**Net Neutrality Explained: What It Means (and Why It Matters)**

*Fortune* - By [Andrew Nusca](http://fortune.com/author/andrew-nusca/) - November 23, 2017

After signaling that it would for months, the U.S. Federal Communications Commission on Tuesday revealed its plan to dismantle regulations that ensure equal access to the Internet, a concept known as “net neutrality.”

The regulations classify broadband access as a telecommunications service, which subjects it to “common carrier” provisions that bar Internet service providers from discriminating against how broadband is used. The regulations were passed in February 2015 by the FCC, then led by chairman Tom Wheeler. Wheeler’s successor Ajit Pai, a vocal critic of that move even while serving under Wheeler, has vowed to revisit the issue.

Pai’s position is that the common carrier provisions used to ensure net neutrality is “[last-century, utility-style regulation](http://fortune.com/2017/02/28/donald-trump-fcc-chair-ajit-pai/)” that injects uncertainty into a market now dominated by broadband. Pai, who says he supports an “open Internet,” believes that less regulation in this area is more beneficial to market growth.

The Internet is “the greatest free-market success story in history,” Pai [wrote in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed](https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-the-fcc-can-save-the-open-internet-1511281099) published Tuesday. Regulations “designed in the 1930s to tame the Ma Bell telephone monopoly” are hurting investment, he argued. In short, Pai’s view is that broadband shouldn’t be regulated like a utility.

Proponents of the 2015 regulations say Pai is merely clearing the way for Internet service companies to charge users more to see certain content and to curb access to some websites—a “fast lane” and “slow lane” for the Internet. It’s not an unfounded concern. In 2007 the FCC sued [Comcast](http://fortune.com/fortune500/comcast/) for interfering with traffic from BitTorrent, the file transfer service. The commission lost, [owing to a lack of legal basis for the complaint](https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2017/07/how-title-ii-goes-beyond-net-neutrality-to-protect-internet-users-from-isps/)—basis it later achieved with the 2015 reclassification.

“There are no toll roads on the information superhighway,” President Barack Obama [said in a 2014 video on the subject](http://fortune.com/2014/11/10/obama-net-neutrality-explained/).

**Most software companies oppose the FCC’s recent moves.**

Technology companies—among them Airbnb, [Google](http://fortune.com/fortune500/alphabet/) parent Alphabet, [Amazon](http://fortune.com/fortune500/amazon-com/), Dropbox, [Facebook](http://fortune.com/fortune500/facebook/), [Microsoft](http://fortune.com/fortune500/microsoft/), [Netflix](http://fortune.com/fortune500/netflix/), Twitter, Snap, and Spotify—have made their disagreement with Pai’s position known.

Rescinding the 2015 regulations makes it possible for telecom companies to force consumer Internet companies to pay for faster connections, they argue—something only the largest companies could afford. Those costs could [make their way to individual users](http://fortune.com/2017/11/21/what-net-neutrality-means-for-you/).

The move “will create significant uncertainty in the market and upset the careful balance that has led to the current virtuous circle of innovation in the broadband ecosystem,” a group representing many of the companies [argued in a filing earlier this year](http://fortune.com/2017/07/18/tech-firms-clash-net-neutrality-fcc/). Worse, it will hurt consumers because it will eliminate restrictions blocking ISPs’ ability to block or “throttle” users’ access, the group argued.

“The Internet should be competitive and open,” Google said [in an early statement on the issue](https://www.google.com/takeaction/action/freeandopen/index.html). “That means no Internet access provider should block or degrade Internet traffic, nor should they sell ‘fast lanes’ that prioritize particular Internet services over others. These rules should apply regardless of whether you’re accessing the Internet using a cable connection, a wireless service, or any other technology.”

“We are disappointed that the proposal announced today by the FCC fails to maintain the strong net neutrality protections that will ensure the Internet remains open for everyone,” [Facebook said in a statement this week](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/21/technology/fcc-net-neutrality.html) following the release of Pai’s plan. “We will work with all stakeholders committed to this principle.”

