



**U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON
COMMERCE, SCIENCE & TRANSPORTATION**
Senator Maria Cantwell, Chair

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Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
FCC Nominations Hearing
June 22, 2023

Senator Cantwell Opening Statement

[VIDEO](#)

Good morning. We're here today considering nominations to the FCC.

I welcome our nominees and their families.

It is critical that the FCC be equipped with a full Commission so that it can proceed with the important work that must be done to promote connectivity and ensure a robust and competitive marketplace.

Today, we will consider four key nominee positions:

- Anna Gomez, nominee for FCC Commissioner;
- Geoffrey Starks, re-nominated for FCC Commissioner;
- Brendan Carr, re-nominated for FCC Commissioner; and
- Fara Damelin, nominee for FCC Inspector General.

Let me begin with the nomination of Anna Gomez.

Ms. Gomez is one of the most qualified nominees for the FCC Commissioner [that has ever come] before our committee.

She has dedicated 25 years of her life to public service, focusing most of her time on telecommunications regulation and policy.

Ms. Gomez formerly served as counsel for this committee and Deputy Chief of Staff for the National Economic Council at the White House.

And various leadership roles within different bureaus of the FCC, including the International Bureau, which is now the Wireline Competition Bureau, and the Office of William Kennard.

Ms. Gomez served as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information at NTIA during the Obama Administration.

And currently is leading the U.S. preparations for the 2023 World Radiocommunication Conference.

If confirmed, she will be the first Latina on the Commission in more than 20 years. And her nomination comes at a critical time in America. We need more affordable and reliable broadband in making sure everyone gets to participate in a 21st Century economy.

When the pandemic hit, the nation saw overnight how remote learning and working from home for more than 16 million K-12 students in the United States literally who had no access certainly put them at a disadvantage.

In my home state, 20 percent of our students didn't have the connection they needed from remote learning.

For households on Tribal lands [the disparity was even more severe].

On the Makah Reservation, located on the Northwest point of the Olympic Peninsula, 90 percent of the households lacked broadband access.

So the pandemic really did highlight for us the disparities that parents had, kids struggling to work and do homework from home, and these gaps made it even more important that equitable access to broadband in the United States become a reality.

So I urge my colleagues to expeditiously move forward with Ms. Gomez's nomination so that we can have a full commission.

We will next consider the re-nomination of Geoffrey Starks, who has been a leader in the fight against internet inequality, and we consistently want to advocate for consumers and for the preservation of national security.

As a native Kansan, Mr. Starks understands the importance of broadband and access in America.

And he has championed the Find It, Fix It, Fund It initiative, which highlighted the need to support small and rural companies and eliminating security threats to our nation's communications networks.

Next, we will consider the re-nomination of Brendan Carr.

Commissioner Carr has nearly 20 years of private and public sector experience related to communications and technology policy.

As a Commissioner since 2017, Mr. Carr has been a strong advocate of 5G.

And as this push for 5G deployment, has supported efforts to expand the telecommunications workforce through community college and apprenticeship programs that train tower climbers and construction crews.

So I very much appreciate that. The Committee on CHIPS and Science here did great work trying to expand the wireless workforce as well.

I do have some concerns about your nomination. But we'll get to questions, and we'll luckily get responses from everybody.

I'm going to be sending a letter to the FCC which I'll elaborate when we get to Q&A.

Finally, we will discuss the nomination of Fara Damelin to be FCC Inspector General.

The FCC Inspector General is responsible for leading efforts to detect and prevent fraud, waste, and abuse, and violations of the law, while promoting efficient operations of the agency. Ms. Damelin in this role is expected to make sure federal dollars are being used to benefit the American public.

You have dedicated 27 years of your career to public service, including nine years within the Inspector General community. So we appreciate that very much.

We look forward to the ability to ask you questions.

Senator Cantwell Question Segment

Nominees:

Fara Damelin to be Inspector General of the Federal Communications Commission

Brendan Carr to be a Commissioner on the Federal Communications Commission

Anna Gomez to be a Commissioner on the Federal Communications Commission

Geoffrey Starks to be a Commissioner on the Federal Communications Commission

VIDEO

Sen. Cantwell: ...[T]his is a time in which we need discourse and competition in discourse. We can't have a few voices. We have to have many voices. And I'm very concerned about the decline of local news.

One of the things that I believe the FCC should be taking action on is reopening the record as it relates to streaming media services, who are now becoming a bigger, bigger player in delivering content.

