

**U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell**

**Opening Statement at Senate Commerce Committee Nomination Hearing**

**Witness: The Honorable Gina Raimondo, of Rhode Island, to be Secretary of Department of Commerce**

**January 26, 2021**

Cantwell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I apologize if I go long, there are a lot of things to cover. First I, too, want to congratulate Governor Raimondo on being nominated to be Secretary of Commerce. I, too, am excited about her nomination and the fact that she has both public and private sector experience. I think that this will be a big help to us and to the Biden administration, as we work on a variety of commerce issues from trade, competition, economic stability, growing opportunities for all Americans. Governor Raimondo's record in the public sector, working on how to empower entrepreneurs and skill workers as part of the Real Jobs Rhode Island initiative, I think is exactly the kind of skill set that we need to match the skills development and the business needs to better grow our economy.

I, too, am grateful for her understanding of important issues as it relates to both science, and to fisheries. Having a great deal of understanding of oceans, fisheries, and the investment in science, I think, will greatly help us at the Department of Commerce, where the budget oversight is a very big task of the Secretary of Commerce. And as we have, I think, more than a dozen members of this committee including you, Mr. Chairman, who these maritime oceans and fisheries issues are very big issues, particularly in a changing climate, couldn't come at a better time to have a Secretary of Commerce who really does understand fish issues. So, I appreciate that about her. And I appreciate that she will lead the agency in making decisions based on science and data that will help our economy grow in the future, everything from these oceans issues and fisheries, to spectrum and space issues. I hope that she will speak out today and say that she opposes any kind of censorship of scientific information at the Department of NOAA and fully expects to hear from scientists on these important issues. We in the Pacific Northwest know that we can't always agree on issues, but we know we can agree on science, and that's why science needs to continue to prevail.

Also, we need to make sure that this issue of spectrum, and the issues related to spectrum, are important. Well, let me actually for a second go back to the science and fisheries issues for a second. There are a whole host of issues where we need smart strategies. Smart strategies on salmon recovery, storm water and habitat investments, we need smart strategies on our orca population that is threatened in Puget Sound. We need smart strategies on stock assessments and fishery management strategies. I know my colleague from Alaska could weigh in on this issue, but smart fishery management strategies is what will help save our fisheries in an ever-changing economy. In 2018, commercial fishermen caught more than 9.8 billion pounds of seafood, and that in turn supported seafood processors, shipbuilders, trade and restaurant jobs. And marine anglers took more than 194 million fishing trips which fueled our outdoor recreational economy. So, in total there are more than a million jobs in the seafood sector. And there are important science issues that need to be addressed there, as I mentioned.

So, the other area that I was mentioning is this issue of spectrum and weather forecasting. In my opinion, there's no reason why the United States should not be a leader in weather forecasting. This is an important issue for us, whether you're talking about fires or you're talking about ocean issues. So, making a better, crucial investment in the science for maritime, aviation, space, and agriculture

industries will be very important for us moving forward. During the last four years the FCC, I believe, ran roughshod over concerns raised by various committees within Congress on these airwave issues critical to weather data, adjacent to the 24 gigahertz band, critical to systems dependent on GPS and threatened by the Ligado decision. So, I'm hoping that a Commerce Secretary will take these issues and help the administration prioritize how we can get on the same page. And also, work with us on these important issues of national security. The Chairman worked so hard on the issues of Huawei and rip and replace, and making sure that the American infrastructure was going to be secure from the future of threats and violations. I hope the Commerce Secretary will work with us on these security issues on our communication system, as we move forward.

And the Secretary will inherit a new program as part of the COVID bill, the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program. The 2019 report from FCC found that less than half of households in Indian Country have access to high-speed broadband services, a 20% gap from non-Tribal areas. And so I hope that we will be able to get good administration of that program.

As the Chairman mentioned, one of the key responsibilities will be in response to the larger COVID pandemic in the country and what we should do about it. I hope that the Secretary of Commerce will play an important role in strengthening our economy, in trying to defeat the pandemic and recover from its economic impacts. I think this is a critical job of the Commerce Secretary, as we continue to see the impacts of COVID on our economy. Again, seafood exports dropped by 31% since 2020 and 44% since February of 2020. So, all of our sectors have been impacted and Congress has appropriated \$600 million in fisheries assistance for state and Tribal needs, but, so far, the fishermen and our state have yet to receive \$1 from this program, so I hope that we can get her assistance in implementing and moving forward on this.

As well as working with us on other aspects of COVID relief package moving forward, particularly in the area of manufacturing. I know my colleague from Kansas, Senator Moran and I are very interested in how we continue to keep an aerospace manufacturing sector going at a time when we've seen a decrease in demand. And the COVID pandemic, you'll also have to help us deal with minority owned businesses who were greatly impacted by the pandemic and have received less help and support. So, the Office of Minority Business Development I believe is an agency that can help focus us on these issues.