**Most telecommunications companies support the FCC’s recent moves.**

A different category of technology company—telecoms such as [AT&T](http://fortune.com/fortune500/att/) and Verizon—support the FCC’s move to rescind reclassification of broadband. In September, a group representing AT&T, [CenturyLink](http://fortune.com/fortune500/centurylink/), [Verizon](http://fortune.com/fortune500/verizon/), and scores of smaller telecom companies [formally petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-09-28/broadband-providers-to-seek-high-court-review-on-net-neutrality) to overturn the Obama-era net neutrality rules.

“The FCC is not talking about killing the net neutrality rules,” said Verizon general counsel Craig Sillman in a video explaining the company’s position. “In fact not we nor any other ISP are asking them to kill the open Internet rules. All they’re doing is looking to put the open Internet rules in an enforceable way on a different legal footing.”

That view is shared by other telecom companies. Charter, which acquired [Time Warner](http://fortune.com/fortune500/time-warner/) Cable in 2016, said it would “not block or throttle Internet traffic or engage in paid prioritization” at the time of that deal. And Comcast says it supports net neutrality [even as it rejects the FCC’s 2015 reclassification](http://corporate.comcast.com/comcast-voices/surprise-we-agree-with-the-presidents-principles-on-net-neutrality-reiterating-our-strong-support-for-the-open-internet) of broadband as a common carrier service.

“We have stated on numerous occasions that we believe legally enforceable rules should continue to include strong transparency, no blocking, and anti-discrimination provisions,” the Philadelphia company said in a statement. “We don’t prioritize Internet traffic or have paid fast lanes, and have no plans to do so.”

Still, various preferential treatments of Internet usage already exist today. When AT&T customers access the company’s DirecTV Now video streaming service, that usage isn’t included in calculations for data limits. The same goes for Verizon and its Go90 and FiOS TV services as well as T-Mobile and services such as those from HBO, Hulu, Netflix, and YouTube. The practice, known as “zero rating,” was scrutinized by Wheeler’s FCC. Under Pai, it’s freely practiced.

“The FCC will not focus on denying Americans free data,” Pai said in February.

**In the end, it’s a political issue.**

Notice something curious about the statements made by Google and Comcast? They’re remarkably similar. Both companies say they reject blocking, throttling, and paid prioritization for Internet users. Their disagreement is over how to enforce it. Should the FCC regulate broadband Internet, or leave market players to do it? Are existing common carrier provisions the best way forward, or is new and different regulation the answer? [It’s as political a battle as it gets.](http://fortune.com/2017/11/23/net-neutrality-donald-trump-mark-cuban/)

The FCC plans to vote on the issue Dec. 14.

**Dear Aunt Sadie, Please Step Back From The Net Neutrality Ledge**

*Forbes* - [Larry Downes](https://www.forbes.com/sites/larrydownes/) , Contributor - November 27, 2017

In the 25 years I’ve been toiling in the mines of tech policy, I’ve developed what I call the Aunt Sadie test.  Most of the issues I research and write about are woefully technical, legal, economic and boring; of interest to more and more people here in Silicon Valley as the information economy increasingly becomes the economy, but, still, relatively obscure.

But every now and then, I’ll get a call from a friend I’ll refer to as “Aunt Sadie,” someone who avidly uses technology but is not involved in its creation, marketing, or regulation.

“What’s this I hear about the U.N. taking over the Web?” Aunt Sadie will ask.  “Am I for or against SOPA?”  And, of course, last week, “How can we stop the FCC from destroying the Internet?”

Aunt Sadie is politically tuned in, a long-time California progressive who reads plenty of Internet news sites and gets lots of solicitations from various public interest groups who want her to help fund their campaigns to overturn this or support that.

So when I hear from Aunt Sadie on an issue of tech policy, I know that the shark has been thoroughly jumped.

It means she’s been blasted with overheated and oversimplified media accounts of what is inevitably a complicated question of technology and policy, followed up by feverish pitches from advocacy groups hoping to capitalize on the chaos, shoehorning the issue into often unrelated agenda.

