

ISPs surprise net neutrality fans on protest day

July 12 2017, by Tali Arbel



This image shows a banner, top, on the Netflix website defending net neutrality, Wednesday, July 12, 2017. On Wednesday, Netflix joined other tech firms and internet activists in an online show of support for net neutrality, the principle that bars internet service providers from playing favorites with websites and apps. (Netflix via AP)

AT&T has a surprise for tech firms and internet activists supporting net neutrality, the principle that bars internet service providers from playing favorites with websites and apps.

Although AT&T has fiercely fought the Federal Communications Commission's net-neutrality rules, it's backing Wednesday's "day of action" denouncing AT&T and other ISPs.

Of course, AT&T doesn't actually agree with the aim of the protest—to support the 2015 regulation that the FCC wants to overturn now that Republicans are in charge.

AT&T says it supports an "[open internet](#)" and believes companies shouldn't block [web content](#) or slow down videos from other providers. Rather, AT&T says it merely opposes the FCC rules that set it in place. Comcast and Verizon joined AT&T in making that distinction. ISPs don't like the FCC's approach because it treats internet service as a utility and comes with more oversight. They worry about price regulation and say the rules hurt broadband investment.

Tim Karr, the campaign director for Free Press, an advocacy group that supports net neutrality, slammed the ISPs for "simply attempting to fake the funk, pretending to support net neutrality while opposing the (FCC) rules that make it an enforceable reality."

The 2015 regulation is the only set of net-neutrality rules that courts have upheld.

Internet activists and [tech firms](#) hope that the protest will pressure Congress and the FCC, the way a highly visible 2012 online protest—including the blackout of Wikipedia's English-language site for 24 hours—helped kill anti-piracy legislation that tech companies equated to internet censorship.

This year's online protest is more muted. Netflix put a gray banner at the top of its home page and is tweeting out "gif" animations in support. Amazon's website has a small square inviting users to "learn more."

Twitter is promoting "net neutrality" as the top trending topic in the U.S. Google tweeted a blog post. Smaller tech companies including Airbnb and Etsy have fat banners on their home pages.

Karr said that [internet](#) users have taken "hundreds of thousands of actions," like contacting the FCC. There had been about 6 million filings on [net neutrality](#)'s overturn made to the FCC as of Tuesday night, both supporting and opposing the policy; that had risen to 6.7 million Wednesday afternoon.

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