

The recently announced a plan to allow internet service providers to create fast-track systems that allow websites and media outlets to stream content to customers in exchange for a paid premium are a concerning new path for the internet in the US. Chairman Wheeler also announced that he has decided to, at least for now, not reclassify internet service providers as common carriers in order to reinstate net neutrality rules that were recently struck down by a federal court under a different classification.

These actions, despite Chairman Wheeler's statements to the contrary, would bring an end to net neutrality and an open internet as we know it. Creating a segregated internet left to be manipulated by corporations to best suit their profits leaves countless consumers and producers of web-based content at the mercy of bottom lines, having adequate access to bandwidth held hostage by companies making a profit off of a new and exploitative system. As Tim Berners-Lee, the creator of the World Wide Web stated, "Unless we have an open, neutral internet we can rely on without worrying about what's happening at the back door, we can't have open government, good democracy, good healthcare, connected communities, and diversity of culture."

The entire reason why the internet became so ubiquitous in our society and why innovative economic trailblazers such as Facebook, Amazon and Google took off the way they did was because the internet was open and available on a level playing field to anyone who could use it. Preserving this kind of internet is essential to continue the kind of opportunities for all people with ideas and willpower- regardless of their internet connection- to create the next big thing in technology and telecommunications. If we as a country want to remain competitive on the global market, it is critical that our internet telecommunications are as fast and accessible as possible.

To give some web content priority over others merely based on price skews the entire premise that the World Wide Web was based on. If we are not careful, the internet will become more and more based on the subscription and pay-per-use format that television is based on. This would be a huge loss for consumers and small content creators alike; consumers will be presented with limited options owned by a small amount of powerful corporations and only content created by a select few large producers will be available for widespread consumption.

In an increasingly globalized and technology-based world, keeping up on the cutting-edge of technology and internet accessibility is the key to remaining competitive in the future economy. Could the next big online company or idea come out of the United States when large ICPs with a stake in not only the internet, but also media content, control the means of distribution? Countries around the world from the European Union to Brazil are realizing the importance of an open and neutral internet. Now, it is time for the United States to follow suit.