Net Neutrality is Online Free Speech

It's a scandal that this issue isn't bigger news. Every candidate for the 2008 presidental election who is serious about the issues should be taking a firm stand on this. Quite simply, in the online world, Net Neutrality is Freedom of Speech.

Perhaps no government officials are censoring us here, but the fact of the matter is that under our current system, every bit of data has equal footing on the internet. That means that General Motors' web site is given the same importance as your best friend's blog. Maybe that sounds trivial. Sure, there's a lot of junk online, but there are also some pretty culturally significant things that have from a Net Neutral internet and wouldn't have survived without it. Sites like Google, Amazon, eBay, YouTube, Myspace, Netflix, to list some of the most popular. These are all household names now that all started from some innovative person online, not a huge corporation. They were able to compete because Net Neutrality gives them a level playing field. Agree with it or not, in the real world, we know that if it's nearly impossible for local businesses to compete when Walmart moves into the town, because they simply don't have the same resources. As the internet stands now, many of those resources are digital and within the average person's budget. One might say that that's the ideal free market capitalist model, where a person with an idea and hard work can make it big and improve all of our lifes. That's what has made the internet revolutionary, but it won't last if the rules are changed to favor those with huge budgets.

And what about the spread of ideas on the net? There's an ever expanding number of places to get your news now. And every one of can contribube to that by writing a blog or helping to spread a message on Digg. What about important political scandals that have been exposed by bloggers? What if, out of all the news sources available to you, you lived in a country with only one state controlled media source, filled with their own biases. Most Americans would be pretty outraged. But what if you had a single news source that was controlled by a corporation, also filled with their own biases. Ok, we have choices and even without Net Neutrality, we will. But what if a corporation decides that you can only have a very narrow selection of choices? Say 5 to 10 (as opposed to hundreds of thousands available now) that have been approved for you to view. Well, you'd have some pretty similar to what's on television now, without too much interactivity. There is an economic interest for those who control the internet to limit what we can do to the highest bidder. In fact, that's the whole point of destroying Net Neutrality. Find me one consumer who thinks that it's good for them to have less choices and less of their own voice. And if you don't think you have anything interesting to say, you're not giving yourself enough credit.

If for no other reason, Net Neutrality should be kept because without it, it will along the majority of the modern world to go light years beyond us. Countries like Iran and China have government gate keepers. It works a little differently there. I will admit that there, some pages are no accessible at all.

But why would anyone want their sites to load slower if they come from a new interesting voice online than a big company? Can you imagine what it will be like for a child growing up in China now to one day leave the country and see how the rest of the world experiences their internet. It may be similar to what it will be like for a child growing up in America.

Perhaps bandwidth is a problem, but I propose a simple solution. Free Wi-Fi across the US, paid for by tax dollars. Taxes aren't popular of course, but think about it. No more monthly bills for internet connections. Tremendous benefits for all businesses large and small. For local communities to communicate better. For the country and the world as a whole to spread and understand different cultural viewpoints. For schools to give their kids a richer, fuller eduction (there's a lot more diverse information online than in their text books - no, not just Wikipedia). It would also be the easiest way to upgrade internet connections without having to worry about expensive wiring. Aren't all these benefits worth paying a little more in taxes? I can argue with me here (and you should if you disagree) but I think we'd get it all back and more very quickly.

This was probably way too long and I could keep going, but I feel passionate about this and I hope you do too. So form your opinion, and write about it online as much as you can before it takes you a half hour to click send on a web site like this one. Nevermind how long it might take to read other opinions.