

**Testimony of Governor Gina M. Raimondo, Nominee to be Secretary of Commerce
Before the Senate Commerce Committee**

Tuesday, January 26, 2021

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Cantwell, and members of the committee – it is an honor to come before you today as President Biden’s nominee for United States Secretary of Commerce. Over the past few weeks, I’ve had the chance to speak with many of you about the critical work of the Commerce Department; to share with you my experience and vision; and to hear your important perspectives. I want to thank you for your time and insight.

The Commerce Department has a simple but vital mission — to spur good-paying jobs, empower entrepreneurs to innovate and grow, and help American workers and businesses compete. These same priorities have guided my life and career.

I was raised to appreciate the value of hard work and a good, family-supporting job. When I was growing up, Rhode Island was the national epicenter of jewelry manufacturing, and those factories sustained thousands of families in my state. There’s something special about a job in manufacturing – about making things, about having dignity and pride in your work. But by the 80’s, the factories started closing, jobs were shipped overseas, and thousands of working-class Rhode Islanders suddenly found themselves out-of-work. My dad was one of those Rhode Islanders. After a long career at the Bulova watch factory, he was forced into early retirement in his 50’s, and our family had to cut back.

I know the pain that losing a job causes a family, and I’ve seen that pain in communities that have lost jobs to outsourcing and to the pandemic.

At its heart, the Commerce Department is about opportunity. The opportunity to start or grow a business. The opportunity to get a good, stable job. The opportunity to pursue the American Dream, regardless of where you live.

Thanks to my dad’s hard work, I had the opportunity for a great education that put me on a path to success. I started a venture capital firm to help entrepreneurs start a business. I ran for state treasurer to shore up Rhode Island’s finances. And for the past six years, I have had the honor of serving as Rhode Island’s governor.

When I started my campaign for governor, Rhode Island had the highest unemployment rate in the nation – for eight straight months. So we got to work. And by the time the pandemic hit, we had the lowest unemployment in over 30 years and the most jobs in state history. We did it by investing in our people through workforce training programs, bringing dozens of new businesses to the state, and empowering small business owners. We launched the Real Jobs Rhode Island training initiative, which has partnered with 1,800 companies and provided skills to 11,000 Rhode Islanders. And our small business loan program – the first in state history – has empowered 150 Rhode Island entrepreneurs so far — more than half of whom are women or people of color.

In this time of overlapping crises, the Commerce Department must be a partner to businesses and their workers to help them innovate and grow.

First, we need to immediately address the economic damage caused by the pandemic. COVID has touched every community – urban, suburban, rural, tribal – and exacerbated long-standing inequities facing low-income families and communities of color. We need to make investments across America and ensure every family, regardless of where they live, has an accessible pathway to a good job. If confirmed as Commerce Secretary, I look forward to scaling and deploying additional resources to businesses and workers – with a focus on regions and communities that have often been left behind – to help them bounce back and grow stronger than ever. And to accomplish that, I look forward to listening to, and engaging with, federal, state, local, tribal, and industry leaders.

Second, we need to ensure that American workers and manufacturers can compete fairly on the global playing field. We need to invest in innovation and technology in our manufacturing sector and take aggressive trade enforcement actions to combat unfair trade practices from China and other nations that undercut American manufacturing. If confirmed, I look forward to deploying the full resources of the agency to keep the American worker at the center of U.S. trade policy and to reinvigorate American manufacturing by reshoring jobs that have gone overseas. When given a fair chance, no one can out-compete the American worker and small business.

And third, we need to recognize that tackling climate change goes hand-in-hand with creating good-paying jobs. As governor, I expanded clean energy jobs, oversaw construction of the nation's first offshore wind farm, and put Rhode Island on a path to 100% renewable power. Like President Biden, I know the climate crisis poses an existential threat to our economic security, and we must meet this challenge by creating millions of good, union jobs that power a more sustainable economy. The Commerce Department has the tools, data, and expertise to help communities and businesses address the climate crisis and become more resilient in the face of climate change.

None of this will be possible without the incredible, hardworking public servants at the Department of Commerce. There are many reasons I am excited about this chance to serve the American people. But the opportunity to work together with the experienced, dedicated public servants at the Commerce Department is at the top of the list. Some of the brightest minds in the federal government – indeed some of the best scientists in America – are at the Commerce Department, and they deserve leadership that's supportive, transparent, and driven toward a common mission – building a stronger, more equitable, and more resilient American economy. If I am confirmed, it will be an honor to lead this team.

Thank you for this opportunity, and I'm happy to take your questions.