The Department of Commerce, I think, continues to have a leadership role in our competitiveness as a nation. I hope that we will continue to look at this issue of competitiveness. In my state, one in four jobs are related to trade, and I hope that the Secretary and the administration will make a goal for export advancement, increasing exports is a great way to grow our economy. The last Democratic administration had a goal of increasing exports 50% over a five year window and came pretty close to making that. I hope that we will continue to move our trade export agenda and that the Secretary of Commerce will help on that.

And then lastly, the Census. We don't need a politicization of the Census, we need accurate data and information. For every 100 household missed in the 2020 Census, the state could lose up to \$5.8 million. So, we need to get this right because children and veterans and seniors and families are dependent on how this formula works. And I hope that we will have a less political process, but one that gives us an accurate Census moving forward. So, Governor Raimondo, that is a big agenda item to cover for Secretary of Commerce, but as I said, very confident that your public and private sector experience will help us deal with these issues. Your great depth of knowledge, both about the competitiveness that

America needs, both from the perspective of the outside in the private sector as well as governor will help us steer through this current pandemic challenge and onto better economic times. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

#### **Q&A With Witnesses:**

Cantwell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Governor again congratulations on your nomination. And I think you're aware of how broad the committee is—I mean the department is in its oversight and science issues. So I wanted to—the Chairman house to a pretty broad question at the beginning, which was important to do with collaboration, it's surprising how often that doesn't happen sometimes, so it's very good to clarify. But I also want to clarify this issue as it relates to science and data. Do you oppose any censorship of scientific data and information coming out of the Department of Commerce?

Governor Raimondo: Yes, I do.

Cantwell: Thank you. And will you work with us to help restore the confidence in that science and data information and investment in it for the future?

Raimondo: Yes.

Cantwell: Thank you. A couple of specific issues: one that I mentioned in my opening statement and as we're talking about seafood and a fishing economy, salmon is particularly important to the Pacific Northwest and one of the issues regarding salmon that I think, you know, as we talk about infrastructure investment moving forward, that is all sorts of transportation infrastructure, we're a coastal state with a lot of transportation infrastructure and moving of products. But keeping salmon habitat and restoration in a robust state is very critical to keeping salmon. So will you work with us on a more targeted, larger scale investment in storm water restoration and in building critical habitat for everything from oyster reefs to eel and seagrass and critical habitat? I'm sure this—again I think there's a dozen or so members of this committee that probably have similar problems in their states, but would you work with us to increase the amount of investment and targeted return from that investment?

Raimondo: Yes, I would very much look forward to working with you and other members of the committee. Again, as I said, I have come to understand from my discussions with you these past couple of weeks how important the salmon stock is and the fishing industry in general is to your state and I would absolutely look forward to working with you on that issue.

Cantwell: Well I guess I would call it salmon infrastructure, and that is that as we grow transportation infrastructure, which we also desperately need in the Pacific Northwest, we grow salmon infrastructure which is that habitat and storm water restoration which practically every community in my state would tell you that they need if we're going to do a better job of protecting salmon. The same kind of scientific data information is also needed for our orca whale population and preserving them. So one of the things that they have issue with right now, which NOAA has basically said, we need to do something about noise, as it relates to the orca population, so I hope that you will work with us to implement something that is a process for our shipping, with Coast Guard and others to work on a mitigation plan for the orca whale population.

Raimondo: Yes, I would be excited to do that. I will say here as governor, I have a record of investing in storm water, investing in resiliency, investing in adaptation. And I would certainly look forward to doing that with you and members of the committee.

Cantwell: Thank you. And then, lastly, stock assessments--we believe in good fisheries management policy and the key to that is stock assessment, and so I hope you'll work with us on increasing the amount of dollars that go into the science behind stock assessment so we can make good management plans.

Raimondo: Yes, again absolutely. I plan to lead with science and lead with data. I know stock assessments are vital and also very detailed, and I absolutely will look forward to working with you on that.

Cantwell: Thank you. And on the larger issue of science and data, as I've mentioned in my opening statement as it relates to weather, do you think the United States should be a world leader in weather and data forecasting information? I say--I'm not necessarily trying to be competitive with another nation, it's just the amount of times that we hear, you know, our news broadcasters say, "Well this is the forecast, then this is the European forecast," and they are using supercomputing time to get more out of this. This weather data is so critical for us as it relates to, as I said, aviation, maritime, space issues, agriculture issues, so will you work with us to make sure the United States has the state of the art technology when it comes to weather forecasting and weather information?

Raimondo: Yes, I think--and we had the opportunity to visit about this last week, I applaud your leadership on it--I think the American National Weather Service should be the gold standard. And should I be confirmed, I will work with you to make sure that that is the case.

Cantwell: Thank you. I see my time is expired, Mr. Chairman, I would just say that I'm going to count on the governor to work with us. Her workforce strategy in Rhode Island jobs, I think, is that particularly for underserved communities and minority business communities, something we need to look at and how we can elevate that to a national level. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.