Emotions, which have been running extra-high since the 2016 election, are on a hair-trigger.  It takes less and less to tip over into the [domain of hysteria](https://www.reddit.com/r/technology/comments/7f81y2/if_trumps_fcc_repeals_net_neutrality_elites_will/) on any policy matter—whether it’s health care, tax reform, immigration, or environmental regulation.

Though Aunt Sadie is a thoroughly rational individual with a healthy skepticism, her call signals that the time for facts and logic on the issue is at least, temporarily, over.

So it was last week when the FCC announced, to no one’s surprise, that it would be voting in mid-December to [undo much if not all](https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-347927A1.pdf) of the Commission’s 2015 Open Internet order, a four-hundred page monster that, almost as an afterthought, attempted to codify rules limiting the network management practices of ISPs--the third such effort to do so after courts twice told the agency it had no legal authority to do so,.

The FCC has always referred to these efforts as “Open Internet rules.”  But everyone else, for better and for much worse, knows them as “net neutrality.”

Once again, the rules are being rewritten.  Once again, the pitchforks and torches are in hand.  And once again, the only real and effective solution is being ignored:  legislation from Congress, versions of which have been floating around Capitol Hill for almost a decade.  (More on that in a moment.)

One, two, three:  What are we fighting for?  No, seriously, what?

Originally a term of art coined [by a law professor](https://hbr.org/2017/03/the-tangled-web-of-net-neutrality-and-regulation) to popularize Internet design principles including peered connections and packet-switching algorithms, “net neutrality” has come to stand for, well, [pretty much anything](https://www.forbes.com/forbes/welcome/?toURL=https://www.forbes.com/sites/larrydownes/2017/10/23/a-legislative-solution-for-net-neutrality-may-be-close/&refURL=https://www.google.com/&referrer=https://www.google.com/), gathering political debris like a snowball rolling down a mountain, until the term has become weirdly partisan and utterly meaningless.  [It’s now “about”](https://www.forbes.com/sites/larrydownes/2017/10/23/a-legislative-solution-for-net-neutrality-may-be-close/#5a70d97b3dd8) everything from free speech to democracy [to “fairness on the Internet.”](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2017/07/11/your-favorite-websites-might-look-a-little-different-soon-heres-why/?utm_term=.9d75ae480e96)

In the wake of the net neutrality debate, a longstanding bi-partisan policy to leave the Internet largely to regulation by the engineering groups who built and maintain it has been decimated.

That, in any case, is the view of the current FCC Chairman, Ajit Pai[, who dissented strongly](https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/FCC-15-24A5.pdf%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), while a Commissioner, from the 2015 Order and who has promised [since being named Chairman](https://www.forbes.com/sites/larrydownes/2017/01/24/why-is-the-media-smearing-new-fcc-chair-ajit-pai-as-the-enemy-of-net-neutrality/#5b001f11438e) of the agency earlier this year to restore Internet governance to the state it was in for the twenty years prior to 2015.

During that period, a bi-partisan consensus of Congress, the White House and the FCC stayed out of the Internet regulation business, following the command of a 1996 law to encourage broadband deployment by leaving it “unfettered by Federal or State regulation.”

The results speak for themselves, including trillions of dollars of new economic value, much of it  built by [U.S.-based Internet companies](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2017/07/11/your-favorite-websites-might-look-a-little-different-soon-heres-why/?utm_term=.9d75ae480e96).

Throughout that time, there were, contrary to popular myth, no enforceable net neutrality rules.  The FCC did not police ISP network management practices, or prohibit specific conduct.

That was left to the Federal Trade Commission, using general consumer protection and anti-competition laws.  Prior to 2015, the FTC [pursued over a hundred complaints](https://hbr.org/2016/05/the-downside-of-the-fccs-new-internet-privacy-rules) against ISPs and others in the Internet ecosystem.

In fact, the 2015 Order explicitly cut off the FTC’s jurisdiction over broadband companies, one of the many negative side-effects Pai’s proposal would reverse.

