

Chad Rupe
Former USDA Rural Utilities Service Administrator, Trump Administration

U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Nomination Hearing for Gigi B. Sohn to be a Commissioner of the Federal
Communications Commission

February 14, 2023

Remarks Introducing Gigi Sohn

[\[VIDEO\]](#)

Chad Rupe: Good morning, Chairwoman Cantwell and Ranking Member Cruz, members of the committee.

My name is Chad Rupe and I'm currently the General Manager at Ponderosa Communications, and as the Chairwoman mentioned, I'm also the former administrator for the RUS (Rural Utilities Service) under the Trump administration, and the former State Broadband Program Manager for Montana.

I'm here today, however, in my capacity as a friend of Gigi. It's truly an honor for me to come before the committee to introduce her to you and to register my strong support for Gigi to be the next commissioner of the Federal Communications Commission.

During my time as the USDA Rural Development State Director for Wyoming, and as the Administrator for RUS, I lead the Trump administration's efforts to get broadband to our rural communities, including through the Reconnect Broadband Program and implementation of the 2018 Farm Bill.

It was as the State Broadband Program Manager for Montana that I got to know Gigi and see how she approaches challenges like bringing broadband to rural America.

I saw that Gigi was deeply passionate about the importance of working to close the digital divide for all of our communities. I saw that she understands the term rural means much more than a designation given to an area based on population.

She knows that each one is unique and presents varying challenges to connectivity.

Importantly, I saw that she firmly believes that these are not partisan issues. And when we make them partisan, we fail to serve the folks in those rural communities who are just looking to ensure their families are able to enjoy the many benefits that come from broadband connectivity.

For the past five years, Gigi has worked closely with state broadband leaders from states as different as Vermont, Nebraska, and Louisiana, providing them with counsel and connections with federal broadband leaders.

In our previous two confirmation hearings, Gigi pledged to be the FCC state liaison. And I have no doubt she will keep that promise. Such a role is critical now that the states have primary responsibility for ensuring that the billions of dollars provided in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is well spent.

The FCC's work has been crucial to ensuring that the economic health and educational benefits that flow over broadband are reaching all of our communities.

More work needs to be done for sure, and Congress has taken an 'all of government' approach to moving that great work forward. And the role of the FCC in those efforts is as crucial as it has ever been.

Gigi will be a great addition to the Commission as it seeks to fulfill the charge that Congress has tasked with performing.

And in closing, I would say to this committee that I was proud to learn that there are over 400 organizations and leaders that agree with me. Gigi will be a great Commissioner. They include Republican and Democratic state and local legislators, business leaders, consumer advocates, and over 350,000 citizens.

Gigi is a dedicated public servant and a strong voice for consumers and a hard worker who will bring her 35 years of work elevating the public's interest to the portfolio of work before the commission.

I urge this committee and the Senate to swiftly confirm her to this post. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you, Mr. Rupe. Just one question for you, are those the Tetons behind you?

Chad Rupe: That is Yosemite, actually, Chairwoman. Ponderosa Communications is proud to serve about 10,000 telephone and broadband subscribers in California, in the Sierra Nevadas as well as rural communities in Arizona.

So fortunately, it's a great family-owned rural business that's been in operation since 1908. So, we're very proud to serve these rural areas.

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you. It definitely is going to be a very big focus of this committee to make sure that we get broadband expansion in rural communities. So I'm sure we'll hear a lot about that today.