



## **This Week in Tech: Patent pick heads to Congress**

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Michelle Lee heads to the Senate Judiciary Committee for a hearing Wednesday on her nomination to be director of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (PTO).

Lee, a former Google executive, has been the deputy director of the patent office since January, but the leadership spot at the PTO has been empty since David Kappos stepped down nearly two years ago. If confirmed, she would be the first woman to lead the patent office.

She has been widely praised for her work over the last year and is unlikely to encounter significant opposition from lawmakers during her nomination hearing. When she was nominated in October, committee Chairman Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) described Lee as “thoughtful and respectful of the diverse perspectives across the patent community, and a valuable resource to the Senate Judiciary Committee.”

The Wednesday hearing could give lawmakers an opportunity to probe Lee’s plans for the patent office, especially in the wake of Supreme Court decisions this year that limited some types of patents the office can grant.

Lee will testify alongside Daniel Marti, President Obama’s nominee for intellectual property enforcement coordinator. In the post, Marti would be in charge of making sure that federal agencies are on the same page when policing patent, trademark and copyright issues.

Given the short amount of time left in the lame-duck session, a vote on the two nominees isn’t likely until next year, a committee aide said.

On Wednesday, a House Science subcommittee will take a look at the country’s plans for new ways to launch human beings farther into space than they have ever gone.

The panel’s hearing comes just days after a successful test flight for the Orion capsule, which could someday carry mankind first to an asteroid and then to Mars. Last week’s successful launch was “a major milestone for U.S. space exploration and our efforts to travel further [sic] into our solar system than ever before,” Science Committee Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas) said in a statement after the test flight.

Officials from NASA and the Government Accountability Office will testify about their initial lessons from that launch and about the progress on the Space Launch System, the rocket that is expected to carry the Orion vessel in the future.

The House Transportation Committee is holding a hearing on “integration, oversight and competitiveness” of drones on Wednesday morning.

On Thursday, the Federal Communications Commission will hold its monthly open meeting. At the top of the commission’s agenda is an item to update its effort to bring high-speed broadband Internet to more schools and libraries around the country.

The extra \$1.5 billion Chairman Tom Wheeler called for to bulk up the program would mean an extra 16 cents in fees added to people’s monthly phone bills. Republicans have criticized the plan as a needless tax increase.

Off Capitol Hill, Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.) and Julie Brill, a member of the Federal Trade Commission, will deliver remarks at a Direct Marketing Association event on “the dynamic state of data” on Monday afternoon.

The Congressional Internet Caucus’s advisory committee is holding a discussion about Uber, Airbnb and the “sharing economy” in a congressional office building during lunch on Monday.

Far outside the Beltway, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals will hear oral arguments in Seattle on Monday in a key case challenging the constitutionality of the National Security Agency’s (NSA) most controversial program. The case is one of three major lawsuits over the NSA’s collection of phone records in the U.S. It was filed by an Idaho nurse who says the program violated her constitutional right to privacy.

Jeremy Bird, the national field director for President Obama’s 2012 campaign, will take part in a discussion on “organizing for change in the digital era” at the New America Foundation’s Open Technology Institute on Wednesday morning.

Brill talks about “patent trolls” with industry and legal minds later on Wednesday.

On Friday, the Cato Institute is holding a daylong conference on surveillance featuring remarks from Rep. Thomas Massie (R-Ky.).