

FCC head defends Internet neutrality rules on the road (Update)

March 3 2015, byTali Arbel



Tom Wheeler, Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission and GSMA speaks on the impact of recent telecommunications regulation in the United States at the Mobile World Congress Wireless show, the world's largest mobile phone trade show, in Barcelona, Spain, Tuesday, March 3, 2015. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)

The head of the Federal Communications Commission is taking the defense of new Internet regulations on the road.

Speaking at the Mobile World Congress wireless show in Barcelona, Spain, FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler said Tuesday that "there needs to be a referee" for the Internet.

The FCC's vote last week approved "net neutrality" rules that prevent Internet providers such as Comcast and Verizon from slowing or blocking Web traffic or from creating Internet fast lanes that content providers such as Netflix must pay for.

Broadband providers and Republicans have been critical of the new rules, and the FCC's decision is expected to trigger industry lawsuits that could take years to resolve.

Verizon has criticized the FCC for basing the new rules on a 1934 law. Wheeler said that the agency "modernized" the old communications legislation, leaving out parts that don't apply to today's Internet. He said that approach has worked well for wireless carriers.

The FCC approved the new rules by a 3-2 vote. One of the dissenting commissioners, Ajit Pai, said the new rules are unpredictable. That could make Internet providers less willing to come up with new services.

Wheeler said the rules are not intended to block innovation. He said that the agency did not want to impose broad, restrictive rules on the industry but would look at business practices on a case-by-case basis. He said that there will be no rate regulation and that the rules won't hurt network operators' revenue streams from consumer services.



Tom Wheeler, Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, right speaks with GSMA Director General Anne Bouverot during a conference on the impact of recent telecommunications regulation in the United States at the Mobile World Congress Wireless show, the world's largest mobile phone trade show, in Barcelona, Spain, Tuesday, March 3, 2015. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)

AT&T has said the rules politicize the Internet. President Barack Obama and many Democrats approve the new regulatory approach. Although Republicans have said they support an open Internet, they want a different approach.

Wheeler did not specifically address the political aspect of the decision, but said "the people against it spawned all kinds of imaginary horrors. This is no more regulating the Internet than the First Amendment regulates free speech in our country."



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