

Washington becomes first state to approve net-neutrality rules

March 6 2018, by Rachel La Corte



Washington Gov. Jay Inslee speaks after signing a bill Monday, March 5, 2018, in Olympia, Wash., that makes Washington the first state to set up its own net-neutrality requirements in response to the Federal Communications Commission's recent repeal of Obama-era rules. The FCC voted in December to gut U.S. rules that meant to prevent broadband companies such as Comcast, AT&T and Verizon from exercising more control over what people watch and see on the internet. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren)

Washington became the first state Monday to set up its own net-neutrality requirements after U.S. regulators repealed Obama-era rules that banned internet providers from blocking content or interfering with online traffic.

"We know that when D.C. fails to act, Washington state has to do so," Gov. Jay Inslee said before signing the measure that lawmakers passed with bipartisan support. "We know how important this is."

As he has done frequently over the past year, Inslee took aim at President Donald Trump's administration, saying the decision by the Federal Communications Commission was "a clear case of the Trump administration favoring powerful corporate interests over the interests of millions of Washingtonians and Americans."

The FCC voted in December to gut U.S. rules that meant to prevent broadband companies such as Comcast, AT&T and Verizon from exercising more control over what people watch and see on the internet. The regulations also prohibited providers from favoring some sites and apps over others.

Because the FCC prohibited state laws from contradicting its decision, opponents of the Washington law have said it would lead to lawsuits.

Inslee said he was confident of its legality, saying "the states have a full right to protect their citizens."



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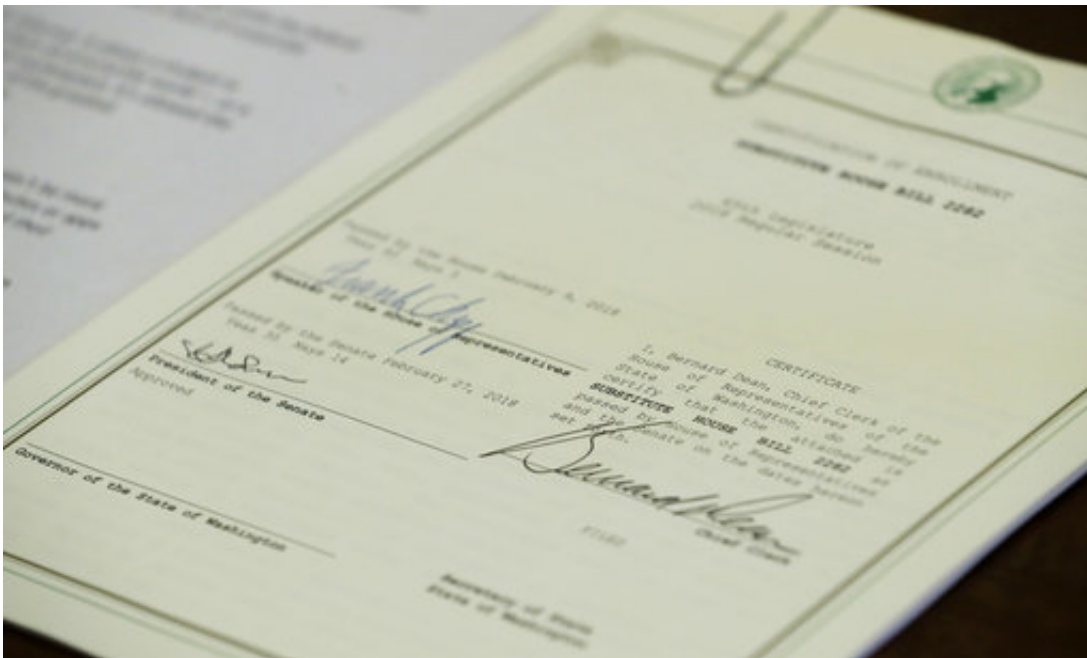
The new law also requires internet providers to disclose information about their management practices, performance and commercial terms. Violations would be enforceable under the state's Consumer Protection Act.

While several states introduced similar measures this year seeking to protect net neutrality, so far only Oregon and Washington have passed legislation. But Oregon's measure wouldn't put any new requirements on

internet providers.

It would stop state agencies from buying internet service from any company that blocks or prioritizes specific content or apps, starting in 2019. It's unclear when Oregon's measure would be signed into law.

Washington state was among more than 20 states and the District of Columbia that sued in January to try and block the FCC's action. There are also efforts by Democrats to undo the move in Congress.



A bill that makes Washington the first state to set up its own net-neutrality requirements in response to the Federal Communications Commission's recent repeal of Obama-era rules awaits the signature of Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, Monday, March 5, 2018 in Olympia, Wash. The FCC voted in December to gut U.S. rules that meant to prevent broadband companies such as Comcast, AT&T and Verizon from exercising more control over what people watch and see on the internet. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren)

Governors in five [states](#)—Hawaii, New Jersey, New York, Montana and Vermont—have signed executive orders related to net-neutrality issues, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Montana's order, for instance, bars telecommunications companies from receiving state contracts if they interfere with internet traffic or favor higher-paying sites or apps.

Big telecom companies have said [net neutrality](#) rules could undermine investment in broadband and introduce uncertainty about what are acceptable business practices. Net-neutrality advocates say the FCC decision harms innovation and make it harder for the government to crack down on [internet providers](#) who act against consumer interests.

The FCC's new rules are not expected to go into effect until later this spring. Washington's law will take effect in June.



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Ron Main, executive director of the Broadband Communications Association of Washington, which opposed the bill, said the cable companies his group represents have already pledged not to block legal content or engage in paid prioritization.

He said that because the internet is an interstate service, only Congress can pass legislation "that gives all consumers and internet services providers the clarity and consistency needed for a free and open [internet](#)."

"There should not be a state-by-state patchwork of differing laws and regulations," he said in a statement.



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