The downside of that is that if we don't have the structures in place to make sure that they get a competitive price for the product that they offer, which I hope at some point in time, our committee will be able to turn to these larger issues about the changing landscape of media and some of the critical issues that we face overall.

In 2014, the FCC started a proceeding to examine this issue, but has been stalled for nearly a decade.

So today, I'm sending a letter to Commissioner Rosenworcel to refresh the record on this issue, and to say that streaming media services should bargain in good faith. Just as we've had to put good faith in other parts of the media landscape to make sure that we're adhering to the types of things that will give them a fair value for their content.

So, I wanted to ask the current commissioners and the nominee if you support refreshing the record on this and taking a look at how we can make sure that local broadcasters get fair value for the content they're providing, as we change over to a streaming media landscape.

Mr. Starks: Well, thank you for the question, Chairwoman. I think it's absolutely true that the way we watch TV has changed. Online streaming services have been introduced. They are more competitive. They have brought competition to the landscape. More eyeballs than ever going into streaming. I take your point and I am eager to work with you. This is part of the record that we have not had since 2014. I'm eager to work with my colleagues on seeing if there's a way that we can understand. There's no easy fix here from the 1984 Cable Act and the 1992 Cable Act. They don't in particular envision streaming, but asking questions and trying to figure out if we can help in this dynamic media space, I think makes good sense.

Sen. Cantwell: Well, my colleague, Senator Grassley sent a letter to the Chair of the Commission and I've seen that response. So, I guess what I'm asking you is if you should relook at this issue.

Mr. Starks: I think it's worth reopening, yes.

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you. Mr. Carr?

Mr. Carr: Senator, yes, I'm happy to take more information on this issue.

Sen. Cantwell: Do you think that you should reopen this and look at it?

Mr. Carr: If the Chair wants to reissue that docket and refresh the record, I'm happy to take a look at that.

Sen. Cantwell: Well, I'm definitely sending a letter to the Chair asking that happen.

As I mentioned, Sen. Grassley sent a previous letter that basically...look, the complexity of this issue is there. But we can't have an FCC that's stalled over the complexity. We need to resolve this issue. I think Seattle, or Dallas, or any other of our Denver stations deserve to have a fair value for their media content. I think, in a lot of ways, local journalism is what people still trust today. And yet, if they're undercut in the negotiations, just as we had to force in STELAR and other places, good faith negotiations I think should do that as well here.

Ms. Gomez, do you have a comment on this?

Ms. Gomez: Yes. Thank you, Senator. I agree with you. Local broadcasting is so important. It is where citizens learn about the news, about emergencies. And the economic model is getting more and more challenging, given the changes in the marketplace.

So if confirmed, I would certainly want to work with you, with the committee to understand this issue and delve into the causation and what the commission can do given the current law.

Sen. Cantwell: So [I] certainly support the Commission's restored auction authority for spectrum. And I think federal agencies need to figure out how to work together so that we don't have conflicts here. I do support the House's movement toward this legislation that I hope we will consider here too as well.

Ms. Gomez, this is a particular area of expertise for you. Where do you think we should be going as a nation in trying to free up more spectrum and the conflicts that have, you know, I certainly want our NASA and NOAA agencies to be supported, not ignored. What do you see is the process here for us getting more expansive policy on Spectrum?

Ms. Gomez: Thank you, Senator. I mean, Chairwoman. As you know, I have extensive experience working at both NTIA and at the FCC on spectrum matters. That gives me a unique viewpoint into the commercial needs for spectrum to be the lifeblood of

innovation, as well as the need of federal agencies to conduct their missions in a successful manner, their important missions. I think it is incumbent on the NTIA and the FCC to always be looking at new ways and new spectrum for future uses. It can be a long-term process, so they need to work together. They need to identify spectrum both on the commercial side and on the federal side to study for possible sharing or repurposing in order to enable innovation.

Sen. Cantwell: Do you think the international community is ahead of us on sharing?

Ms. Gomez: That is a very good question. The U.S. has been a leader in terms of spectrum management and sharing. I think that maintaining that leadership means that we have to continue to move forward to identify spectrum for all uses.

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you. We have a long list of people who want to ask questions today.

So Mr. Damelin, I'm going to submit something for the record for you, but clearly care a lot about the oversight of these agencies. And I like the DNA. I can't imagine being the Inspector General for the Department of Treasury. So I'm sure your dad came home with lots of stories.

But this is about the management of a resource for our nation, and the bright light and oversight at a time when equity as we outlined in all of our opening statements is critical for America's competitiveness. But I will submit that for the record.