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**From:** National Hispanic Media Coalition [mailto:info@nhmc.ccsend.com] **On Behalf Of** National Hispanic Media Coalition  
**Sent:** Friday, December 17, 2010 3:04 PM  
**To:** Rosemary Harold  
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## All We Want For Christmas Is Internet Equality

By Alex Nogales (December 17, 2010)  
Published today in the [Huffington Post](#)

On Tuesday, December 21, 2010, just days before Christmas, the Federal Communications Commission will vote on whether Internet service providers can block or degrade access to online content and applications. Press reports and comments from FCC officials have shed some light on what these rules are to contain. Based on what we know from these accounts, I am troubled that what the FCC Chairman has lined up will fall short when it comes to protecting the online experience of people of color and the poor. I find it particularly alarming that while the proposed rules impose a number of basic guidelines for the Internet that we access on our computers, those same basic protections would not apply to our cellular phones, a major Internet onramp for poor Americans and people of color.

"The Internet that we access on our phones," you may ask. "Isn't that the same Internet that we access on computers at work, or in the library, or in our homes?" By every account, the answer is "yes." And, on many occasions, the decision makers at the FCC have recognized this fact. A little over a year ago, FCC Chairman Genachowski stated, unequivocally, that "[e]ven though each form of Internet access has unique technical characteristics, they are all different roads to the same place" and that "the Internet itself [must] remain open, however users reach it." And just a few months ago he recognized the unique relationship communities of color have with wireless Internet when he said, "Of course, when we talk about broadband, we're increasingly talking about wireless. In fact, mobile devices are now the primary pathway to the Internet for minority Americans." However, in recent weeks, the FCC Chairman seems to have faltered in the face of intense lobbying from the powerful telecommunications companies.

Don't get me wrong - I fully understand why these companies would spend millions of dollars lobbying the FCC and Congress to defeat any rules that would be imposed on them. They want to be able to exploit the infrastructure that they have created to increase profits. This sounds reasonable, and in many other fields, this may be an acceptable business model. However, in this particular business, the provision of high-speed Internet, I don't agree. Not in an age where broadband Internet access has risen to the level of a fundamental right. Not when these

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companies have already used billions of dollars worth of subsidies from the federal government to build and improve their infrastructure. And certainly not when this type of Internet access has become so incredibly important for the poor and communities of color; communities that need all the help they can get.

Recent studies make it abundantly clear that Latinos access the Internet from cell phones at an incredible rate. According to a Pew Internet study from this year, 51% of English-speaking Latinos access the Internet on their cell phones compared 31% of whites. 47% of Latinos send or receive e-mail on their cell phones compared to 30% of whites. In another recent Nielsen study that measured both English- and Spanish-speaking respondents, Latinos were found to use mobile data services, including Internet access, at a greater rate than any other ethnicity in five of six categories measured. Further research indicates that large proportions of the poor, youth and communities of color tend to access the Internet solely through mobile devices. Thus, if the FCC fails to apply strong open Internet rules to mobile networks, the results would be particularly harmful to not only Latinos, but to this country's poor as well.

Indeed, numerous companies have already recognized the importance of the mobile web to our community. For instance, in the past many companies including Facebook, Ford Motor Company, Citibank, and Yahoo have invested in Spanish-language mobile websites. These websites have been a resounding success. It was recently revealed that the number of users to Ford's Spanish-language mobile site regularly equals or exceeds web traffic to its English-language mobile site. This means that Spanish-language customers, a relatively small but growing portion of our economy, generate more hits to Ford's mobile site than all other segments of the population combined.

If the FCC fails to provide strong open Internet rules for mobile Internet providers, the landscape could change dramatically. Companies that have already spent the money to invest in Spanish-language sites could be required to spend more money to ensure priority access. This would mean that if Ford's successful Spanish-language mobile website begins to feel pressure from a similar website from Chevrolet, Ford could call up AT&T and pay to have its website delivered to cell phone users at a faster rate. While users may not be aware that Ford is doing this, they will begin to notice that Ford's website is lightning fast while Chevy's lags and takes a long time to load. Although the Chevy website is still available, users will avoid it in favor of a faster, more responsive experience. If these rules would allow a company like Ford to push around such a large competitor, like Chevy, imagine the advantage that Ford could wield over a smaller, less resourceful competitor, like a local used car lot. Although this may seem relatively harmless when it comes to shopping for a car, imagine if the same service is allowed for job sites, aid organizations, or even news providers. Further, imagine how difficult it could become for a small, local business to gain a foothold on the mobile web. The Internet on our cell phones could become dominated by a small number of large, wealthy companies, and people surfing this Internet will have to sacrifice choice for connection quality, even for basic services that many of us take for granted.

The FCC has just a few days to decide an issue that could dramatically affect all of us in the near future. Whatever rules were proposed weeks ago can still be strengthened to avoid wireless inequality. In fact, Commissioners Copps and Clyburn, two stalwart champions of the people, have expressed a desire to strengthen rules for the mobile web. We continue to hope that their courage will rub off on the Chairman and that, on Tuesday, the FCC will vote for strong open Internet protections that apply equally to the mobile web. That is my Christmas wish.

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The National Hispanic Media Coalition is a non-profit, media advocacy organization established in 1986 in Los Angeles, California. Our mission is to improve the image of American Latinos as portrayed by the media, increase the number of American Latinos employed in all facets of the media industry, and advocate for media and telecommunications policies that benefit the Latino community.

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