

# Maria Cantwell: Getting Results for Washington State

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## **Cutting Your Taxes**

For nearly two decades, Washington state taxpayers have been unable to deduct the state and local taxes they pay from their annual federal income tax returns. Maria worked with a bipartisan group of senators and representatives to restore this important tax cut for the next two years as part of the American Jobs Creation Act, signed into law in October 2004. Under Maria's provisions, more than one million Washingtonians will receive an average tax cut of over \$500, and state officials estimate that residents will save a total of almost \$500 million per year. Now, Maria is leading the effort to make this tax cut permanent.

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## **Fighting Identity Theft**

Maria's legislation to fight identity theft, "The Fair and Accurate Transactions Act," was signed into law in 2003. The law's provisions are the culmination of years of hard work by Maria to provide law enforcement officials and identity theft victims with the tools they need to battle the nation's fastest-growing crime. Maria's bill helps ensure that identity theft victims are able to protect their credit rating from further damage by requiring credit reporting agencies to block information on fraudulent transactions resulting from identity theft. It also created a standardized process for a person to establish that they are a victim of identity theft, and allows law enforcement to act as the victim's agent in obtaining business records. Finally, the new law requires that once a business verifies that an individual is a victim of identity theft, the business has 30 days to provide all relevant application and transaction records to the victim.

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## **Supporting Our National Guard and Reserve**

Historically, National Guard and Reserve deployment periods, for the purpose of determining mobilization lengths, have been calculated to begin at the point of activation. However, in September 2003, the Pentagon changed practice mid-stream by determining the deployment lengths of over 20,000 personnel in Iraq as beginning at the date of entry into the theater of operations. In fact, many service members first learned of the change from the press, not military leaders. Maria succeeded in blocking the change, working to pass a requirement that the Pentagon tell activated Guardsmen and Reservists the expected length of their deployments, calculated from the time they are activated. Maria's provision will help prevent sudden, mid-stream policy changes, giving members of the Guard and Reserves the kind of transparency and predictability they deserve. To make sure National Guard has the equipment they need to train and respond effectively to emergencies both at home and abroad, Maria is working to make sure the military tracks and replaces equipment left in the theater of operations by National Guard units when they are deployed.

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## **Encouraging Innovation in Aerospace**

Maria passed legislation as part of the Federal Aviation Administration reauthorization bill creating a Center of Excellence for applied research and training in the use of advanced materials in commercial airplanes. Established at the University of Washington in 2003, the Center of Excellence coordinates research efforts and encourage the broader use of advanced structural materials, including composites and aluminum alloys, in future aircraft such as the Boeing 787. The Center capitalizes on Washington's technological know-how to expand the region's research and development capabilities, helping to ensure that Washington state remains a global leader in aerospace innovation.

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## **Protecting Our Borders: Closing the Visa Waiver Loophole**

In 1999, Ahmed Ressam tried to enter the United States at Port Angeles with a carload of explosives after first going through France and Canada. In response, Maria authored legislation to push foreign countries to use biometric standards, such as the inclusion of fingerprints and facial recognition on visas, to stop terrorists before they get to the U.S. Her proposal was signed into law as part of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004. Maria's provision requires the Secretary of State to report to Congress on the progress Visa Waiver Program countries are making towards implementing a biometric visa system to identify potential terrorists. This will allow Congress to better evaluate the

continued vulnerability of the Visa Waiver Program as a loophole that terrorists can exploit to get around our nation's biometric visa identification systems.

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### **Protecting Our Borders: Tripling Border Agents**

After September 11, Maria fought to beef up security on our northern border, and called attention to the allocation of a disproportionately large share of resources to our border with Mexico. She created a coalition of Northern Border Senators and wrote a series of letters to the President and members of Congress highlighting this discrepancy and the risk of terrorism it presented. Working with the Northern Border Coalition, Maria successfully secured funding to triple the number of INS inspectors and Border Patrol and Customs agents stationed on the northern border. Maria also worked with the INS Commissioner to get the NEXUS secure frequent commuter system up and running. The program, a joint operation between the U.S. and Canadian governments, is designed to simplify border crossings for pre-approved, low-risk travelers. The program debuted in 2002, making Washington the first state with an operational frequent commuter program.

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### **Expanding Mt. Rainier National Park**

Maria worked with former Representative Jennifer Dunn (R-WA) to pass legislation to expand the boundaries of Mt. Rainier National Park by roughly 800 acres - the largest expansion of the park in 70 years. The law, which was signed in October 2004, will improve access to the park, allow for a new camping area to be built, and preserve one of the last inland old-growth rainforests in the country. Maintaining accessibility to the park is important, not only for visitors, but also for Washington's economy. Visitors to Rainier spend nearly \$25 million annually, supporting 800 jobs and \$13 million in personal incomes in communities surrounding the Park.

