

The Internet, the singular greatest modernising and globalising influence on the world stage, must remain neutral. Currently, the internet provides a forum where all people have access to all content at (theoretically) equal speeds. Yes, equipment failure and software and server issues place some limitations on some users some of the time. However, never has there been an explicit difference in the way some kinds of content are treated, because of who is providing the content. China blocks content related to organising political protests against the CPC, some countries block any kind of nude images (regardless of age of the user), and some countries block other kinds of content they believe form a threat. Yet, even in these situations where the freedom of speech enshrined in the U.S. constitution is clearly being violated (though of course it does not apply to those countries) the content is not being blocked - or the speed of access changed - due to any corporate interests lobbying government, but because governments deem censorship appropriate in those instances. Never has there been a separation of speeds of content based on who is providing your internet, particularly not under what can at best be described as oligarchic (or worse, monopolistic) market conditions for service providers in the U.S. Decreasing the speed at which a particular service or piece of information may be obtained online is not, strictly speaking, content censorship - at least in theory. Proponents of this law will no doubt say that, provided even those who do not pay the requisite fees for high-speed access will have satisfactory speed of internet connection. But that's exactly the point. The beauty, the great virtue of the internet is that it provides the information and tools that it provides practically instantaneously, to anyone, attempting to access any part of it. I find the suggestion that creating different lanes of internet traffic or services will leave us with two lanes of high speed, and one of very high speed laughable. I think it is much more likely that, if that service were put in place, due to capacity, and due to traffic, the free lane would be slow. So slow as to in many ways detract from the number one virtue of the internet - free, easy, immediate access to information. Add a sufficient wait period to any process, even if it is free, and it does make a real difference to the service provided. Not the least of which will be a deterrent from using that kind of service. At that point, the U.S. is effectively encouraging net users to use particular services online.

Let me be clear, if the implementation of this act produces internet speed variation based on who is supplying content, then we can expect the free lane, which will have higher traffic but less resources, to be meaningfully slower than its non-free counterpart. Given the difference in speed, while content is not directly censored, I argue that, depending on the delay and its severity, the way in which citizens of the U.S. access information will be under some pressure to change. Thus, effectively, the government will be putting pressure not on what people read, say, or think, or express, but in how they read, say think or express it. Freedom of speech is not the freedom merely to read, say, think or express most anything (barring defamation etc) but to do so in one's own chosen fashion, the limitation being the safety of others. The freedom of religion is not limited in its implementation - it is not okay to be a Christian *provided* you express yourself a certain way. It is okay to be Christian because it is okay to religiously be anything, and thus to express that religion in a way you choose. What I am trying to say is that the freedom of religion comes with a free exercise clause. Freedom of speech does too, and so the free exercise of free speech is violated, when sufficient deterrents are allowed to influence patterns of domestic internet traffic. In short, this bill is, in my mind, unconstitutional.

The people of the United States have repeatedly demonstrated their commitment to freedom of information. So why are their representatives, the U.S. government, attempting to change the way U.S. citizens access information in a way that violates the first amendment, in a fashion at least analogous to the actions of countries which do attempt to censor the internet like China?

Stop. This. Bill.

If not for the sake of the U.S. citizens, for the sake of the world at large that may follow the U.S.'s lead.