

Biden FCC nominee withdraws, blaming cable lobby and “unlimited dark money”



Enlarge / Gigi Sohn testifies during a Senate Commerce Committee confirmation hearing on Feb. 9, 2022.

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President Biden’s nominee to the open seat on the Federal Communications Commission, Gigi Sohn, withdrew her nomination today.

“When I accepted his nomination over sixteen months ago, I

could not have imagined that legions of cable and media industry lobbyists, their bought-and-paid-for surrogates, and dark money political groups with bottomless pockets would distort my over 30-year history as a consumer advocate into an absurd caricature of blatant lies,” Sohn said in a statement provided to Ars and other media organizations.

Sohn’s nomination was “met with homophobic tropes and attacks against herself and her family,” a recent letter from advocacy groups to senators said. Sohn’s statement said that “unrelenting, dishonest and cruel attacks on my character and my career as an advocate for the public interest have taken an enormous toll on me and my family.”

“It is a sad day for our country and our democracy when dominant industries, with assistance from unlimited dark money, get to choose their regulators. And with the help of their friends in the Senate, the powerful cable and media companies have done just that,” Sohn also said.

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Manchin announced opposition today

Earlier today, Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) announced that he would vote against Sohn. With Republicans lined up against the nominee, that meant she would need support from every remaining member of the Democratic caucus in order to be confirmed.

In a statement, Manchin criticized Sohn for “her years of partisan activism, inflammatory statements online, and work with far-left groups.” Manchin didn’t provide any examples of Sohn making “inflammatory statements.” The “work with far-left groups” may be a reference to Sohn being on the board of the Electronic Frontier Foundation.

“Especially now, the FCC must remain above the toxic

partisanship that Americans are sick and tired of, and Ms. Sohn has clearly shown she is not the person to do that," Manchin's statement said. "For those reasons, I cannot support her nomination to the FCC, and I urge the Biden Administration to put forth a nominee who can bring us together, not drive us apart."

The FCC has been stuck with a 2-2 partisan deadlock for Biden's entire term as president. He nominated Sohn, a longtime consumer advocate and former FCC official, in October 2021 and again in January 2023 after the previous Senate didn't vote on the nomination.

"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," Sohn told the Senate Commerce Committee during a confirmation hearing last month.

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