

US Senate votes to restore 'net neutrality' rules

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Protesters in Washington on February 27 urged lawmakers to reverse regulators and restore "net neutrality" rules that require all data to be treated equally

The US Senate voted Wednesday to restore so-called "net neutrality" rules aimed at requiring all online data to be treated equally, the latest step in a years-long battle on internet regulation.

The 52-47 vote is likely to be symbolic, however, since the measure faces an uphill battle in the House of Representatives and would need enough lawmaker support to overturn a probable presidential veto.

The vote marked the latest step in a contentious fight over rules governing online access over the past decade including court challenges and various moves by regulators.

In December, the Federal Communications Commission voted 3-2 along party lines to reverse a 2015 order which established [net neutrality](#) and which itself had faced court challenges and intense partisan debate.

In the Senate, three Republicans joined Democrats in the vote under the Congressional Review Act, which allows lawmakers to overturn a regulatory body.

FCC chairman Ajit Pai, appointed by President Donald Trump, has argued that the 2015 rules were "heavy-handed" and failed to take into account the rapidly changing landscape for online services and were discouraging investment in advanced networks.

Net neutrality backers have argued that clear rules are needed to prevent internet [service](#) providers from blocking or throttling services or websites for competitive reasons.

Some activists fear internet service providers will seek to extract higher fees from services that are heavy data users, like Netflix or other streaming services, with these costs passed on to consumers.

The battle has been largely along party lines, and has also been split with large tech firms supporting neutrality and telecom operators backing more flexible rules.

Although the Senate vote may not succeed in restoring neutrality rules, backers said it would allow voters to know where their lawmakers stand.

Democratic Senator Ed Markey said on Twitter the vote would "show the American people who sides with them, and who sides with the powerful special interests and corporate donors who are thriving under the @realDonaldTrump administration."

Ferras Vinh of the Center for Democracy & Technology, a digital rights group, welcomed the vote.

"Without net [neutrality](#) protections, internet service providers will have an explicit license to block, slow, or levy tolls on content, which will limit choices for

internet users and suffocate small businesses looking to enter the market," Vinh said.

"These protections are the guiding principles of the open internet, facilitating innovation and enabling the spread of new ideas."

But USTelecom, an industry group representing major broadband carriers, expressed disappointment.

"This [vote](#) throws into reverse our shared goal of maintaining an open, thriving [internet](#)," said association president Jonathan Spalter.

"Consumers want permanent, comprehensive online protections, not half measures or election-year posturing from our representatives in Congress."

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