

Statement of Gigi B. Sohn
Nominee to Serve as Commissioner of the Federal Communications Commission

Before the
US Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation

February 14, 2023

Good morning, Chairwoman Cantwell, Ranking Member Cruz, and members of the Committee.

Today I am joined by my wife, Lara, our daughter Yosselin, and my brother Adam. I want to acknowledge my mother, Roma, who can't be here today. People who know her would say that I get my determination and fortitude from her.

Since there are several new Committee members, let me introduce myself. I grew up with three brothers in a middle-class household on Long Island. My father was an accountant for the Grumman Corporation and my mother was one of the first Physician Assistants certified in New York State. My formative years were filled with sports and music, including cheering for my beloved Mets and Jets.

A Broadcasting Law course in my sophomore year at Boston University changed my life. I was fascinated with the power of communications networks to inform public discourse and promote democratic values and was awakened to the important role government can play in ensuring that all voices are heard.

After law school and private practice, I started what has been a nearly 35-year career as a public interest lawyer advocating for policies that ensure that modern communications networks are available to everyone, regardless of who they are or where they live. For the past two decades, I have worked towards the goal of ensuring that every US household has robust and affordable broadband Internet access.

From 2013 to 2016, I was privileged to serve as Counselor to then-FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler, where I gained the invaluable experience of working inside the agency and learning the different tools needed to be an effective policymaker.

Today, at my 3rd confirmation hearing, 15 months after I was nominated, I'd like to answer a question that I know is on the minds of many on the dais and in this room: Why am I still President Biden's nominee for the 5th seat on the FCC?

There are four reasons. First, I care deeply about the mission of the FCC and have dedicated my entire career to that mission – ensuring that everyone, regardless of income level, race, gender, sexual orientation, or where they live – has access to affordable and robust communications networks so they can be full participants in our economy, our education and health care systems, our culture, and our democracy. I've accomplished a great deal as a public advocate, but after I left the FCC, I knew I wanted to one day return as a public servant to continue this important work.

Second, I believe it is critical for at least one member of the FCC to be a consumer advocate who has spent a career not beholden to any interest but that of the public. I've certainly worked with industry towards common goals and many in industry are among the over 400 groups that support my confirmation, but my roots and my heart are with the everyday Americans the FCC by law is tasked to serve.

Third, I am extremely well qualified. Even those who oppose my confirmation agree that I have a deep knowledge of the issues before the FCC and thanks to my time working at the agency, I know how it operates. I am proud of my bipartisan network that includes pretty much every FCC stakeholder, including state, local and tribal officials, industry, academia, public interest, public safety, civil rights, and the disability community. I know everybody and they know me. They also know, regardless of whether we agree on policy, that I'm a straight shooter who will listen, try to find common ground, and take their equities into account.

Lastly, I believe deeply that regulated entities should not choose their regulator. Unfortunately, that is the exact intent of the past 15 months of false and misleading attacks on my record and my character. My industry opponents have hidden behind dark money groups and surrogates because they fear a pragmatic, pro-competition, pro-consumer policymaker who will support policies that will bring more, faster, and lower-priced broadband and new voices to your constituents.

The FCC has been without a majority for the entirety of the Biden Administration – over two years – at a time when closing the digital divide is front and center. There are too many important issues in front of the Commission to lack a full complement of members, including improving the broadband maps, fixing the Universal Service Fund, closing the Homework Gap, ensuring fair access to broadband, and protecting consumers' privacy. Americans deserve a full FCC where I could play a critical role in addressing every one of these, but time is of the essence.

In closing, I want to give my heartfelt thanks to President Biden for his belief in me, to Chairwoman Cantwell and her staff for their constant support and to the other Committee members and their staffs who have worked so hard on my behalf and on behalf of the American people. If I am confirmed, I look forward to working with all the Members of the Committee as well as the sitting Commissioners to achieve universal connectivity in the United States. Thank you.