

Woman in Silicon Valley sex discrimination suit to testify

March 5 2015, bySudhin Thanawala

The woman at the center of a sex discrimination lawsuit against one of Silicon Valley's most prestigious venture capital firms is set to take the stand in a case that has focused attention on the treatment of women in the high-tech and venture capital fields.

Ellen Pao says she was passed over for a promotion at Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers because she is a [woman](#) and was fired in 2012 after she complained. Pao's attorney, Alan Exelrod, has argued that Kleiner Perkins had a male-dominated culture where [women](#) were excluded from parties, asked to take notes like they were secretaries and subject to coarse behavior and harassment by their male colleagues.

Pao specifically says she was given a book of erotic poetry and nude sketches by a senior partner at the firm, and another male employee had interfered with her work when Pao broke off an affair with him.

She says she was passed over for a seat on the board of a company that she helped develop that went public. Pao became a junior partner in 2010 with full-time investment duties at the firm, but says three male colleagues with less tenure and less success than her were promoted from that position while she was not.

Pao's testimony set for Thursday comes as the trial nears the end of its second week. It could last four weeks.

The firm has denied wrongdoing and says Pao, 45, didn't get along with

her colleagues—a requirement for the junior partner position—and performed poorly in that role.

Jurors heard testimony Wednesday from billionaire investor John Doerr, a senior partner at Kleiner Perkins. Pao referred to herself as Doerr's "surrogate daughter," according to an email presented in court.

Doerr testified that he was a loyal supporter of Pao's and tried to help her succeed at Kleiner Perkins. Doerr, a member of the Kleiner Perkins management team, said he fought for Pao to stay with the company and objected when other partners wanted to let her go in 2011.

Doerr said he provided Pao with two coaches, including a speech coach, to help improve her skills, but she continued to have problems.

In a job review previously presented in court, Doerr said Pao needed to improve her interpersonal skills and not be dismissive of peers who don't meet her expectations, though he otherwise praised her performance in her first year as his chief of staff—the position she held before becoming a junior partner.

Doerr previously testified that he was aware of Pao's affair with the male colleague, but she insisted that she could work with him and he not be punished. He also said she did not tell him the nature of the poetry book and didn't seem upset about it.

A study released last year by Babson College in Massachusetts found that women filled just 6 percent of the partner-level positions at 139 [venture capital firms](#) in 2013, down from 10 percent in 1999.

Doerr said 20 percent of partners at Kleiner Perkins are women.

Pao is seeking \$16 million in damages. The firm is seeking to limit any

possible damages by arguing that Pao is well-compensated in her current position as interim CEO of the popular social media company Reddit.

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