

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

Yakima Fentanyl Roundtable

August 25, 2023

Sen. Cantwell Remarks

[\[AUDIO\]](#)

Sen. Cantwell: I look forward to listening this morning about the problems that exist in this community, in Yakima. And what we need to do to help at the federal level, [to] help you in dealing with what I think is a national emergency.

I have a feeling that what I'm going to hear here in Yakima is a story that is similar in many communities in our state. There probably are some unique things that are happening here. And it may be that there's more supply here.

But the tragedy and the excruciating pain that is being caused, we need this to be a federal response, with more support for law enforcement, to get rid of the supply, more support in the community for everything from behavioral health to treatment options, and obviously, some long term issues that probably would be helpful, like affordable housing.

So I look forward to hearing from everybody about that. The statistics here: 43 people died from fentanyl-related overdoses in Yakima County in 2022. There was a 250% increase in fentanyl deaths in Yakima from 2018 to 2021.

So as you were saying, City Manager [Bob Harrison], this is a problem on the rise. And that's why we want a federal response because this problem is just increasing out of control. And we need more help.

We need people to understand that just one pill -- one pill -- of fentanyl can kill people. And the product is now so available that last December, the FBI seized 120,000 fentanyl-laced pills in Yakima in one search. That's just unbelievable. The median price of a fentanyl pill in Yakima County is just \$1.35. We've seized more fentanyl in our state this year, as of August 1, than we did all of last year, so the supply is increasing.

And that is why we have fought [for] what is federally called the FEND Off Fentanyl Act, a national bill to give DEA and Treasury the tools to go after the cartels and the drug suppliers, and anybody who's been involved in any aspect of the money laundering or financing of that. We want a very aggressive response in cutting down on supply.

We obviously have heard everywhere, that we need more support for local law enforcement in the form of Byrne JAG grants. And I'm sure I'll hear about that.

But ... at the federal level, we'd like to get this bill that has passed out of the Senate, passed out of the House and on to the President's desk.

But we think we probably need more tools. Even our airports are a source of the transport of this drug. And we need to give the TSA more authority so they can help us crack down on this product.

Obviously, I want to hear about the treatment options, you have one certified opioid treatment program where providers can prescribe methadone. We need more OTP options in general, we need more medical professionals. I'm sure I'm going to hear about that.

But this issue is really about how do we get the community ... the tools they need? And how will we be a better federal partner at fighting this? So I'm going to stop there. I've got lots more I could say.

But well, I will just say we have been here for other events where the community has just really rallied on building more affordable housing. And it's been a great success story. We think about how we increase that and increase the partnerships with organizations to help build more of that in this community.

So thank you all very much. I look forward to hearing what you think are some of the solutions and what you think we should be doing. So thank you for being here.