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The proposed Protecting and Promoting the Open Internet bill that would allow ISPs to charge online content creators for access to faster data lanes would cause irreparable damage to arguably the most important means of communication ever created. Regardless of what misleading name is assigned to it, there is nothing at all "open" about the idea that the largest corporations in the country should be able to determine what information its citizens can reliably receive.

Information is a public good. The free and open transmission of information promotes the general welfare of our nation. This information should not be segregated into those that can afford to pay an ISP toll and those that cannot. Modern innovation is dependent on all entrepreneurs having access to the same infrastructure that their competitors do. Allowing large corporations to buy their way into prioritizing their content over all competition would be a huge barrier to any new company or individual attempting to offer a new and potentially innovative product or service to the public. True net neutrality means a free exchange of information between all people and organizations, regardless of their ability to contribute to election campaigns or hire politicians to cushy high paid executive roles.

It is in the best interest of all Americans that we immediately classify ISPs as common carriers under Title II of the Telecommunications Act. Internet access is no longer a luxury, it is an essential tool for work, commerce, and the exercise of free speech, and a necessity for the vast majority of Americans. Broadband providers use public rights of way to install their cable across the country, and the government has an obligation to ensure that this allowed monopoly is not abused. Given that this installation of cable is controlled by local governments just as utilities are, it is only right that they should be classified and regulated as one.

In addition, many ISPs themselves publish online content like streaming video, television, music and news. These same ISPs could use these proposed laws to throttle or block their own competitors, an obvious conflict of interest. What is the benefit for Comcast or AT&T to provide unfettered service to companies like Netflix or Amazon Streaming when these services often are used as a replacement to the pay TV model used by those companies? How this is not immediately apparent to any legislator considering this proposal is astounding.

ISPs should not have control over the flow of information; they should be held responsible for providing equal and unrestricted access to all content to each and every subscriber. There are repeated claims by these same ISPs that their infrastructure can not handle current demands, which is why their customers often experience far slower speeds than advertised. How these same companies can now promise improved service, but only to corporations that shell out large payments, shows that they do not have the best interests of their customers at heart. The idea of data congesting their infrastructure is a complete fabrication. If there weren't such monumental barriers to entry for new ISPs, their clients could express their disappointment by moving to an alternative carrier. For most of the nation there is only one broadband carrier available, and you're about to give them a green light to further abuse their customers and hold hostage every individual and company, large and small, who has an online presence. Can we really trust them to act appropriately when the FCC Chairman himself has indicated that there is potential for abuse?

In closing, this issue will never slip under the public radar. Every time a new SOPA, PIPA or "Open Internet" proposal is made, citizens like me will be here to fight it. The only acceptable solution is to reclassify ISPs as common carriers under Title II of the Telecommunications Act. Only then will we be on the road to the internet that we as Americans deserve.

Sincerely,
Sharen Wilcox