



MEMORANDUM

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Devon Puglia, SKDK
DATE: January 3, 2021
RE: Potential Transition Communications Roll-out

INTRODUCTION

With the potential for a transition in leadership in the Governor's Office in the coming days and weeks, it's imperative that we be prepared with a preliminary communications and political plan to execute. Unlike at the conclusion of a long campaign with intense media scrutiny and unlike a traditional transition, the timing of this situation is far more fluid and unpredictable, with a number of different variables that will require us to make decisions with far less runway than we would otherwise have. But there is one undeniable constant: we only get one shot to introduce and define ourselves in the right way, particularly in the midst of a once-in-a-century international health crisis.

Right now and in the months ahead, the public's eyes are squarely on COVID, and our long-term political success will hinge on our ability to have command of this crisis early. As our management of COVID goes, so goes our political success. That means we need to be "about" COVID and COVID-only—other topics are ultimately strategic distractions from that objective—and the public needs to associate us with safety and competence. They need to have confidence in us, and we can nurture that confidence by emphasizing stability in government. The stakes from both a policy standpoint and a political one could not be higher—this is something we must get right. This memo lays out an early sketch of communications situations we may face in the days ahead and can serve as a preliminary roadmap to potentially guide us in future weeks.

THE COMING DAYS AND FIRST 48 HOURS

In the coming days, we should have a clearer picture if there will indeed be a leadership shift in the Governor's Office. How and when will we know for certain? Based on previous cabinet appointments, the President-Elect's transition team has typically given an exclusive story the night before a formal announcement. Within hours, one story begets many pieces and a fully-formed narrative about a given selection.

For us, that first leak (if it is indeed Governor Raimondo) is when media coverage will quickly go from zero to 100 almost instantaneously. A number of scenarios will likely arise:

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- Capital reporters and TV stations will come to us for confirmation on the news and for comment. We will likely be inundated with media incoming on this, likely late at night, asking for confirmation or denial of that national story, and asking if we've had any conversations with the Governor's team.
- While the story for the first 12-24 hours is the news of the Governor's departure, the story for the following 24-48 hours is, what happens next? That means once the selection is formally announced by the Biden team, TV stations and news outlets will likely come to us for one-on-one interviews, requests for comment, etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

During this early period, we would make a few recommendations:

1. The night of a potential leak from the President-elect's team, we'd recommend as a media response referring any requests for comment to the Governor's Office. Reporters may ask for off the record conversations about what we know, what we've heard, who we've spoken to, etc. We should resist that temptation to be ultra-responsive and just simply refer any questions to the Governor's Office, via email.
2. Next, once the news is fully confirmed by the following day, there may be intense demand for one-on-one interviews. We also strongly recommend resisting the temptation to do them. We will get peppered with questions, each outlet will try to make its own news out of those interviews, and the risk to our roll-out is great. Granting an exclusive to one station or reporter on this major announcement could also risk alienating other members of the press corps at a critical time.

It's important for us to remember that unlike in the past when we had to work to get news coverage, now we can make news anytime we want. We can create a headline any time we choose. The Governor's Office has a massive new microphone, and we have to wield that microphone on terms that are favorable to us.

3. Before we say or do anything public, we will want to ensure that we have called and spoken with the commissioners of all COVID-related agencies – health, emergency management, RIDE, etc. Our goal is very simple with those calls: to be able *to say* that we've spoken to them, that we've received a preliminary briefing, and that we are currently in the process of scheduling longer briefings. We want to give the public confidence that there is continuity and steadiness during this transition in the middle of a resurgent COVID wave. We can do that by making these key calls, so that the first thing we've done, and the first step forward we've taken, is to speak with relevant agency heads and received preliminary briefings. We'll also want to make sure that we've had a conversation with Governor Raimondo before doing anything public, for many of the same reasons outlined above – to demonstrate that a robust, organized and resident-focused transition is in place.