As [I’ve written before](https://www.forbes.com/sites/larrydownes/2017/10/23/a-legislative-solution-for-net-neutrality-may-be-close/#5a1907113dd8), the net neutrality fight long ago stopped being about how to regulate network management principles prohibiting blocking, throttling, or otherwise discriminating against some packets for anti-competitive reasons.

Whether its most ardent advocates know it or not, support for net neutrality rules [was hijacked into a proxy referendum](https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-white-house-thwarted-fcc-chief-on-internet-rules-1423097522) on whether U.S. information infrastructure should remain privately funded and operated [or nationalized](https://www.dailydot.com/layer8/nationalize-internet-net-neutrality/), either [as a government service or a quasi-governmental public utility](https://www.forbes.com/sites/larrydownes/2017/10/23/a-legislative-solution-for-net-neutrality-may-be-close/#5a1907113dd8).

In 2015, a majority of FCC Commissioners voted for the latter, justifying their decision as the only option left to get enforceable net neutrality rules past the federal courts.

(A challenge to that decision is still on-going, [with the U.S. Supreme Court waiting](https://www.forbes.com/sites/larrydownes/2017/10/23/a-legislative-solution-for-net-neutrality-may-be-close/#5a1907113dd8) on the FCC’s current proceeding to see if the issue becomes moot.)

Now, in 2017, a different majority of Commissioners will be reversing that decision, at least the sixth such change of policy in the last ten years.  And, unless and until Congress steps in, it will certainly not be the last time.

But each time the Commission or the courts have reversed course, the public attention becomes heightened, the rhetoric becomes more over-the-top, and the likelihood of reasoned policy debate becomes slimmer.  The calls from Aunt Sadie come earlier, and with more urgency.

Four, five, six:  Open up the pearly gates

To be clear, I support Pai’s proposal, which cites my research on disruptive technology and the danger to innovation in the Internet ecosystem of the open-ended public utility powers the FCC granted itself in 2015.

To maintain the Open Internet principles themselves and carry through on [Pai’s pledge to uphold the](https://www.forbes.com/sites/larrydownes/2017/01/24/why-is-the-media-smearing-new-fcc-chair-ajit-pai-as-the-enemy-of-net-neutrality/#5b001f11438e) FCC’s longstanding support for the Open Internet, the new plan proposes to replace the 2015 Order’s specific prohibitions and a dangerous “General Conduct Standard” (which even fierce opponents of Pai’s current proposal [argue is illegal and overreaching](https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2015/02/dear-fcc-rethink-those-vague-general-conduct-rules)) with a strong transparency rule.

The enhanced transparency rule will require ISPs to disclose how they are managing their networks.  It will be enforceable by the FCC, the FTC and the Department of Justice, shoring up existing laws that protect consumers and competition.

It’s not the same as the 2004, 2010 or 2015 versions of net neutrality.   But it’s also not the “repeal,” “destruction” or “killing” of net neutrality.

(Most of vitriol over the Commission’s new plan appeared before the draft order—[which runs over 200 pages](https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-347927A1.pdf)—had even been released.  It presumably remains unread by most.)

My support for the proposal is not partisan.  Believe it or not, I do not hate the Internet, nor do I want or expect it to be destroyed by undoing some of the rules, none of which existed before 2015 and which didn’t only barely got past a federal court challenge [a little over a year ago](https://www.cadc.uscourts.gov/internet/opinions.nsf/3F95E49183E6F8AF85257FD200505A3A/%24file/15-1063-1619173.pdf).  (The agency has yet to bring a single enforcement action.)

Rather, as regular readers of this column know, my technology policy lodestone is simple if not simplistic:  the accelerating speed of technological change invariably outweighs the ability of regulators to keep up.  The law of unintended consequences takes over quickly and dangerously, often undoing any benefits from interventions entered into with the best of intentions.

Instead, new technologies and the engineers, entrepreneurs and investors who develop it do a much more effective job of regulating than traditional governments.

