

Is the Obama FCC siding with the largest cable and phone companies, and against Net Neutrality and universal Internet access?

The Obama administration has long vowed to protect Net Neutrality and bridge the digital divide, and FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski picked up this baton when he took up his post last year. But now Genachowski appears to be wavering.

According to an article in the Washington Post, Genachowski may sit on his hands rather than reclassify broadband to make sure the FCC can protect Internet users. The decision not to reclassify would be a grave mistake — one that would threaten the Internet as we know it.

A recent federal appeals court decision jeopardized the FCC's authority to establish Net Neutrality protections and carry out its National Broadband Plan.

Chairman Genachowski can fix this by reclassifying broadband as a telecommunications service under Title II of the Communications Act — where it was in the first place before a Bush FCC changed it, creating the mess we're encountering now.

If Chairman Genachowski fails to re-establish the FCC's authority to protect Internet users, he will be allowing companies like Comcast, AT&T and Verizon to slow down, block or censor content at will. And it will cripple the FCC's ability to ensure universal Internet access for rural, low-income and disabled Americans.

If he doesn't reclassify broadband, the phone and cable giants will be able to block any website, blog post, tweet or outreach by a political campaign — and the FCC will be powerless to stop them.

Basically, without reclassification, nearly every broadband-related decision the agency makes from here forward will be aggressively challenged in court by companies who know the FCC stands on shaky legal ground, and the FCC will likely lose.

Which means, we could lose the Internet as we know it — the only remaining open communications platform where we all have a voice.

Genachowski's inaction would be an outrage. But we can't just grimace, sigh and resign ourselves to yet another broken promise, one more Washington letdown. We have to draw the line.

Chairman Genachowski must stand up to the industry pressure, keep his promises and do the right thing: Reclassify broadband, protect Net Neutrality and promote universal Internet access.