4. Once those calls are made and the news of the cabinet appointment is fully confirmed, we will want to release a media statement about this moment making clear that we are laser-focused on COVID, on the public health crises, and that this is our clear, unequivocal objective as we take office. That statement should be serious sober, and focused almost solely on COVID-19, while also conveying that we plan to take an open-door approach, that we believe in getting leaders around the table to solve problems, and that as a state, we're all in this challenging moment together. We want the public to have confidence in us while also signaling a different style and tone of governing.
5. Following this media statement, we'll want to launch a corresponding political outreach program behind the scenes. Calls to our most critical mayors, stakeholders, and players are going to matter. The earlier they hear from us proactively, the more likely the political touch will resonate, the more likely we'll be able to develop an even bigger bench of short- and long-term surrogates and supporters.
6. More broadly, if we want to have a smooth transition in the weeks ahead, we should do our very best from the outset to ensure that we are on the same page as the Governor's Office from a communications standpoint. To the extent we can choreograph this with their office, we should. Or, at minimum, we should convey to them what we plan to do and how we plan to approach media situations. In short, we could jeopardize a smooth transition by surprising them, so to the extent possible, we should work together while our interests are fully aligned.

GOVERNOR RAIMONDO'S PRESS CONFERENCE

At some point within or following the first 48 hours, Governor Raimondo will have a press conference to address local reporters. It's possible they may want you at that press conference to demonstrate a smooth transition of power in the middle of a crisis, or it's possible they decide to do it on their own. Regardless, we will be a significant portion of that story, which means we need to take several steps:

- We should ensure that we are briefed by as many people as possible about COVID. Reporters will ask how you spent your day, and we will want to provide a rundown that is focused solely on the virus. In an ideal world, we will also have had a brief phone conversation with Dr. Fauci and partners at the federal level, so that we can emphasize a seamless transition.
- So that reporters have fresh quotations to use, we should have a new media statement prepared, one that praises the Governor's press conference, hails her public service, and reinforces our messages from the days prior. We may also want to couple that with a background fact sheet on your bio, accomplishments, career highlights, and headshot for the TV news desks.

- If Governor Raimondo hosts a press conference on her own, we should prepare a video message to the public that can be used by TV that day, one that mirrors or emphasizes our previous media statements. That video can then be distributed both on social media and via press release, aiming to introduce us to the broader electorate.
- Following the Governor's press conference, we should continue to do a proactive blitz of political calls to stakeholders, the Congressional delegation, and elected officials statewide (and anyone who hasn't gotten a heads up call prior) to shore up our support, project confidence, etc.
- We'll also want to touch base with the DGA, who may be willing to provide support in the weeks and months ahead if needed (we work closely with their team and can make the necessary connections).
- In this period, you may want to reach out to Governor Lamont, Governor Baker, Governor Cuomo, and Governor Murphy.
- The day following the Governor's press conference, we should then move forward on an op-ed in the Globe that lays out our vision, unfiltered and on our terms, for the future and the kind of Governor you'll be. We may also want to host an introductory press conference of our own to make remarks about this moment. We will also want to ask our surrogates and supporters to proactively release positive media statements about the transition, so that the press is constantly receiving positive reactions.

THE PERIOD BETWEEN APPOINTMENT AND RESIGNATION

Once Governor Raimondo addresses the media after the announcement of a potential appointment, she'll need to be very clear about when she plans to resign. We will have an exact date, and for our purposes, we should anticipate that it will be January 20th or prior. We should not expect her to both be Acting Secretary and Governor simultaneously.

From a communications standpoint, that means we may enter an awkward period in which Governor Raimondo continues to make news to leave a positive legacy on her terms, while the media will have a desire to give us equal or more time since we are the Governor-in-waiting.

