

Smooth Sailing Out of the Ocean State: Raimondo's confirmation hearing for cabinet nomination took place today



Governor Gina Raimondo answered questions before the US Senate's Commerce, Science and Transportation committee today in a confirmation hearing that could not have gone smoother for her nomination. The Ocean State governor answered questions from Democrats and Republicans serving on the committee that ranged from broadband access, to jobs programs to net neutrality. There was no official vote recorded at the conclusion of the confirmation hearing in committee today, but Chairman Roger Wicker (R-MI) said he did not expect Raimondo to be governor of Rhode Island for too much longer.

The governor received glowing commendations in remarks from Senators Jack Reed and Sheldon Whitehouse, with Reed regaling attendees with a typical Ocean State story of meeting Raimondo when she was still a newborn and he was a second lieutenant. Her submitted written testimony committee bore all the major hallmarks of Gina-isms: being a born in a state where manufacturing was on the decline, the story of her working-class father and watch factory, as well as her commerce-related accomplishments, many tied to jobs.

Conservatives and critics of the Raimondo administration would have found themselves disappointed watching today. There were few fireworks in the committee room, with barely any questions touching on the governor's record as chief executive. Senator Ted Cruz asked pointed questions about her track record with jobs, citing a CNBC ranking that placed Rhode Island dead last in 2019. Raimondo answered that prior to the COVID pandemic, the state had achieved its lowest unemployment, as well as its highest employment rate, in years. She repeated what became almost catechism at the confirmation

hearing: "I'm committed to fighting for the American worker."

Under questioning from Republican Sen. Ron Johnson, Raimondo also stated she supporting reforming Section 230 of the Communication Decency Act that gives internet publishers immunity from the content users upload to their website, as well as protection from civil litigation in moderating content on their website. Raimondo was much more close-lipped on net neutrality, evading Johnson's attempts to get her to say one way or the other how she feels about such policy legislation. Raimondo also emphasized the need to hold social media companies accountable for what is put on their platforms, but demurred on potential anti-trust actions or need for actions.

"Governor will you support..." was another common refrain on the hearing today, as individual senators asked Raimondo to support certain legislation one way or the other. Raimondo, as she is known to do, frequently responded with an "I hear you," or an "I pledge to work with you on this issue." Other standouts in the hearing this morning was a commitment to expand broadband access to rural areas, something Ramondo says she supports. The governor did say she was opposed to a nationalized 5G telecommunications network.

Raimondo repeated the Biden administration's commitment to broadly reviewing all tariffs implemented during the Trump years. China was a frequent topic, and the governor repeated her insistence on "free trade but fair trade" and bringing companies (and countries) on an equal playing field so American businesses and workers are not left out in the cold. Asked if she supports measures, such as the Keystone XL pipeline cancellation, in the energy sector that would kill jobs, Raimondo answered that energy sector policy questions are not the role of the Commerce Dept. She did stress, however, that with investments in green infrastructure, more good paying union jobs would be created.

The American fishing industry and the census were the other important topics in the committee today. Many of the senators present emphasized the need to save the fishing industry as well as various hospitality industries. One senator noted that 70% of American seafood is eaten at restaurants, making restaurant closures devastating for related industries; 4,000 people in Rhode Island are in the fishing industry. "I assess the impacts to be quite longstanding unless we take bold action," she said.

Raimondo also said when asked questions about the census that she would take the politics of the census. She also pledged to give the agency the time and resources it needs to complete a full count.

It's unclear when Raimondo will be confirmed with a full Senate vote. Several of Biden's key picks for national security and the economy have been confirmed. Newly confirmed Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen was voted less than a week after her confirmation hearing. Raimondo is still scheduled to give her (presumed final) State of the State address next week.