

CANTWELL INTRODUCES LEGISLATION TO ADDRESS SECURITY COSTS AT NORTHWEST DAMS

Measure would lift burden from community customers

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WASHINGTON, DC –Tuesday, U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) introduced bipartisan legislation that would require the federal government to cover 85 percent of security costs at federal hydroelectric facilities. Currently, local water and power users bear most of the responsibility for these costs through higher rates.

“Our Pacific Northwest dams are critical to our economy and to millions of Washingtonians,” said Cantwell, a member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. “The federal government must take seriously its responsibility to protect these dams, and that means making the necessary security upgrades without leaving local families and farmers with the bill. These dams are critical national assets managed by the federal government, and the federal government should cover the bulk of security bills. Dumping costs on a small group of users is not the way to get this job done.”

Dick Erickson, Secretary-Manager of the East Columbia Basin Irrigation District said, “The East Columbia Basin Irrigation District strongly supports the Cantwell bill because we believe Congress must limit the costs of guards and patrols to be repaid by customers. We also support it because it will allow Congress to exercise vigorous oversight of the site security program to keep the escalation of future costs within reasonable bounds.”

Steve Johnson, Executive Director of the Washington Public Utility Districts Association said, “The Washington PUD Association is grateful that Senator Cantwell is fighting to make sure there is a reasonable allocation of the costs of increased security at these dams, so water and power customers in our state pay only their fair share.”

Following September 11, 2001, the Bureau of Reclamation—the agency charged with managing many federal dams—initiated an anti-terrorism program to improve security at federal dams. Twelve of these dams are in Washington state, including Bonneville, The Dalles, John Day, McNary, Chief Joseph, and Grand Coulee dams on the Columbia River; Roza and Chandler dams on the Yakima River; and Ice Harbor, Lower Monumental, Little Goose, and Lower Granit dams on the Snake River.

Initially, the Bureau of Reclamation determined that security costs would remain the responsibility of the federal government. However, in 2005, the Bureau of Reclamation shifted the burden for many of these costs to water and power users. There are also 19 federal dams in the Columbia River basin outside of Washington that supply power to our state, meaning Washington power users also subsidize security costs at these facilities. Cantwell's legislation would make sure the federal government covers 85 percent of security costs at all federal dams.

Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rogers (R-WA) is supporting similar legislation in the House. Cantwell's bill is cosponsored by Senators Ron Wyden (D-OR), Gordon Smith (R-OR), Orrin Hatch (R-UT), and Wayne Allard (R-CO).