To: Ajit Pai, Chair, Federal Communications Commission

Fr: F. Lyman

Re: “Restoring Internet Freedom” / proceedings public comment

As a longtime journalist and author, I urge the Federal Communications Commission to fulfill its role in protecting the Internet as a vehicle of free speech and open competition.

Since the 1990s, I’ve been in the business of providing online and print content as a columnist and investigative reporter, writing one of the first books on global warming, for a Washington D.C. think tank.  That experience, as well as working as a technical writer for a big city university in New York in the 1980s, (in the days when the world/wide/web was used mainly by), allowed me to witness the Internet in its infancy.

Based on these experiences, I believe the Internet would never be as dynamic and powerful as it has become today, nor as popular, had it not been for the longstanding principle of keeping the web open and free – what would later became codified and known as “net neutrality.”

~So I’m unequivocally in favor, both as a U.S. citizen, and as a reporter, of a Neutral Net, which I prefer to call “Equal Access” to digital telecommunication services.

 ~I’m also in favor of the FCC’s strong oversight of Internet Service Providers as described under Title II of the Communications Act. With the growth of the Internet over the last decade, ISPs have assumed greater and greater power over the American economy, so this stronger regulatory scheme seems appropriate.

Legally speaking, too, a D.C. circuit court told FCC’s former Chairman Tom Wheeler that broadband internet providers could not be classified as “information services” and still mandate those services on a neutral, equal, footing under Title 1.

I fear that deregulating these near-monopoly broadband Internet providers will give them the ability to raise prices and control content and delivery much more than they do now, to the detriment of hundreds of millions of American consumers.

**Why is net neutrality so important?**

Two main reasons, to my mind:

One is *free speech and expression*. Access to an Open Internet, insured through net neutrality, should be a fundamental free-speech right, most Americans believe, according to a Mozilla poll; respondents across the full political spectrum (78%) believe Internet Access is a right, with large majorities of Democrats (88%), Independents (71%) and Republicans (67%) in agreement.

Today the Internet is one of the main places where journalism happens, where independent blogs and websites spontaneously pop up, grow, and expand. Readers rely on it for their news and information; journalists use it to disseminate their work and to collaborate with other writers all over the world. Educators use it for online courses, and syllabi. Businesses and marketers thrive on it. .

The other main reason net neutrality is so vital is that it preserves *free and open competition* for all users. Without these protections, wealthier, better-connected sites and organizations will have easier access, marginalizing and discriminating against smaller, less influential businesses.

Whichever companies can pay service providers to make their content go up faster will have a big edge over businesses that can’t pay those fees, killing competition and the marketplace that has birthed millions of small business startups and created valuable search-engine and social media companies. How can this be helpful to e-commerce?

Moreover, FCC’s mandate is to foster competition and diversity; allowing the big cable companies free reign to give certain sites priority or higher speeds for higher pay, the agency will do the opposite.

It seems to me that the principle of ‘fast lanes’ and ‘slow lanes’ brings no advantages and many other pernicious possibilities, including discrimination and even censorship.

ISPs could make it harder for consumers to get access to websites they don’t agree with politically (as has happened before ‘net neutrality’ rules were enacted). If those same cable companies make it harder for blogs, nonprofits and others to pay for their services, those voices could be silenced.

**Will the changes proposed affect me personally directly? Yes.**

As a reporter, I'm indebted to the freedoms with which I can enjoy access to information on the Internet, using the vast resources of the web to research a seemingly infinite amount of published material.

I'm also indebted to the forum the web has provided me to publish my own ideas and disseminate columns, articles, and even full books, (through Google books, for example, and many other journalism websites) not to mention a Facebook page for my small business of drawing/painting character portraits.

However, the benefits I’ve enjoyed, along with millions of other writers, journalists, bloggers, artists and simply users/readers/citizens/participants in our democracy, are in jeopardy. The proposal to repeal those Net Neutrality rules enacted in 2015 would hamper my ability to navigate the web as an independent reporter/researcher working to spotlight hidden facts and policies. Uncovering documents would be potentially much harder and even financially prohibitive.

Where I live, there are only two high speed broadband companies. Their prices have both risen astronomically, from about $19.99 to over $100.00 a month. The proposed repeal opens the door for more price hikes.

Where are the benefits for consumers, creators and makers on the Internet in these proposed changes? Are there only benefits to Big Cable?

I’d rather see the FCC advocate for an Internet that is not controlled by few players or groups of players, but rather free and open to a full range of voices, stakeholders, and participants—in short, democratic.

Thank you!