Markets are imperfect, but here they work extraordinarily well, as evidenced by the health of the U.S. Internet economy.  When they do fail, regulatory solutions [should be narrowly tailored](https://poseidon01.ssrn.com/delivery.php?ID=534125082092087101103025028123084101033003058035043086102105079087078031022072108081098099038005016125097091125097064068012065020002055000087002111116017002006127028036054039093088072017122030127114088127106010026125089099068121073092085004028064120110&EXT=pdf), and adopted only when the costs of enforcing them are less than the costs of simply leaving thing alone and waiting for the next generation of technology to reset the game.

Sometimes that point of view puts me on the side of the rabble-rousers ([copyright](https://www.forbes.com/sites/larrydownes/2012/01/25/who-really-stopped-sopa-and-why/#3d7e97487b76) and [patent](https://www.forbes.com/sites/larrydownes/2013/01/09/at-ces-companies-large-and-small-bash-broken-patent-system/#2c4de72859f1) reform, keeping the U.N. [out of Internet governance](https://www.forbes.com/sites/larrydownes/2012/12/17/no-one-mourns-the-wcit/), defending [sharing economy innovations](https://www.forbes.com/sites/larrydownes/2013/02/06/lessons-from-uber-why-innovation-and-regulation-dont-mix/)) and sometimes not ([blocking tech mergers](https://www.forbes.com/sites/larrydownes/2017/08/28/antitrust-is-back-but-the-media-industry-doesnt-need-it/), regulating [data collection and use](https://www.forbes.com/sites/larrydownes/2017/03/30/why-congresss-rejection-of-proposed-fcc-data-rules-will-not-affect-your-privacy-in-the-slightest/), [utility treatment for ISPs](https://www.forbes.com/sites/larrydownes/2015/02/12/how-wheelers-net-neutrality-became-obamas-public-utility/#5bd1f4612ea8)).  I served on the Executive Committee of the ACLU during the years I lived in Chicago, and I continue to admire its vigilance on the risks of government overreach.

[As I wrote earlier this year](https://www.forbes.com/sites/larrydownes/2017/10/23/a-legislative-solution-for-net-neutrality-may-be-close/#79b664503dd8), I had expected the agency to leave the other 2015 rules on the books with an uncertain legal foundation for now.  But I respect the agency’s legal experts and their view that the agency never had the authority from Congress to pass them in the first place.

Beyond technical and economic safeguards, the enhanced transparency requirement from the FCC and [the return of authority to the FTC](https://www.forbes.com/sites/larrydownes/2017/05/17/pushing-the-net-neutrality-rock-back-up-the-hill/#5e22c7383fe8) to enforce it, along with general consumer protections and anti-competition laws, will give Internet users the legal backstop they need to maintain the Open Internet.

Though less specific (and less dangerous) than the 2015 rules, the 2017 replacement still provides more legal protection than existed prior to 2015.  Not less, and certainly not none.

But that, of course, is an argument from facts and logic, costs and benefits, law and policy--unlikely to carry much weight in the present climate of [rage and hysteria](https://www.reddit.com/r/technology/comments/7f81y2/if_trumps_fcc_repeals_net_neutrality_elites_will/).

There’s little point, at least for now, in reciting other relevant facts—including that the FCC has long acknowledged that net neutrality violations [are almost entirely theoretical](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2164985) and that its attempts to pass enforceable rules have been, to use the agency’s own oft-repeated term, “prophylactics.”

Or that ISPs have little business incentive to destroy the Internet, and that in most of the U.S. consumers can and do easily switch companies if they object to the network management practices of their current broadband provider—a potent prophylactic.  (According to recent data, over 75% of Americans have a choice of two or more providers even at the highest speeds.)

Source: FCC

Or that some applications—video, autonomous vehicles, the Internet of Things, tele-medicine—already or will soon [require prioritized treatment](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/innovations/wp/2015/10/26/what-is-5g-and-why-should-lawmakers-care/?utm_term=.fb02d66ae812), long a feature of the Internet’s actual architecture.

