

The Internet Freedom Preservation Act of 2009 establishes the basic rules of the road for an open Internet. And its arrival couldn't be more timely.

We are amid the greatest technological transition in our media since the invention of the printing press. An open Internet is driving this change. It's a communications tool that, while still in its infancy, is already storming the gates of media's old guard. But they're not letting us in without a fight.

Traditional media fear a system that is more decentralized, participatory and personal. While their outlets still dominate, mainstream media are threatened by a generation of users who have embraced the Internet to control their information experience.

These users no longer passively consume the news; we actively participate in it. We no longer limit our civic involvement to watching television ads and reading editorial pages. We Google candidates to learn more, create our own political networks on Facebook, and use Twitter to stay on top of the issues we care about most.

As the Internet breaks down old political, economic and social barriers, it raises new concerns about free speech, control, privacy and equality.

The Internet Freedom Preservation Act will safeguard the basic rights of our emerging media democracy. It makes Net Neutrality the standard, locking in the network's greatest strength: its ability to give everyone a chance to be heard -- whether a little-known blogger, local environmental group or giant multinational corporation.

Without Net Neutrality, this democratic Internet could fall prey to the companies that deliver Internet services. For them our new found media freedom is a threat that needs to be controlled for commercial gain.

We must act now to pass this bill. Here are seven reasons why:

1. Economic Recovery and Prosperity

"The Internet has thrived and revolutionized business and the economy precisely because it started as an open technology," Eshoo said in a statement on Friday. The Internet is so closely tied to U.S. economic recovery that President Obama and Congress earmarked more than \$7 billion to help build out more high-speed connections at a time when our economy needs it most.

Obama and Congress also recognized that the economy cannot benefit by building a closed Internet. The American Reinvestment and Recovery Act requires that all federally funded networks be services that meet "nondiscrimination and network interconnection obligations" -- that abide by Net Neutrality.

"The Internet is an essential infrastructure," declares Markey and Eshoo's bill. "The national economy would be severely harmed if the ability of Internet content, service, and application providers to reach consumers was frustrated by interference from broadband telecommunications network operators."

2. Free Speech

Freedom of the press extends only to those who own one -- or so the saying goes. It once rang true in a world ruled by newspaper chains, radio and television broadcasters, and cable networks. But the Internet has changed all that, delivering the press -- and in theory its freedoms -- to any person with a good idea and a connection to the Web.

This extraordinary twist to "mass media" has catapulted many an everyday YouTube auteur to celebrity-status, while turning ideas born in a garage or dorm room into

Fortune 500 companies. It is the reason so many Americans are now passionate about protecting their free speech rights on the Internet.

The Internet Freedom Preservation Act would stop would-be gatekeepers from re-routing the free-flowing Web. To meet other national priorities, and to our right to free speech under the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States, the bill says, the United States should adopt a clear policy preserving the open nature of Internet communications.

3. Civic Participation

New media are more participatory and personal than ever before and have opened up new avenues for people to become involved with local, state and national politics. We saw it during the 2008 presidential election when tens of millions expressed their support for Obama and McCain via interactive Facebook, Twitter and e-mail forums. We are seeing it in 2009 from the streets of Tehran to the work of organizations like the Sunlight Foundation and the Center for Responsive Politics, which use the Internet as the means to open governments to public scrutiny and accountability.

This wave of digital empowerment is the gathering force for a healthier democracy, and it all depends upon a more open, affordable and accessible Internet for everyone. Expanding Internet access alone doesn't erase concerns over what kind of information people will find when they get online. Net Neutrality guarantees that we all have an equal opportunity to play a part.

4. The Marketplace of Ideas

The Internet was the great surprise of the 20th century. Sir Tim Berners-Lee created the standard that opened the World Wide Web to everyone with an idea and a connection. At that time, few could imagine that this open architecture would fuel such a powerful eruption of economic, social and political creativity.

The Internet Freedom Preservation Act "will protect consumers and content providers because it will restore the guarantee that one does not have to ask permission to innovate," Rep. Markey said when he introduced the bill.

This is true regardless of your age, social status or location. Net Neutrality safeguards everyone's fundamental right to an open Internet, making it possible for one person's good idea to blossom into the next big business or, even, a movement of millions.

5. Social Justice

Broadband in America today is not equally accessible: Users are predominantly middle- or upper-class and live in urban or suburban areas. Poorer communities and communities of color, as well as communities in rural areas, have been largely left off the grid.

Imagine what it would mean, then, to provide a connection to disadvantaged areas without also extending to them Net Neutrality's guarantee of openness. Dominant ISPs have argued for this exception, saying Net Neutrality prevents them from connecting more people. But it's a false choice and far too high a cost to give network owners the power to shunt ideas percolating up from these communities to a digital backwater.

The Internet Freedom Preservation Act guarantees equal and unbridled access to the Internet's engine of opportunity, leveling the playing field so that we all have a chance to be heard.

6. The Rise of the Gatekeepers

A high-speed connection is useful only if you can connect to everyone else online.

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Net Neutrality leaves control over your Internet experience with you, the user. Yet network operators are considering charging extra money depending on where you want to go and what you want to do online. Some are deploying technology that would sift through and filter the content that you share with others online. Such discrimination endangers the open and level playing field that has made the Internet so democratic.

As more of us rely upon a high-speed connection to do all things media -- watch and make video, follow the news, listen to music, Tweet, email and call our friends -- legacy media are too tempted to get in our way, steering us back via old channels where they make all decisions for us. But there's no going back to the analog oligarchy. The Internet Freedom Preservation Act keeps the gatekeepers at bay.

7. The Obama Opportunity

Forces are coming into alignment for Net Neutrality. We have a president who is an outspoken supporter, congressional leadership willing to fight for an open Internet, and a pro-Neutrality chairman newly ensconced at the Federal Communications Commission.

Since the fight for Net Neutrality began more than three years ago, 1.6 million Americans have picked up the phone, signed petitions, spoken out publicly and written letters to urge their members of Congress to get behind Net Neutrality.

The tides have shifted. Still, giant phone and cable companies aren't going away. They think they can squash our movement -- and over the past six months alone, they have hired 500 lobbyists in Washington to try to stop this bill.

This is our best chance to beat them back once and for all.