

# Net neutrality divides bureaucrats, too

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Net neutrality continues to wrangle members of the House and Senate as lawmakers debate the pros and cons of the U.S. Telecom Act. They're not alone in being divided, though, as government officials too made clear their opposing views in speaking at the Wireless Communications Association conference.

Howard Waltzman, chief counsel of Telecommunications and the Internet for the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee, for instance, wants the act passed for more multi-channel competition and lower cable prices. Yet Johanna Shelton, minority counsel of the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee, claimed that there are clearly problems in the bill and further stated "outright blocking is a huge problem."

While the Web can ensure that everyone can get their point of view across the board regardless of size or influence, the Internet is made of various groups including universities and libraries, according to Shelton. As of right now, Shelton is not confident that the new act would meet this expectation. She questioned whether consumers would have choices with Web sites under the legislation, at a time when the consumer should be in charge of where they want to go.

Gregory Vadas, congressional fellow of Sen. Conrad Burns, R-Mont., stated that, "We just need a compromise on the issue of Net neutrality" in order for the bill to pass.

Shelton, however, said that the bill has significant flaws; it doesn't

require anything of anyone. It does not effectively state what the Federal Communications Commission has the authority to enforce. Along with FCC concerns, Shelton also expressed apprehension in the fact that the act would create a broadband account within the Universal Service Fund.

She pointed out that the majority of people are using broadband. There are other technology options out there but are they really a viable substitute for broadband, Shelton questioned.

Waltzman, on the other hand, argued that there are multiple providers out there, and that technology is continuing to evolve. Waltzman offered his support for competition in the market, adding that broadband is faster and cheaper compared to other services but that no one is forced to have it.

"In the last 10 years-facility based providers have offered robust, deep-seated competition," said Waltzman. "The more options that consumers have the better."

Regarding the connection between competition and the bill, Waltzman confirmed that they've given the FCC the tools to do their job, which is to offer a robust and unfettered environment on the Web.

"We will be all over the FCC if there are any problems," said Waltzman.

According to Shelton, there are currently problems with the FCC. She argued instead of implementing what Congress was trying to do, the FCC is trying to influence Congress.

"The FCC is there to do what Congress tells them to do," said Shelton.

Vadas suggested that the FCC should do what Congress intends, but the FCC does possess technological knowledge beyond that of Congress.

"When there are problems with the FCC, we don't hesitate to tell them," Waltzman said. "We've had good open lines with them."

While the FCC has the potential to pose problems in the passage of the bill, the concept of white space or rather empty channels on public airwaves has also created a challenge.

Shelton explained that solving this problem is a high priority for the committee.

"We certainly consider how seriously our constituents take their TV," said Shelton.

She added that there is a need for testing and that the interference potential is something that should be strongly considered.

"There are a lot of inconsistencies, but once these issues are improved upon, then we'll see about the bill," Shelton said.

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