

Written Statement for the Record

Geoffrey A. Starks

Nominee, Federal Communications Commission

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Good Morning Chairman Thune, Ranking Member Nelson, and Members of this Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you here today as you consider my nomination to be a Member of the Federal Communications Commission. I would like to thank the President for my nomination. I would also like to thank all of the members of the Senate and the House on both sides of the aisle that have been so gracious and supportive. I am humbled by this opportunity and, if confirmed, I look forward to working with all of you to advance the public interest, as well as engage with any issues of particular interest to you as members of this Committee.

I would like to begin by introducing my family. My parents, Dr. Gregory and Janet Starks, who traveled from Kansas to be with me here today. The first in your families to go to college, the values you instilled in each of my brothers and me is your legacy: hard work and education; service to others; and a deep love for this country. You two are my heroes – and whatever achievements I reach for in this life, should they fall within my grasp, it is because I stand on your shoulders. Also here today is my twin brother, Dr. Christopher Starks, and his wife, Melanie, of Virginia. My older brother, Dr. David Starks, and his wife, Dr. Kathy Starks, are watching this from their home in South Dakota. Most importantly, also here today is my wife, Lauren: you are the love of my life, and I am so glad to be on this journey with you. I could not be me without you. And, of course, my spirited two-year-old daughter, Olympia, who is simply my joy.

As many of you know, I grew up in Kansas. I am the product of a terrific high school in Kansas City – Rockhurst High School – which prides itself on training “men for others.” I then went off to college at Harvard and law school at Yale. There, I continued to learn a lot about myself and this great country. That experience nurtured my commitment to public service and my belief in the essential role technology plays in the lives of everyday Americans at work, at school, at home, and at play. I have worked in all three branches of government – as a law clerk, as a staffer in the Illinois State Senate, and at the Department of Justice. In addition to this public sector experience, I worked in the private sector at a bank and a law firm. Taken together my experience to date and the terrific mentors that came along with them have granted me a unique perspective on the issues facing American consumers. This background ultimately led me to my current post at the FCC, where I have been honored to work with a team of dedicated and thoughtful professionals in the Enforcement Bureau – a perch from which I have seen the great work being done in all of the Commission’s bureaus and offices. The Commission is a talented, passionate, and hard-working team. Over the past few years, I have worked extensively with FCC staff and leadership across the agency, and I look forward to building on those relationships. In particular, I must highlight what an honor it is to be considered for the seat that was occupied by the barrier-breaking tenure of Commissioner Mignon Clyburn – the first

woman to Chair the FCC.

The Federal Communications Commission was established nearly 83 years ago today, on June 19, 1934. The advancements in technology and the telecommunications sector since then are truly staggering, perhaps never more so than right now. Nevertheless, much of the core mission of the FCC is the same now as it was then: connect all of the American people to safe and secure networks at reasonable charges; protect consumers; and promote localism, diversity, competition and innovation. If confirmed, I will be guided by this continuing mission, and will devote myself to being a careful steward of the responsibilities entrusted to the agency by Congress to advance and defend the public interest. I shall be guided by the parameters Congress has established for the agency: to act according to the direction of Congress wherever it has spoken on a matter in question and, wherever the statute grants the FCC discretion, to review the applicable rules and record in order to reach a reasoned determination.

As a public servant at DOJ and in the Enforcement Bureau, I have seen first-hand the importance of oversight and accountability. If fortunate enough to be confirmed, I will implement the priorities of this Committee, and seek opportunities to build working relationships with all of you to ensure that the Commission is focused on the work that best serves the interests of the American people as consumers, taxpayers and citizens.

If confirmed, my initial focus in my work at the FCC will be in three main areas.

Protecting Consumers and the Public Interest: In my government work, I have always focused on giving a voice to the most vulnerable in our society. This readily extends to the FCC. Consumers look to our regulators for protection – whether it’s the scourge of robocalls, or protecting their privacy and the values of localism and diversity in our national media. Ultimately, I will be laser focused on serving the public interest and protecting consumers in this era of remarkable technological change. I believe this can and must be done in a manner that puts consumers first, but is also cognizant of the impact that regulation can have on competition and innovation if not properly implemented.

Promoting Robust Broadband Access for all Americans: Growing up in Kansas, with family members scattered around rural America, I am all too aware of the challenges presented for connecting all Americans to mobile and fixed broadband. But the so called “digital divide” is not confined to rural America – there are digital deserts in urban America, too. I will work hard to ensure that we create the right incentives for ubiquitous broadband investment and deployment, and that our universal service funding is efficiently and appropriately spent in the course of securing the deployment objectives you have established. This is a critical challenge to open the door to education, health care and opportunity for all.

Advancing Telemedicine Opportunities: The issue of telemedicine, in particular, has captured my attention. I think it is essential that we advance broadband telemedicine programs to improve access to quality medical services and health outcomes, especially for those who live in rural areas and places where there aren’t enough practitioners, both general and specialized. Perhaps it is in my blood – as I mentioned, my family members practice medicine in areas where telehealth options are helping everyday Americans: South Dakota, Kansas, Missouri, and Virginia. Telehealth practices are already revolutionizing the way in which doctors can provide care and treatment. For example, the Avera Health ECare system in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center in Amarillo, Texas, have become leaders

in providing teletrauma assessment – enabling doctors to examine emergency patients remotely, and to make real-time medical decisions that cut down life-saving transport minutes for injured patients. In a similar vein, doctors in Kansas and Missouri have made telemedicine an integral part of the fight against the opioid abuse epidemic, helping patients to connect with caregivers when there are no other options. Moreover, telemedicine is already providing critical care to nearly 45% of veterans living in rural communities. But for telemedicine to be a universal reality, citizens and the healthcare providers that serve them need access to affordable broadband connectivity wherever they live and serve. The FCC has a lot to say about that and I look forward to jumping in on this issue with the FCC team and our partners in other parts of government and the private sector that directly affect the health and quality of life of Americans.

I am humbled and honored to be considered to continue to serve the American people in this new capacity. Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to answering your questions.