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### **Saving Ratepayers from Enron's Greed**

In May 2005, during Senate Energy Committee hearings, Maria added two important amendments to the new energy bill, and worked to ensure their inclusion in the final version of the bill that became law in August 2005. Her first amendment gave the federal government the power to ban dishonest energy traders and corrupt corporate officials from working in the energy industry, preventing them from continuing to drive up costs through illegal trading practices. Maria's second amendment prevented bankruptcy courts from forcing Snohomish PUD and its customers to fork over millions of dollars to Enron for power the bankrupt energy trader never even delivered. This measure reaffirmed the authority of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to decide whether charges related to manipulated power contracts should be enforced. The Commission exercised this authority in June 2006 when it ruled that Snohomish PUD did not have to pay \$122 million to Enron.

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### **Strengthening Rural Health Care**

Maria introduced the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) Loan Repayment Act, which was signed into law in 2004. The NHSC is a federal program that places doctors in rural and underserved communities by offering grant and loan repayment assistance. By making the program's payments to medical professionals tax-free, Maria's legislation expanded the NHSC's capacity by nearly 70 percent, allowing the program to bring more doctors to rural and underserved communities. Previously, the NHSC was forced to pay the taxes for those grants and loan repayments, which consumed 40 percent of the program's budget.

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### **Improving Safety for Wildland Firefighters**

In 2001, four forest firefighters lost their lives fighting the Thirtymile Fire north of Winthrop. An investigation revealed that, tragically, mistakes by the Forest Service may have contributed to their deaths. In a number of Senate hearings, Maria focused on what went wrong, and worked to help create a cultural shift within the Forest Service to increase accountability and improve training. Maria also worked with Representative Doc Hastings (R-WA) to pass legislation injecting independence into investigations of future forest firefighter fatalities. The new law requires the USDA's Inspector General, not just the Forest Service, to investigate the deaths.

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## **Addressing the Connection between Identity Theft and Meth Abuse**

The growing connection between identity theft, the nation's fastest-growing crime, and the use and production of methamphetamines, is an issue raised often during Maria's meetings with law enforcement officials from across Washington state. For example, according to the Spokane County Sheriff, 100 percent of the county's large-scale identity theft cases in 2004 included meth connections. In response, Maria introduced legislation to begin a national study of this troubling trend. Her bill, "The Methamphetamine and Identity Theft Study Act," would also create a national database allowing federal, state, and local law enforcement to share information on crimes involving meth and identity theft, giving them an additional resource in the fight against both crimes.

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## **Opening Foreign Markets to Washington Goods**

Maria worked to create new trade opportunities for Washington farmers and producers by opening foreign markets to their goods. In 2002 and 2003, she visited Cuba and met with a wide range of government officials. The meetings resulted in the first Washington state exports of apples, peas, and lentils to Cuba in over 50 years. Maria also visited Mexico to advocate that the Mexican government remove its existing trade barriers on potato imports, which had prevented Washington farmers from accessing the potentially lucrative Mexican market. Five months after her visit, Mexico to a rule change allowing for the first-ever import of Washington state potato exports. Similarly, in October 2002, Maria negotiated with the British Columbia government to permit the sale of wine from eight new Washington state wineries. The agreement expanded Washington winery access to B.C. by 40 percent, substantially increasing Washington's share of the \$60 million in wine British Columbia imports from the United States each year.

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## **Advocating for Innovative, Home-Grown Solutions to our Energy Needs**

Recent hikes in gas and energy rates show the volatility of relying heavily on foreign fuel. Maria believes working to accelerate the development of clean, plant-based fuels can decrease our dependence on foreign oil, create new jobs locally, improve the efficiency of vehicles, and reduce emissions. To support home-grown energy sources, Maria added language to the energy bill recently signed into law that boosts domestic research, development, and demonstration of advanced biofuels production technologies. To make biofuels cost-effective, we must make certain advances that allow for the production of fuel from a more diverse range of sources. Today, most biofuels are made from corn and soy-crops primarily grown in the Midwest. A recent WSU study estimated that Washington has enough wheat straw to produce about 200 million gallons of ethanol - and 1.2 billion gallons with technology improvements.

Maria convened the Washington Biofuels Business Collaborative in 2005, bringing together entities from every step of biofuel production to build connections and learn what it will take for a Northwest biofuels industry to grow. Maria has worked to jumpstart the Washington state biofuels market by brokering several deals with Washington state businesses, including a commitment by the Port of Seattle and its tenants to purchase one million gallons of biodiesel annually. In early 2006, she joined with officials from the Port of Grays Harbor and representatives from Seattle BioDiesel to announce plans for one of the nation's largest biodiesel plants at the Port of Grays Harbor. To address our consumption of fossil fuels, in 2006, Maria introduced landmark legislation to increase the combined average gas mileage of cars, SUVs, and light trucks to 35 miles per gallon by 2017.

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## **Promoting Fair Competition for America's Aerospace Workers**

Currently, Maria is working with a bipartisan group of senators to call on European governments to reject unfair subsidies for Airbus, and worked to pass a resolution supporting the president's authority to take action to protect American aerospace jobs. Airbus has benefited from a unique subsidy known as "launch aid," which is risk-free, low-cost government funding for the development of new lines of aircraft. The company only needs to repay the loans if the new product succeeds. This means Airbus remains unfettered by marketplace realities, while American companies must assume realistic levels of commercial risk. Maria has pushed for a commitment from the European Union to stop its support of launch aid.

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