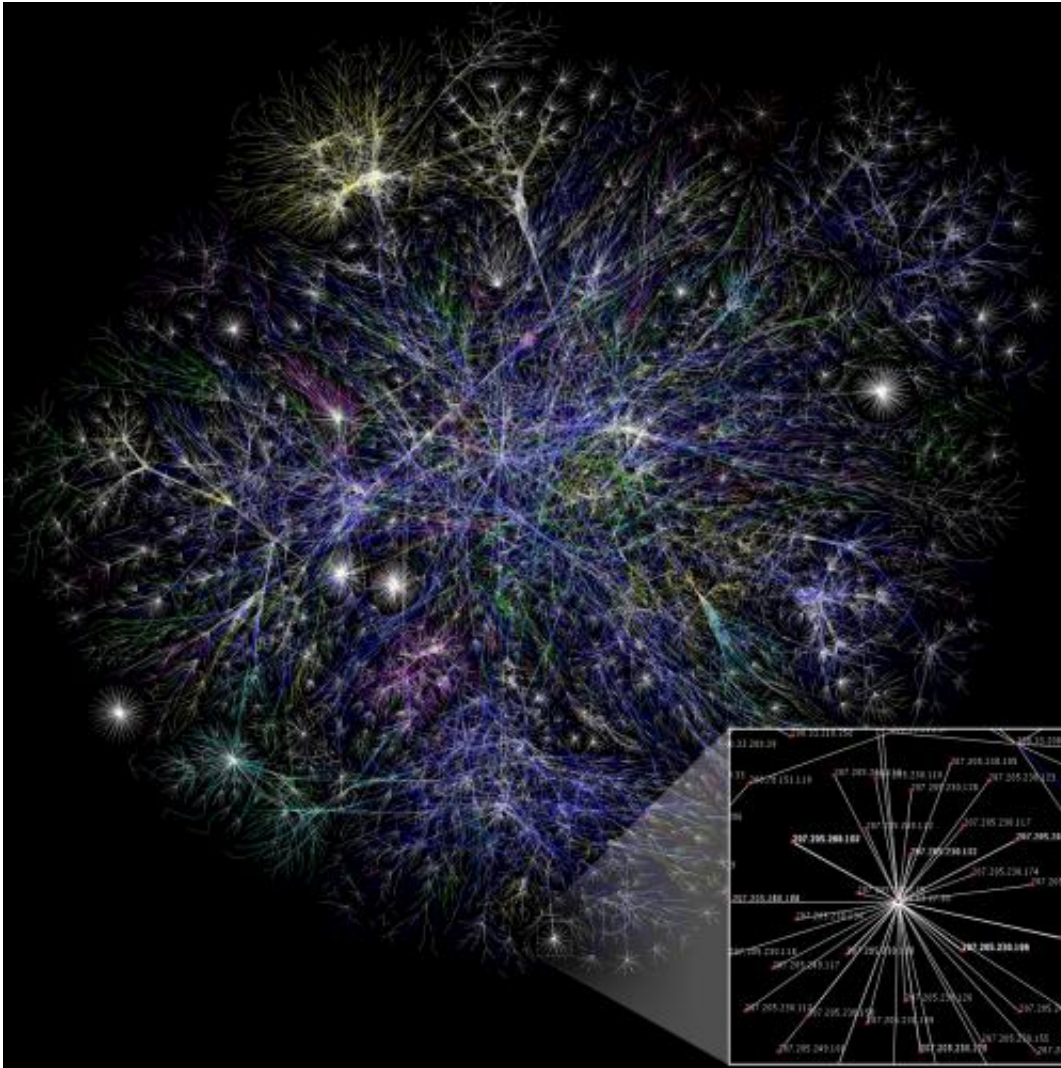# Here's how to defend net neutrality

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Partial map of the Internet based on the January 15, 2005 data found on opte.org. Each line is drawn between two nodes, representing two IP addresses. Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Net neutrality is under threat, but you can do something to defend it.

