Mr. Pai,

After reading about your comments lambasting internet companies like Twitter, Google, and Facebook, for being biased, it’s clear that you are willfully ignoring the real issues that repealing net neutrality will cause. Just because Twitter decides it doesn’t want a certain message being projected on its platform, doesn’t mean that their decision to remove that message is going to ruin the entire internet. Let’s talk about why. Twitter is one social media company of many. If one does not like the way that Twitter or Facebook curates content on their sites, they can choose to stop using their services. With the current free, open environment of the internet, people can decide which websites they will or will not use. Let’s say I am a conservative concerned with censorship on Twitter, I can simply stop using Twitter’s services and go to a different social media site which allows conservative views to be discussed on their platform. Reddit for example allows discussion of many topics that Facebook or Twitter ban, and there are many other sites out there which allow discussion of these issues. I can even start my own platform specifically geared to my conservative audience. I won’t have to pay an ISP to display my content. That is the beauty of the current internet; namely, the playing field is equal. Alternative ideas are only a click away.

Now, just because internet companies engage in undesirable and questionable behavior, doesn’t mean we should also allow ISPs to do the same. While there are many social media websites that consumers can choose to access, there are a very limited number of ISPs. Often, consumers have little or no choice as to which ISP to use in their home. I’ll give a personal example: over the course of 2016, I became unhappy with the direction Facebook was taking its platform. I disliked the negativity on the platform, the lack of educated discussion, and the shifting population of those who use the platform. So, I deactivated my account and stopped using their services with the exception of Messenger. I went to Twitter for a short time, and became dissatisfied with their platform as well. So, I stopped using it; it was that simple.

By contrast, I moved this past summer to a new apartment. I had an AT&T account and had been using them as my ISP for 2-3 years because I liked their service. Once I moved, I found out that AT&T was not offered in my building, so I went to Comcast. Then I found out that RCN was already wired in my apartment, and Comcast wanted to charge me $200 to come and rewire my apartment for their service. I found this to be quite a nuisance. As a recent graduate with tons of loan debt and limited income, spending $200 for Comcast to come and switch a few wires outside was unacceptable. I didn’t have a choice but to open an RCN account and use them for my ISP.

If you repeal net neutrality, then companies like RCN, Comcast, and AT&T can pick and choose which websites I can access based on packages of preferential treatment given to sites which paid ISPs to promote their websites. Say RCN is not a big fan of Reddit’s platform, so they do not allow access to Reddit in their content packages. Instead, they have a deal with Facebook to offer their website in content packages available to consumers. That is an even higher level of censorship because not only is Facebook engaging in biased curating of content as you have argued, now RCN is preventing me from accessing alternative sites. Again, I don’t have much choice but to use RCN, so I am unable to access content that I want to see. Even if they do allow access to alternative sites, it most certainly will come at a fee, because that is the greed of the ISP industry. They thrive on the lack of choice; they like $200 fees to send a tech to turn on service, and they’ll love $4.99 for this content package and $6.99 for that one and $10.99 for another. If you think Facebook, Twitter, and Google don’t have the money to maintain their internet dominance after you repeal net neutrality, then you are kidding yourself.

Trying to force this issue to become yet another debate between left and right is simply irresponsible. All sides will suffer from the repeal of Net Neutrality. Small websites will not have the money to compete with those internet giants you’re so critical of. That small, conservative-leaning website will not be able to buy their way into RCNs packages. Just as that liberal internet start-up won’t be able to afford to get their content displayed. Before you know it, we’ll have censorship levels akin to that of dictatorships across the world. Except instead of being at the mercy of some autocratic government, we’ll be at the mercy of greedy ISPs and giant companies buying their way in. This plan to repeal net neutrality is a plan to repeal choice and America thrives on choice. Please rethink this plan and consider the effect that this will have on the access to different viewpoints. The internet has become a pillar for democratic values (not left, liberal Democratic, but free, open democratic in case you wanted to try painting this as a partisan issue again). It has connected people globally and allows for an access to information which was previously unknown. Do not crush this pillar under the weight of corporate and bureaucratic greed.

Sincerely,

Chaya Otikor