Senator Maria Cantwell Speaks at Senate as They Confirmed Gary Locke to be Commerce Secretary

Local News

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I rise today to thank my colleagues for quickly confirming former Washington Governor Gary Locke as the next Secretary of Commerce. I have known Gary Locke for more than 20 years. And I can say to my colleagues Governor Locke is the right man for the job. As Governor he helped bring broadband service to rural areas of our State. Under his leadership, using E-rate funds, Washington State developed the K-20 network: A high-speed, high-capacity network linking K-12 schools with libraries, colleges, and universities across the State of Washington.

Governor Locke has also been involved both in public and private sector trade missions advocating open markets and promoting exports of U.S. products. At the International Trade Administration (ITA) within Commerce, this experience will be put to good use -- part of the ITA’s mission is to provide advocacy for American companies competing abroad. It can mean the difference whether major foreign sales go to U.S. exporters or their foreign competitors. At NOAA, which is over half of the Department of Commerce’s budget, Governor Locke’s prior experience with the complexities of Puget Sound, endangered salmon species, and the hazards of oil spills will also be invaluable. As Governor of Washington, Gary Locke dealt with one of the nation’s most vibrant fishing industries appointing members of the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council. Fisheries in the North Pacific are among the best-managed fisheries in the world, a fact that has not gone unnoticed by the U.S. Oceans Commission and the Pew Oceans Commission. In addition to commercial fishing, Governor Locke has dealt with the complexities of endangered salmon. In December 2004, Governor Locke presented to the federal government the first locally developed regional salmon recovery plan for Washington state. Finally, many of the challenges the Commerce Department faces in the near term are management challenges – from the set-top box program for digital television transition, to getting NOAA’s satellite program back on track, to wisely investing the $4.7 billion in broadband grants included as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Gary Locke has never shied away from difficult management challenges like crafting a state budget in his second term as Governor after the tech bubble burst. He worked with Democrats and Republicans in the State legislature to come up with spending reduction proposals, many of them unpopular at the time, but necessary, given the need to balance the State budget. I know he will continue that bi-partisan spirit when working on these tough issues as Secretary of Commerce. He is someone who understands the challenges many America’s face as we try economic policies to stabilize our economy. I look forward to working with Governor Locke on many of these issues and urge my colleagues to quickly confirm him.