However, we can control only what we can control, and for us, this period marks the official "transition". Though it may appear to be awkward, it has myriad communications benefits for us as we prepare to take office. We'll be able to be as proactive as possible in communicating our laser-focus on COVID from a completely offensive posture. We can talk about COVID every day with a significant microphone without actually yet being in-charge of or accountable for the response to date. As a result, this window can really be to our benefit, and we should consider a few different tactics towards that end:

1. We should release a daily transition readout or update of transition progress (meetings you held, phone conversations you had, etc.) via media release that are principally focused on COVID updates and preparations.
2. We should proactively make clear or announce that we do not anticipate any major immediate changes in agency leadership or staffing during this critical period. Conveying continuity and stability in the middle of a health crisis would be our goal.
3. Tweet out select photos of you meeting with public health experts.
4. Start releasing a daily public schedule if you are not already.
5. Make various public visits and tours, advised on your schedule, that are either open press or “photo sprays.” Those could include:
 - Touring the emergency operations center and the State COVID response center
 - Hosting a Zoom roundtable or in-person briefing with hospital or health executives that is open press
 - Visiting/touring a testing facility or vaccination site to spotlight progress so far and the work ahead
 - A virtual meeting/roundtable with nurses or frontline workers
 - Visiting a food bank and serving meals or touring social service organization to keep attention on those who are struggling most with this crisis
 - A Zoom or in-person “visit” to the Dept. of Health and other state agencies so that you can be visible to day-to-day staff below the commissioner level, convey that you will soon be in-charge, and boost agency morale. You could be accompanied by a single reporter for some of those visits and offer exclusive access where appropriate.
 - Roundtables with the small business community on how COVID is impacting them and how the state can support them
 - Public visits to the districts of legislative leadership (if we think it will achieve a political goal)
 - A joint video message or conversation that is recorded with you and Dr. Fauci that can be disseminated via media to encourage people to take the vaccine and emphasize any critical public health messages.
 - Make a point to be present and visible at any COVID-related meetings and events that Governor Raimondo is participating in, to demonstrate that you are on top of the pandemic and ready to handle it seamlessly on day one.

As all of these things happen, we will also be peppered with a variety of different press questions that will be aimed at making news and fomenting conflict – the very things aimed at taking us off message. We could be asked about anything and everything about Governor Raimondo, her legacy, differences in policy, how we feel about contentious issues, your

plans for the next gubernatorial election and more. During this unique period, our answer to all of these questions needs to be simple and straightforward:

There is only one governor at a time, and right now, our focus is ensuring a seamless transition, managing the COVID crisis at this critical moment, protecting public health, and supporting small businesses. There will be time in the days and weeks ahead to explore and answer all of these important questions.

SWEARING IN

As the transition date approaches, we expect to see a combination of “look-back” stories regarding highlights of Governor Raimondo’s tenure as well as what challenges lie ahead for you. Some tactics we should employ around this time could be:

- Holding a round of one-on-one TV interviews or tours in the 72 hours leading up to your official swearing in
- Holding an open-press virtual cabinet meeting or a photo spray with all commissioners immediately after you are sworn in
- Releasing a photo or holding a photo spray of you entering the Governor’s Office for the first time
- Hosting a statewide tele-town hall with members of the public to give them an update of your vision directly in the 48 hours after your swearing in

SELECTING THE NEXT LG

As the transition happens, we will no doubt be asked how we think the next Lt. Governor should be selected – whether that should be our prerogative or the legislature’s – and who that selection should be. Our recommendation would be to take the public position that the Governor is and should be empowered to make that selection. Particularly during a health crisis, it will be important to have trusted, tested leaders with whom we work well. However, we also believe that we will need to work closely with legislative leaders behind the scenes, out of public view, for the input and potentially their blessing on that pick.

When an LG is eventually selected and assuming it is with the input of House and Senate leadership, ideally we would announce the pick via press release via a joint press statement/release with those leaders, and then potentially do a press conference so the media can speak with the new Lt. Governor. Our goal should be to have that happen within one week of taking office.

POST-SWEARING IN

After the swearing-in and the corresponding news cycles, we then have to transition to governing mode. In the coming weeks, we will want to identify, via the formal transition process, COVID-related announcements at the agency level that can be made in the days immediately after you take office. Should things move forward, we can work with the team

to develop a robust comms plan to that end. But our strategic goals will still be the same: to keep the conversation on our terms and on terrain that is favorable to us, particularly around our response to the virus.

CONCLUSION

This tick tock and ideas represent a rough communications sketch, and will no doubt change considering all the potential variables. But nonetheless, I hope the ideas within it can provide a strategic outline about how to approach the next several weeks and look forward to discussing your thoughts and feedback.