

Senate Democrats push to reinstate 'net neutrality' rules

16 May 2018, by Kevin Freking

Don't expect the House to go along with the Senate's expected passage of legislation that would revive an Obama-era rule requiring equal treatment for all web traffic by internet providers.

Opponents such as Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., said the Senate's vote later Wednesday on a measure reversing the Federal Communications Commission's decision that scrapped the "net neutrality" rule amounted to "political theater" with no prospects of approval by the GOP-controlled House.

Net neutrality prevented providers such as AT&T, Comcast and Verizon from interfering with internet traffic and favoring their own sites and apps.

Telecommunications companies lobbied hard to overturn the 2015 rule, saying it discouraged investment and innovation. The FCC said in repealing it last December that it was simply restoring the "light-touch framework" that has governed the internet for most of its existence.

But the move has stirred fears among consumer advocates that cable and phone giants will be free to block access to services they don't like or set up "fast lanes" for preferred services—in turn, relegating everyone else to "slow lanes."

A resolution from Sen. Edward Markey, D-Mass., that would reverse the FCC's decision advanced Wednesday by a 52-47 vote, with three Republicans siding with Democrats—Sens. Susan Collins of Maine, John Kennedy of Louisiana and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska. But a House vote is seen as unlikely to consider the legislation.

Thune urged Democrats to work with him on a plan that he said would incorporate the net neutrality principles they desire without onerous regulation that he said made it harder to connect more Americans to the internet and to upgrade service.

He said the internet thrived long before the Obama administration stepped in, and he predicted that when the Trump administration's rule scrapping net neutrality goes into effect in June, consumers won't notice a change in service.

"That's what we're going back to: rules that were in place for two decades under a light-touch regulatory approach that allowed the internet to explode and prosper and grow," Thune said.

Democrats were undeterred. They see their effort as something that will energize young voters who value unfettered access to the internet.

"This is our chance, our best chance to make sure the internet stays accessible and affordable to all Americans," said Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y.

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