

# Raimondo Addresses the Press for the First Time in Weeks: A summary of the governor's January 13 press conference



The circus was in town today at The Vets, as Governor Raimondo declined to answer questions from the press in her first public appearance since it was announced she was President-elect Joe Biden's pick to lead the Department of Commerce. State officials steered away from political questions in an attempt to orient the press conference around COVID-19 response. The governor left shortly after concluding her announcements, much to the consternation of the press.

Raimondo began her remarks today by saying what an honor it was to serve as Rhode Island's governor and be asked by President-elect Biden to lead a cabinet department. With inauguration a week away, it's unclear when exactly Raimondo will step down. Her offices are reported to be coordinating with Lieutenant Governor Dan McKee. McKee speculated in a later press huddle with reporters that he would take the reins as a new governor officially sometime in mid-February. His office has scheduled a press conference tomorrow at Chelo's on Post Rd in Warwick. The only confirmed detail of transition is McKee's pledge to keep the current COVID response team in place after Raimondo leaves.

"I say that because I want Rhode Islanders to know there will be no disruption in our COVID-19 response," said the governor.

Raimondo is leaving Rhode Island in the midst of a stark resurgence of COVID-19. Today, there are 823 new cases of COVID-19 with a percent positive testing rate of 5%. The cumulative number of cases is now 102,485 since March. Weekly new cases per 100,000 continue to rise, while other trends, like weekly percent positive and new hospital admissions, trend downward. There are 402 people currently hospitalized; 49 people are currently in the ICU with 35 on ventilators.

McKee gave his first remarks to the press today as presumptive governor, crediting Raimondo with her accomplishments during her tenure. "The governor has done a great job as governor of Rhode Island," he said. McKee went on to say it was a point of personal pride for all Rhode Islanders that a sitting governor from the Ocean State was nominated for a cabinet position. He stated his office has been communicating with Raimondo's for some years, moreso during the pandemic. There have been news reports from the past few weeks that McKee has not met with the governor personally since 2019.

Dr. Nicole Alexander-Scott gave a briefing on vaccination progress by DoH. With very little room for wastage, this week the following areas are getting vaccinated: nursing homes, outpatient providers like respiratory clinics and urgent care workers. Also getting tested are some folks in Central Falls, school nurses, EMS workers and others. Next week many of the same groups will continue to be vaccinated, with additional groups like doctors and dentists offices, behavioral health providers, group homes and residents older than 75.

While the room at the start of the presser was fully packed with local honchos and members of the national press hoping to get some kind of vocalization out of Raimondo vaulting onto the national stage, most press quietly exited by the end when it was just COVID news. Raimondo reportedly dodged and declined to answer questions from the press both inside and outside The Vets in Providence. It remains to be seen whether she will communicate with the press again like she did prior to the commerce secretary news.