

**STATEMENT OF  
COMMISSIONER JESSICA ROSENWORCEL  
BEFORE THE  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
ENERGY AND COMMERCE COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY  
“OVERSIGHT OF THE FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION”  
MARCH 22, 2016**

Good morning, Chairman Walden, Ranking Member Eshoo, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today along with my colleagues at the Federal Communications Commission.

Last week I had the privilege of speaking in Austin, Texas at South by Southwest. It's a festival for the connected, a place to get a glimpse of the future. From virtual reality to robotics, it's a terrific place to see where technology is taking us.

Last week I also spent time in California in a rural farming community in the Coachella Valley. It's a place where most roads lead to fields but where broadband has not made its way to most households.

I can say with confidence I am probably the only person who spent time in both communities last week—and saw that they had something in common. As dissimilar as they seem, they both know that the future lies in connectivity. They both know that access to modern communications is no longer a luxury—it is where we create; it is where we innovate; it is a necessity for full participation in civic and commercial life.

Expanding this access is front and center in our work at the FCC. This month we will begin the spectrum incentive auction, which will remake both broadcasting and broadband in the 600 MHz band. We are also updating our universal service policies to support stand-alone broadband in rural communities. At the same time, we are developing smarter policies for small cell siting. We are exploring new spectrum frontiers for 5G wireless services, like the 28 GHz band.

But I want to focus on two things we can do right now that will make a difference for the most connected and least connected among us: We can make space for more Wi-Fi and we can help bridge the Homework Gap.

First up, Wi-Fi. Everyone here knows the demands on our airwaves are growing. In response, we are developing policies to increase the supply of licensed airwaves for auction. This is important. But the best spectrum policy involves a mix of 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. Wi-Fi democratizes Internet access. It helps wireless carriers manage their networks through the offloading of traffic. It encourages permissionless innovation—the kind I saw last week all around Austin. And it is responsible for \$140 billion in economic activity every year.

But historically the legislative process has overlooked the value of unlicensed spectrum because it gets low marks in the scoring process at the Congressional Budget Office. Yet this accounting misses the mark—because the broader benefits of unlicensed spectrum to the economy are so great. So in any effort to increase the licensed spectrum pipeline, we need to explore a cut for unlicensed—call it the Wi-Fi dividend.

Right now at the FCC we have golden opportunity for a Wi-Fi dividend in the upper portion of the 5 GHz band. We have a consensus framework for testing this band for unlicensed use while protecting incumbent efforts to use it to promote vehicle safety. So now we need to work with our colleagues at the Department of Transportation and Department of Commerce to get this testing underway. We also have unlicensed opportunities in the guard bands in the 600 MHz band and millimeter wave spectrum at 64-71 GHz. We need to seize them.

Second, I want to talk about another issue that matters for the future of connectivity—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 here is 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. In fact, in Coachella Valley, where I was last week, they are using Wi-Fi on school buses—and turning ride time into connected time for homework. But more can be done. Modernizing the Lifeline program to support online access in households with school-aged children is critical. 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. I look forward to answering any questions you might have.