I urge the FCC to maintain strong Title II oversight of ISPs in support of net neutrality. Title II oversight is absolutely necessary to maintain American citizens’ (relatively-free) access to information on the Internet, protect consumers, and preserve innovation on the Internet.

As the Internet becomes further ingrained into our lives, Internet service is becoming a necessity to stay informed of current events, access important government information and resources, and participate in the modern economy. The entrenchment of powerful companies as the leading Internet service providers (ISPs) for most Americans gives those companies incredible power over our every-day lives. Most of these companies already have bad reputations in terms of customer service and support (e.g., most cable and cable Internet providers), and their dominating control of local Internet service provision allows them to impose their will on their customers with relative impunity due to lack of local competition and oversight. Without strong common carrier rules, there likely will not be much to stop ISPs from further controlling what the American People can access and how they access it.

While our current common carrier rules don’t appear to have many pricing regulations, the current regulatory system does appear to be protecting consumers by mostly maintaining price equity, both nationally and in local markets. At the moment, people in the same service area are generally charged the same amount of money to access the same websites (that is, practically any website), and websites with subscription services generally don’t charge different rates across different geographical areas. Removing Title II oversight would potentially allow ISPs to charge more to access certain websites. This will either have the effect of limiting access to those websites (basically allowing ISPs to pick winners and losers, especially for competitors to their own services), or pushing the cost from websites to consumers. This has the potential to deeply harm consumers and companies with major online presences (e.g., online shopping and streaming video services). The only potential check on that power that I can foresee is anti-trust provisions in the Sherman Antitrust Act, and I have no confidence that the federal government would use that power to protect consumers and smaller businesses given its recent track-record.

Opponents of the currently regulatory regime complain that the current rules restrict innovation in internet service provision. Honestly, if you are worried about the lack of rural ISPs, lobby Congress to allocate more or new funding which incentivizes rural broadband roll-out. But changing the rules would seem to have far wider effects on innovation in services provided over the Internet. Removing Title II oversight would have wide-ranging implications for the economy in general. Potential competitors to large companies would need even more funding to offer any kind of competition to those entrenched powers. Charging Internet-based companies for bandwidth might put them at a competitive disadvantage compared to companies in foreign countries. Changing these rules has the potential to harm our nation’s economic performance significantly.

To reiterate, strong Title II oversight is absolutely necessary to maintain American citizens’ (relatively-free) access to information on the Internet, protect consumers, and preserve innovation on the Internet. Loosening oversight rules appears to only benefit the ISPs (of which many are already large, profitable, media conglomerates) and harm almost everyone else.