highlighted a Pierce County family targeted by a scam that used an AI-generated imitation of their daughter’s voice and demanded \$10,000.

Permanent legislation, not executive action alone. While Cantwell praised the [Biden Administration’s October 2023 AI executive order](#), she said Congress still needed to enact a permanent framework governing AI development and deployment.

2024 | Moving an AI Legislative Framework Through Commerce Committee

As Chair, Cantwell [assembled and advanced a bipartisan package of bills](#) designed to build a federal infrastructure and establish an AI safety and security framework before the most dangerous AI threats would appear. The package included:

- The [Future of AI Innovation Act](#) (Cantwell, Young, Hickenlooper, Blackburn) would establish the AI Safety Institute at NIST—recently renamed by the Trump administration the Center for Advancing Innovation and Standards for Super Intelligence (CAISSI)—and directed it to develop technical standards, benchmarks, evaluations and testing methods for advanced AI systems
- The [TEST AI Act](#) (Luján, Blackburn) would enhance the ability of the Department of Commerce to work with the Department of Energy National Laboratories to test and evaluate advanced AI systems.
- The [VET AI Act](#) (Hickenlooper, Capito) would support a pipeline of qualified independent third-party evaluators capable of verifying AI companies’ testing and risk-management claims.
- The [CREATE AI Act](#) (Heinrich, Young, Booker, Rounds) would establish a public-private partnership to bring advanced AI computing resources to universities and research organizations to conduct advanced AI research.
- The [Promoting US Leadership in Standards Act](#) (Warner, Blackburn) would enable U.S. leadership in setting international AI standards by supporting the participation of US researchers and technologists in international standard setting bodies.

Key AI bills advanced in Committee markup. On July 31, 2024, the Commerce Committee advanced these five bipartisan AI measures as part of a larger package of AI-related bills. Together, these bills would have built out a robust **Standards, Testing and Evaluation** ecosystem capable of mitigating the most dangerous uses of AI, including AI swarms and AI-enabled cyberattacks. Senate Republicans blocked the bills from passage.

2024 | Privacy, Deepfakes and Creator Rights

AI as an accelerant for privacy harms. At a July 11 [Commerce Committee hearing](#), Cantwell argued that AI increased the urgency of federal privacy legislation because models can aggregate data and infer sensitive information at scale. Her examples included data brokers selling information about military personnel and AI-enabled foreign influence operations.

COPIED Act. The same day, Cantwell, Sen. Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.) and Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.) introduced the bipartisan [Content Origin Protection and Integrity from Edited and Deepfaked Media Act](#). The bill directs NIST to develop standards and guidelines for content provenance, watermarking and synthetic-content detection, and gives creators mechanisms to protect their work from unauthorized use in AI systems.

2025 | Federal Framework vs. a 10-Year State Moratorium

The policy dispute. A 2025 Republican budget reconciliation proposal sought to restrict state and local enforcement of AI laws for ten years. Cantwell opposed the moratorium while continuing to call for a bipartisan national framework. She underscored that Congress should not preempt state AI laws without a strong federal standard. Many states were passing and pursuing consumer safety laws regarding as AI-enabled fraud, deepfakes and autonomous-vehicle safety. Attorneys General, Governors and state officials joined Cantwell's [fight to remove the provision](#).

Result: 99–1. On July 1, 2025, the Senate adopted a Cantwell-Blackburn amendment stripping the ten-year moratorium from the reconciliation bill by a 99–1 vote.

Pushing previously advanced federal bills. At a 2025 [Commerce Committee hearing](#) with the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, Cantwell pointed to the bipartisan AI measures the Committee had already advanced—including the Future of Artificial Intelligence Innovation Act, CREATE AI, TEST AI, the AI Research, Innovation and Accountability Act, NSF AI Education Act, Small Business AI Training Act, VET AI and the Promoting US Leadership in Standards Act—as a ready legislative foundation for research access, standards, testing, workforce preparation and accountability.

Trump Executive Order. In December 2025 Cantwell again spoke out against state preemption of AI consumer protection laws calling instead for a national AI framework that allows for innovation and safety to develop together.

2026 | Frontier AI Models, Independent Testing and National Security

Reintroducing bipartisan legislative solutions. Cantwell reintroduced the bipartisan [Future of AI Innovation Act](#) in February 2026, authorizing NIST's recently renamed Center for Advancing Innovation and Standards for Super Intelligence, standards and national-laboratory testbeds. Also in February, she and Sen. Jerry Moran reintroduced the [Small Business Artificial Intelligence Act](#) to help small businesses evaluate and adopt AI. In March, she and Sen. Moran also reintroduced the [NSF AI Education Act](#) to expand scholarship and professional development opportunities to study AI with support from the NSF.

Frontier-model testing gains urgency. [At a July 30 Commerce Committee hearing](#) on AI and communications networks, Cantwell called for federal agencies, national laboratories and experts in cybersecurity, biodefense and nuclear security to play a leading role in testing frontier AI models. Her focus was on building security layers and evaluation capacity while maintaining U.S. competitiveness.

September floor speech. On September 14, 2026, Cantwell called for stronger federal guardrails governing the testing and release of frontier models. The speech focused on increasingly capable AI agents, cyber incidents, recursive self-improvement concerns and the need for independent evaluation rather than relying solely on model developers' internal testing.