Or that paid Internet “fast lanes” already exist, offered not by mercenary ISPs but in [the proprietary backbones](https://www.forbes.com/sites/larrydownes/2014/11/25/how-netflix-poisoned-the-net-neutrality-debate/#48e27db81c4d) of Google, Facebook, Netflix, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft and others, or from Content Delivery Networks and other paid transit services offered to everyone by unregulated companies including [Akamai](https://www.akamai.com/) and [Limelight](https://www.limelight.com/), and [Cogent](http://www.cogentco.com/en/)--non-neutral technology, but essential to keep the Internet, and especially highly popular video traffic, moving.

Or that, to the extent blocking and other forms of viewpoint-based discrimination does occur, it is done by infrastructure providers [such as CloudFlare](https://blog.cloudflare.com/why-we-terminated-daily-stormer/?utm_content=buffer57d9d&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer) and content companies including [search engines, social media platforms](http://www.multichannel.com/news/congress/pallone-google-facebook-twitter-content-treatment-not-neutral/416099) and news services [such as Reddit—](https://www.forbes.com/sites/larrydownes/2015/06/01/the-fccs-war-on-the-internet-targets-facebook/2/#7a6ac4d16b14)leading senior Democrats including Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.) and Frank Pallone (D-N.J.) to call for [extending net neutrality to the entire Internet ecosystem](http://thehill.com/policy/technology/359499-franken-condemns-tech-calls-for-net-neutrality-for-google-twitter-and).

Or that prior to 2015, public utility regulations designed for the former Bell System [had never applied](http://cbpp.georgetown.edu/sites/cbpp.georgetown.edu/files/July%2012%202017%20Broadband%20Regulation%20-%20How%20did%20we%20get%20here.pdf) to cable, satellite, mobile or fiber-based Internet access.

Call your Congressman, do it now, but ask for something useful

But assume none of that is relevant and assume, like Aunt Sadie, that the principles of the Open Internet are so central to your experience of online life that you believe the federal government should regulate it and enforce it.  What then?

It should be clear to everyone by now that leaving the specifics of that remedy to the discretion of successive chairmen of the FCC is an untenable solution.

The courts have now ruled that Congress left the classification of ISPs to the discretion of the Commission, meaning that whatever you think of the 2010, 2015, or 2017 Open Internet orders, the next FCC Chairman will have her or his own view, and this cycle of chaos will start anew, perhaps indefinitely. Chairman Pai’s proposal is, notably, the sixth reversal of policy in the last decade.

Whatever outcome you are hoping for, in other words, won’t last long even if you get it.

[That’s why I continue to urge](https://www.forbes.com/sites/larrydownes/2017/10/23/a-legislative-solution-for-net-neutrality-may-be-close/#5a1907113dd8) Aunt Sadie and everyone else who will listen to bring an end to this wasteful debate by demanding that Congress decide once and for all how broadband Internet should be regulated, and by whom.

Congress can--and I believe should--pass specific net neutrality rules, and should settle the question of how enforcement should be split (or not) between the FCC and the FTC.

I’ve supported a legislative solution whether [offered by Democrats](https://www.cnet.com/news/leaked-net-neutrality-bill-threads-needle-on-mobile/) (Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Cal.) in 2010) [or Republicans](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/innovations/wp/2015/01/20/eight-reasons-to-support-congresss-net-neutrality-bill/?utm_term=.0d3115bed15c) (Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.), Rep. Fred Upton (R-Mich.) and Rep. Greg Walden (R-Ore.) in 2015).  I continue to do so.

Indeed, several net neutrality bills have floated in Congress over the last several years.  All of them are short, and differ little in most material respects.  They all create enforceable net neutrality rules, and give the FCC authority to enforce them.

Rep. Waxman’s bill, for example, was [based on a framework](https://www.cnet.com/news/what-the-google-verizon-proposal-really-says/) agreed in 2010 by Google and Verizon.  The Thune/Walden bill was based on the FCC’s 2010 version of the rules (struck down by the courts), with considerably more teeth than Waxman’s version.

Negotiating a bi-partisan bill, given the minor differences, would take little time.  And perhaps now that the FCC is poised to return the status quo to where it was in 2015, Congress, as I [suggested last month](https://www.forbes.com/sites/larrydownes/2017/10/23/a-legislative-solution-for-net-neutrality-may-be-close/#5a1907113dd8), will take both the need and opportunity seriously.

