

**STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER JESSICA ROSENWORCEL
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BEFORE THE
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COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE & TRANSPORTATION
“OVERSIGHT OF THE FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION”
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Good afternoon, Chairman Thune, Ranking Member Nelson, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you in the company of my colleagues at the Federal Communications Commission.

Today, communications technologies account for one-sixth of the economy—and they are changing at a breathtaking pace. How fast? Consider this: According to the *Wall Street Journal*, it took the telephone 75 years before it reached 50 million users. To reach the same number of users, television took 13 years, and the Internet 4 years. But Angry Birds took only 35 days.

So we know the future is coming at us quicker than ever before. We also know that the future involves the Internet and that our Internet economy is the envy of the world. It was built on a foundation of openness. Sustaining the openness that has made us innovative, fierce, and creative is vitally important. In fact, our commercial and civic success in the digital age depends on it. That is why open Internet policies matter—and why I support network neutrality.

As you have undoubtedly heard, four million Americans wrote the FCC to make known their ideas, thoughts, and deeply-held opinions about Internet openness. They lit up our phone lines, clogged our e-mail in-boxes, and jammed our online comment system. That might be messy, but whatever our disagreements on network neutrality, I hope we can agree that’s democracy in action and something we can all support.

With an eye to the future, I want to talk about two other things today—the need for more Wi-Fi and the need to bridge the Homework Gap.

First up, Wi-Fi. Few of us go anywhere now without mobile devices in our palms, pockets, or purses. That is because every day, in countless ways, our lives are dependent on wireless connectivity. While the demand for our airwaves grows, the bulk of our policy conversations are about increasing the supply of licensed airwaves available for auction. This is good. But the best spectrum policy involves a mix of both licensed and unlicensed airwaves. And focus on the former should not come at the expense of the latter.

That’s because the 2.4 GHz band where Wi-Fi makes its primary home is getting mighty crowded. The demand for 5 GHz Wi-Fi is also growing. So before we overwhelm Wi-Fi as we know it, we need more efforts to secure more unlicensed spectrum.

There are no shortage of reasons why this is a good idea.

After all, Wi-Fi is how we get online—in public and at home.

Wi-Fi is also how our wireless carriers manage their networks. In fact, today nearly one-half of all wireless data connections are offloaded onto unlicensed spectrum.

Wi-Fi is how we foster innovation. That's because the low barriers to entry for unlicensed airwaves make them perfect sandboxes for experimentation.

Wi-Fi is also a boon to the economy. The economic impact of unlicensed spectrum has been estimated at more than \$140 billion annually.

So we need to make unlicensed services like Wi-Fi a priority in our spectrum policy. We have opportunities to do just that with upcoming FCC work in the 3.5 GHz band and in the guard bands in our reimagined 600 MHz band. But it will take more than this to keep up with demand. That is why I think the time is right to explore greater unlicensed use in the upper portion of the 5 GHz band, and specifically from 5850 to 5925 MHz. In the future, we need to be on guard for more opportunities like this so we can find more places for Wi-Fi to flourish.

Second, I want to talk about another issue that matters for the future—the Homework Gap. Today, roughly seven in ten teachers assign homework that requires access to broadband. But FCC data suggest that as many as one in three households do not subscribe to broadband service at any speed—due to lack of affordability and lack of interest.

Think about those numbers. Where they overlap is what I call the Homework Gap. If you are a student in a household without broadband, just getting homework done is hard. Applying for a scholarship is challenging. While some students may have access to a smartphone, let me submit to you that a phone is just not how you want to research and type a paper, apply for jobs, or further your education.

These students enter the job market with a serious handicap. That's a job market today where half of all jobs require digital skills. By the end of the decade that number jumps to 77 percent. But the loss is here more than individual. It's a loss to our collective human capital and shared economic future that we need to address.

That is why the Homework Gap is the cruelest part of our digital divide. But it is within our power to bridge it. More Wi-Fi will help, as will our recent efforts to upgrade connectivity in libraries through the E-Rate program. But more work remains. I think the FCC needs to take a hard look at modernizing its program to support connectivity in low-income households, especially those with school-aged children. And I think the sooner we act the sooner we bridge this gap and give more students a fair shot at 21st century success.

Thank you and I look forward to answering any questions you might have.