

Regulators move to toughen Internet provider rules

February 26 2015, by Anne Flaherty



In this Oct. 8, 2014 file photo, Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Tom Wheeler speaks during new conference in Washington. Is President Barack Obama taking over the Internet? Not by a long stretch, but that's not stopping some interesting political banter on the "net neutrality" debate. The FCC votes Thursday on whether to put Internet service in the same regulatory camp as the telephone. That means broadband providers like Comcast, Verizon, AT&T, Sprint and T-Mobile must act in the "public interest" when providing your Internet connection and conduct business in ways that are "just and reasonable." (AP Photo/Jose Luis Magana, File)

(AP)—Internet service providers like Comcast, Verizon, AT&T, Sprint and T-Mobile would have to act in the "public interest" when providing a mobile connection to your home or phone, under new rules being considered by the Federal Communications Commission.

The rules would put the Internet in the same regulatory camp as the telephone, banning providers from "unjust or unreasonable" business practices.

The FCC vote on the rules scheduled Thursday is considered a victory for consumer advocates and companies like Netflix and Twitter that have long warned that some providers want to create paid "fast lanes" on the Internet, edging out cash-strapped startups and smaller Internet-based businesses.

The broadband industry is expected to sue, arguing that the plan constitutes dangerous overreach. Republicans in Congress said they will try to pass legislation scrapping the rules, although it's unlikely that such a bill would be signed into law by President Barack Obama.

"One way or another, I am committed to moving a legislative solution, preferably bipartisan, to stop monopoly-era phone regulations that harm Internet consumers and innovation," Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee, said in a statement earlier this week.

Twitter said the new rules were a matter of protecting free expression.

"Safeguarding the historic open architecture of the Internet and the ability for all users to 'innovate without permission' is critical to American economic aspirations and our nation's global competitiveness," Twitter wrote in a company blog post this week.

Net neutrality is the idea that websites or videos load at about the same speed. That means you won't be more inclined to watch a particular show on Amazon Prime instead of on Netflix because Amazon has struck a deal with your service provider to load its data faster.

For years, providers mostly agreed not to pick winners and losers among Web traffic because they didn't want to encourage regulators to step in and because they said consumers demanded it. But that started to change around 2005, when YouTube came online and Netflix became increasingly popular. On-demand video became known as data hogs, and evidence began to surface that some providers were manipulating traffic without telling consumers.

By 2010, the FCC enacted open Internet rules, but the agency's legal approach was eventually struck down. FCC officials are hoping to erase the legal ambiguity by no longer classifying the Internet as an "information service" but a "telecommunications service" subject to Title II of the 1934 Communications Act.

That would dramatically expand regulators' power over the industry by requiring providers to act in the public's interest and enabling the FCC to fine companies found to be employing "unreasonable" business practices.

The FCC says it won't apply some sections of Title II, including price controls. That means rates charged to customers for Internet access won't be subject to preapproval. But the law allows the government to investigate if consumers complain that costs are unfair.

Also at stake Thursday was Obama's goal of helping local governments build their own fast, cheap broadband. Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Wilson, North Carolina, have filed petitions with the agency to help override state laws that restrict them from expanding their broadband

service to neighboring towns.

The FCC was considered likely to approve these petitions, which could set a precedent for other communities that want to do the same.

Nineteen states place restrictions on municipal broadband networks, many with laws encouraged by cable and telephone companies. Advocates of those laws say they are designed to protect taxpayers from municipal projects that are expensive, can fail or may be unnecessary.

© 2015 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Regulators move to toughen Internet provider rules (2015, February 26) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-02-tougher-internet.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.