As I've written recently, the Federal Communications Commission under President Donald Trump and its new chairman, Ajit Pai, looks set to roll back or kill off its net neutrality rules. In response, many readers have written me, wondering what, if anything, they can do.

Activists working on the issue have numerous suggestions. But they all boil down to this: Make your voice heard. Hard as it may be to believe sometimes, policymakers do actually listen to the public.

"The short answer is to raise hell," said Craig Aaron, CEO of Free Press, a consumer advocacy group that helped champion the net neutrality rules.

That's how net neutrality was saved before. Millions of everyday citizens made their voices heard, and the FCC responded.

In 2014, an appeals court struck down a previous version of the FCC's net neutrality rules. In trying to figure out how to respond to the ruling, the agency proposed to replace the defunct rules with new ones that would have gutted net neutrality by allowing broadband providers to create fast lanes on the internet for their content and those of their paid partners.

The conventional wisdom in Washington was that fast lanes were pretty much a done deal.

But then the citizenry got involved. Average citizens wrote to the FCC demanding that it bar fast lanes and reclassify broadband as a "common carrier service," which would allow it to put strong new net neutrality rules in place. The agency ended up receiving some 4 million comments, an unprecedented number. That outpouring of support helped turn the

FCC around. It ended up ditching the fast lane proposal, reclassifying broadband, and putting in place strong rules to safeguard net neutrality.

"Net neutrality is an issue that a lot of people care about - millions and millions more than the FCC ever expected," Aaron said. "We need to hear from those people again."

So how exactly can you make your voice heard? Here's what the advocates recommend.

-Call or send a snail mail letter to your senators and congressional representative. Ever since the FCC put its new net neutrality rules in place, there have been rumblings in Congress about overturning them and neutering the agency. Those efforts may pick up speed now that President Barack Obama, who strongly supported net neutrality, is no longer in office.

Many in Congress receive campaign donations from the big telecommunications companies that would love to get rid of the rules. They need to hear that their constituents care about this issue, advocates say.

"Everyone should contact their lawmakers to tell them that the net neutrality protections we have now are what makes the internet great, and we should leave them alone," said Evan Greer, a campaign director at Fight for the Future, a consumer advocacy group that focuses on internet issues.

-Call and leave a message for Chairman Pai. It's much easier for policymakers to change rules if they don't think anyone's paying attention. Free Press is encouraging citizens to call Pai and let him know they care about this issue. It has a web page that provides Pai's number, offers a suggestion for a message to leave and ask citizens to let it know

how the call went.

-Sign a petition. Fight for the Future has put together an online petition that people can sign to show their support for net neutrality. The organization is encouraging people when they sign to declare what political party they belong to. It's trying to "show lawmakers that voters from across the political spectrum want to keep the internet free from throttling and censorship," Greer said.

-Sign up for alerts. Free Press, Fight for the Future and Demand Progress, a progressive advocacy group, are each strong advocates for net neutrality and are staying on top of the latest developments on the issue. Each offers a free email newsletter that offers updates.

-Join and donate to an advocacy group. Numerous other groups also are championing net neutrality. They include Public Knowledge, the Center for Media Justice and the National Hispanic Media Coalition. They all will need financial support to counter the lobbying of the big telecommunications companies and get their message out, advocates say.

"I strongly encourage people who want to get involved to connect with one of the many great organizations working to protect the free and open internet, and stay involved for the long term," Greer said.

-Encourage others to get involved. It took a broad-based, popular coalition to convince policymakers to put in place the current strong net neutrality rules. Defenders of those rules say they're going to need just as much support - or more - to keep them in place. So they're hoping net neutrality fans can get their family members, friends and neighbors to join in.

"We'll welcome all the friends we can get in these fights," said John Bergmayer, a senior staff attorney at consumer advocacy group Public

Knowledge.

Be prepared to send in comments. Before Pai's FCC can kill off the [net neutrality](#) rules, it will have to go through a formal rule-making process. That process - like those before it - will require the agency to solicit comments from the public. Those comments proved decisive in the past and could prove crucial in the future.

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