

# California legislators advance bill to set strongest net neutrality protections in U.S.

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California lawmakers advanced an ambitious proposal Thursday to prevent broadband providers from hindering or manipulating access to

the internet, bringing the state closer to enacting the strongest net neutrality protections in the country.

The legislation by Sen. Scott Wiener, D-San Francisco, would bring back Obama-era internet rules rolled back by federal regulators this year, the latest volley cast by state leaders already feuding with the Trump administration over immigration and climate protection policies.

The proposal prevents internet service providers from blocking or slowing down websites and video streams or charging websites fees for faster speeds. But it also goes further than the old regulations and measures taken up by other states, placing new limits on certain data plans and tasking the state's attorney general with investigating cases in which companies might be evading the rules.

On the Assembly floor, Republicans argued that the state was going too far and would create a patchwork of state and federal laws that would be cumbersome on companies and hinder innovation.

Assemblyman Jim Patterson, R-Fresno, a former broadcaster, argued that "light-touch regulation" had helped the internet flourish.

"The overreach, the going too far here is going to be challenged for its unconstitutionality, and we are going to find ourselves in very uncertain territory," he said.

Accusing the bill's proponents of being unable to explain [net neutrality](#), Assemblywoman Melissa Melendez, R-Lake Elsinore, called the Democrats' resistance to the Trump administration "embarrassing."

"You are wading into an area that you have no business being in," she said.

But supporters argued that California needed to take a stand at a time when officials appointed by President Trump had rolled back consumer protections—and broadband providers were willing to profit at the expense of customers and public safety.

"We are stepping up and filling the role that we need to fill because we cannot rely on this federal government to protect us when we need protection," Assemblyman Ian Calderon, D-Whittier, said.

Senate Bill 822 cleared the state Assembly with overwhelming support on a 59-18 vote, overcoming the first major hurdle after months of aggressive lobbying and online advocacy campaigns waged between internet advocates and the telecom industry that has drawn national attention.

California is one of 29 states to consider net neutrality protections since the Federal Communications Commission voted late last year to reverse the Obama-era internet regulations, with FCC Chairman Ajit Pai and Republicans calling for an end to the utility-like oversight of internet service providers.

The rules, enacted in February 2015 and ended in June, barred broadband and wireless companies such as AT&T Inc. and Verizon from selling faster delivery of some data, slowing speeds for certain content or favoring selected websites over others.

Wiener's Senate Bill 822 would, in effect, reestablish the same regulations. It also restricts some zero-rated data plans, or package deals that allow companies such as Verizon or Comcast to exempt some calls, texts or other content from counting against a customer's data plan.

An additional proposal, Senate Bill 460, by Sen. Kevin de Leon, D-Los Angeles, would deny public contracts to companies that fail to follow the

new state internet rules. It is also expected to be taken up by the Assembly this week.

Clashes between net neutrality proponents and telecom industry lobbyists heated up again last week when Verizon was reported to have slowed the speed of the Santa Clara County Fire Department's wireless data transmission, a revelation detailed in an addendum to a federal lawsuit filed by states including California to challenge the repeal of net neutrality rules.

Net neutrality has also become a rallying issue for Democrats in House races across the country.

Over the weekend, Wiener accused broadband companies of using robocalls to mislead seniors about the impact of his bill, and he posted a voicemail of one such alleged call on Twitter.

Assemblyman Miguel Santiago, D-Los Angeles, who presented the bill Thursday, became the target of a different campaign in June, waged by net neutrality proponents condemning his Assembly committee's attempt to throw out contents of Wiener's bill. He faced a barrage of tweets and was captured in a viral video, as activists raised money through a crowdfunding website to place a billboard over the debacle in his district.

"We all know why we are here," said Santiago, who helped restore the bill and has since signed on as a co-author to both net neutrality proposals. "The Trump administration destroyed the [internet](#) as we know it."

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