

Don't Put Our Fate in Their Hands

I have never written to an agency of the Executive Branch before. I am not an "activist" nor an ideologue, but a citizen truly and instinctively horrified at the idea that my cable provider could effectively control which websites I have access to, and which are able to be economically viable as a result of their ability to vary rates among websites. The ability to control rates is of course the ability to control who survives. John D. Rockefeller consolidated his monopoly over the oil business in the late 18th century by his control over the tariffs and rates charged to rival refiners to ship their oil to market via pipeline or rails which he indirectly controlled. The result was a complete wipeout of his rivals. See "Titan," by Ron Chernow, the definitive biography. It is appalling that we would consider repeating the regulatory lapses of the late 19th century at the dawn of the 21st--and to allow corporate gate keepers to gain control over the flow of something even more precious than oil: information and, just as importantly, interaction among citizens of our democracy. The web is more than just a tool for information, although it is that, of course, it also enables citizens to work together to define shared interests, values and goals. That is the essence of democracy. Giving a telcom company control over this shared space is like giving them the right to put up a gate around Boston Common and charging for the key. It is a wholesale abandonment of the fundamental defining values of our democracy, in favor of an economic Darwinism that has been repeated and painfully shown to create crimes and abuses. We can't afford to learn that lesson again at the cost of our democracy.

Sincerely,

Daniel J. Greaney