

Statement of Michael P. O’Rielly
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
September 18, 2013

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Thune. I am honored to be before this Committee -- one of the truly great Committees in the United States Senate -- for the consideration of my nomination to be a Commissioner to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). It has been an interesting path that has led me here today, and I should start by extending my deep appreciation to Senate Republican Leader McConnell, Senate Commerce Committee Ranking Member Thune, and President Obama for the trust placed in me for selection to this role.

As the Members of this Committee know well, it takes a team of people for any one individual to succeed in Washington. Unfortunately, my mother is unable to be here today, as she doesn’t travel well; my father passed away three years ago and is inurned across the river at Arlington National Cemetery. I am blessed, however, to be joined by my sister, Debra Keyes, representing my family; my girlfriend, Sarah Goss, representing my future; and a host of friends, representing my extended D.C. “family.” Without them, I would not be here today.

By way of background, I was born and raised in a small city located on the Erie Canal, just outside Buffalo, New York. Growing up, it was a heavily union-based area, with General Motors being its largest employer. The people of Lockport are hearty, hardworking, holders of strong faith, and fans of the Buffalo Bills. They accept the hard winter weather and lack of sun as a badge of honor. I hope to have retained many of the qualities of my large family, now scattered across our nation, and the people of my hometown, as I am sure these qualities will come in handy in the future.

It has been a distinct honor to work in the United States Congress for the last 20 years, with a little under half of the time being spent in the House of Representatives and a little over half being spent in the United States Senate. I have enjoyed every minute of my time in this distinct body; and potentially leaving for the FCC is bittersweet. To say that the United States Senate is the greatest deliberative body in the world does not do it justice. It represents the genius of our founding fathers, often having the last say on the consequential legislative matters of our day. I am in awe of this institution -- and its Members -- every day that I walk into work.

One doesn’t hold the views I do about the U.S. Congress without working for some amazing individuals. I have had the fortune of working for a number of legislative visionaries and I thank them all, including Ranking Member Thune and Senate Republican Whip Cornyn, for providing me such extraordinary opportunities. I would like to mention three for special appreciation:

- Tom Bliley and James Derderian -- Former House of Representatives Commerce Committee Chairman Tom Bliley and his trusty strategist, J.D., were my first employers, my mentors and remain inspirational figures. They taught me how to be a Virginian Gentleman, how to object without being personally objectionable, how to negotiate in good faith, and how to be a grounded family man in the messy environment that is D.C.
- John E. Sununu -- There are not enough words to express fully my appreciation for the opportunity and pleasure of working for former Senator Sununu. He epitomizes what I believe Senators should be and how they should conduct themselves. I have never met another politician with greater intellect, insight, vision, or courage. He has been described as

“independent and principled, a great dad, big-hearted, funny and kind” and I couldn’t agree more. He also comes from New Hampshire, a near-magical place where the people adopted me as one of their own and where I only had one really bad day in six years.

Like many, I believe that America is far and away the greatest country that has ever existed in the history of the world. This is in part because of our strong free market system and our faith in American capitalism -- true pillars of our democracy, setting us apart from our international counterparts. In today’s global economy, American companies are the most innovative and consumer-driven. As a nation, we achieve the greatest outcome when we allow our companies to freely compete and fight for consumers’ attention and approval. Thomas Jefferson stated it well: “The policy of the American government is to leave their citizens free, neither restraining nor aiding them in their pursuits.” Those companies that understand how to offer the best products, the best services, and/or the best prices to meet consumer demand should flourish. Conversely, those that do not should be allowed to fail.

Generally, it is my view that the American communications industry is competitive, and our carriers should be free from undue government intervention. Accordingly, I tend to favor a smaller governmental role. This is not an absolute, as the government can play an important function in certain instances. In the particular case of the communications policy, establishing and enforcing clear rules of the road can help consumers and industry participants alike. I subscribe to former President Reagan’s belief: “Government exists to protect us from each other. Where government has gone beyond its limits is in deciding to protect us from ourselves.” Depending on the circumstances, effective and efficient FCC rules -- grounded in statutory provisions and sound policy -- can bring benefits to the overall marketplace.

If I were fortunate enough to be approved by this Committee and the Senate as an FCC Commissioner, I would focus on implementing and enforcing the applicable statutes enacted by Congress, work with my colleagues to address the pressing issues and bring certainty to the market, and look for opportunities to reduce unnecessary regulations or those that impose excessive financial burdens.

It may be a bit premature, but I want to take this opportunity to mention the persistent problem of Americans using their wireless phones when driving. While our nation’s wireless companies are spending considerable resources and energy to get the message out, more needs to be done on the education side of the equation. Let me lend my voice to this issue: Absolutely no one should try to call, text, or search the Internet while driving a car. People need to put their phone down, keep their eyes on the road, and focus on driving.

I stand ready to answer any questions of the Committee.

Stay Strong For Freedom.