So, dear Aunt Sadie, please step back from the net neutrality ledge.  The Internet as we know it is still not coming to an end.

On the other hand, if you or anybody else wants to channel your understandably strong feelings about protecting the truly remarkable value we’ve created in the Internet over the last ten years into something that might actually help, don’t just take to Twitter or Reddit to rant.

Don’t sign petitions.  And don’t funnel more money to public interest groups who pledge vaguely to “fight” for net neutrality.

Instead, do as advocacy groups [including the Electronic Frontier Foundation](https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2017/11/today-and-every-day-we-fight-defend-open-internet) recommend. Immediately reach out to your elected representatives.  Do it right now.

But don’t waste time demanding that they somehow stop the FCC vote next month (they cannot).  Ask instead for something both concrete and within their power—and something that will actually secure enforceable net neutrality rules.

Ask them to pass legislation that will settle the Open Internet fight, once and for all.

It's either that or find ourselves right back on the same precipice, starring into the same abyss, time and time again.

**When The FCC Kills Net Neutrality, Here's What Your Internet Could Look Like**

*Forbes* - [Steven Salzberg](https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevensalzberg/) , Contributor - November 26, 2017

The new FCC chairman, Ajit Pai, [formerly worked as a lawyer for Verizon](https://www.thenation.com/article/if-trumps-fcc-repeals-net-neutrality-elites-will-rule-the-internet-and-the-future/). His plan to eliminate net neutrality is a bigger gift to Verizon than anything he's ever done before.

In just a few weeks, the FCC will vote to eliminate net neutrality. The vote isn't in doubt: with Pai in charge, the anti-neutrality votes have a 3-2 edge. Without net neutrality, Internet service providers will be able to charge web companies for "fast lanes," which they can't do now. Smaller online video or videogame providers could be relegated to the slow lane. The biggest service providers (Netflix, Google, Amazon, and others) may have to cough up extra money, but the consumers won't see any of that–all the benefits will go to the ISPs. Consumers could see their rates go up.

Higher fees for lousier service. Does this sound familiar? That's how cable companies have operated for years.

Not surprisingly, virtually everyone hates this idea except the cable companies themselves. The telecommunications industry, though, is very excited about the prospect of all the money they're going to make. When previous FCC commissioner Tom Wheeler proposed to weaken net neutrality just a couple of years ago, the ensuing public outcry convinced him to reverse himself, resulting in a strong ruling in 2015 preserving neutrality. This week, [Wheeler blasted Pai's new rules](http://bgr.com/2017/11/22/net-neutrality-explainer-2017/), saying that "this proposal raises hypocrisy to new heights."

But don't take my word for it. Check out this terrific and entertaining explainer from John Oliver, earlier this year:

Here's the nightmare version of what your Internet service could look like in a few years if Ajit Pai and his telecom buddies get their way– I altered the first line, just to convey the idea; the rest is from a list of Comcast's current cable TV services:

That's right: your Internet service provider (ISP) will be allowed to bundle websites just like they bundle television channels. Of course, ISPs say they will do no such thing, and some experts say it's unlikely that they would do so given the risk of antagonizing consumers. More likely, they say, is a shift toward plans where content providers favored by the ISP are given preferential treatment.

If net neutrality goes away, it could become harder to establish a thriving business online by offering popular content. They'll need to raise money to pay the ISPs, or else face being relegated to the slow lane.

No one wants this change except a few large telecom companies. Interviewed by *The Nation*, [former FCC Commissioner Michael Copps said](https://www.thenation.com/article/if-trumps-fcc-repeals-net-neutrality-elites-will-rule-the-internet-and-the-future/)

"There can be no truly open internet without net neutrality. To believe otherwise is to be captive to special interest power brokers or to an old and discredited ideology that thinks monopoly and not government oversight best serves the nation."

Ajit Pai, our new FCC chairman, clearly belongs to the former.