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Polls in Pennsylvania remain open until 8:00 tonight.

For a fundamentally nerdy subject, net neutrality is pushing a lot of political buttons. The latest salvo is over a California law that restores a ban on cable, wireless and other broadband providers from impeding people's ability to use their favorite apps and services. The federal government had rescinded that ban, and the Trump administration is seeking to block California's effort as an imposition on federal prerogatives.

Though net neutrality started off more than a decade ago as an insight into how to make networks work most efficiently, it has taken on much larger social and political dimensions lately. The issue has emerged as an anti-monopoly rallying point and even a focus for "resistance" to the Trump administration. "Any time the cable companies and the Trump administration are on one side, it looks good for companies to be on the other side," Boston Law School professor Daniel Lyons said.

But the idea hasn't always been political or partisan. Net neutrality traces back to an engineering maxim called the "end-to-end principle," a self-regulating network that put control in the hands of end users rather than a central authority. Traditional cable-TV services, for instance, required special equipment and controlled what channels are shown on TV. With an end-to-end network like the internet, the types of equipment, apps, articles and video services permitted are limited only to imagination. And the internet subsequently grew like nobody's business — largely because it wasn't anyone's business.

But as internet use expanded, so did the power of the big companies that offer internet service to the masses. It became clear that they could, and sometimes would, restrict what people did. The Associated Press found in 2007 that Comcast was blocking or slowing down some file-sharing. AT&T blocked Skype and other internet-calling services on the iPhone until 2009.

Law professor Tim Wu, now at Columbia University, coined the term "net neutrality" in 2003 to argue for government rules that would prevent big internet providers from discriminating against technology and services that clashed with other aspects of their business. Allowing such discrimination, he reasoned, would choke off innovation. Big telecommunications companies, on the other hand, argue that they should be able to control the pipes they built and owned.

The Federal Communications Commission subscribed to the principle of net neutrality for over a decade and enshrined that as specific rules in 2015 under chairman Tom Wheeler, an Obama appointee. Among the rules: Broadband

companies couldn't block websites and apps of their choosing. Nor could they charge Netflix and other video services extra to reach viewers more smoothly. Once President Donald Trump took office, net neutrality became one of his first targets as part of broader government deregulation. The FCC chairman he appointed, Ajit Pai, made rollback a top priority.

And thus net neutrality became increasingly political. As a vote loomed for months, the once-obscure concept was debated endlessly on talk shows and online chats. Big-time Hollywood producer Shonda Rhimes tweeted a link to a story about saving net-neutrality on her lifestyle website. Actor Mark Ruffalo urged people to contact members of Congress by tweeting, "Long live cute dog videos on YouTube! #RIPinternet."

The debate created strange bedfellows: Support for net neutrality comes from many of the same people who are also critical of the data-sucking tech giants who benefit from it. Yet on net neutrality, these tech companies got to be the "good guy," siding on the side of the younger "digital first" generation and consumer groups calling for more protection. No matter that these companies are keeping their own business interests at heart, as a net-neutrality rollback could mean higher costs for access to the "pipes."

Politicians glommed on to the debate to appear consumer friendly. "No politician will ever lose votes by supporting net neutrality," said Gus Hurwitz, law professor at the University of Nebraska and a member of the conservative group The Federalist Society. "It's an ill-defined term that voters don't really understand other than that it is a scary concept they know they don't want to lose."

Meanwhile, ISPs haven't done themselves any favors in appealing to the consumer. They've long had a reputation for bad service and high prices. Unlike the high-profile support for net neutrality, the opposition was limited to behind-the-scenes lobbying. Nonetheless, the FCC rolled back the net-neutrality rules last December on a 3-2 party-line vote. The decision took effect in June.

On Monday, the Supreme Court **declined to hear** appeals from the broadband industry to strike down a lower court ruling in 2016 that was in favor of net neutrality. That effectively shut down an appeal that had already become largely moot when the FCC rolled back the rules. But in other arenas the fight is likely to drag on. Several tech companies including Mozilla and Vimeo are challenging the FCC's rollback decision in a federal appeals court. That's separate from the challenge to the California law, which is on hold until the tech companies' lawsuit is resolved. Oral arguments in the tech companies' case are expected in February.

Oregon, Washington and Vermont have also approved legislation related to net neutrality. And a Democratic

takeover of the House in Tuesday's midterm elections could revive efforts to enact net neutrality into federal law, though Trump would likely veto any such attempts. "Net neutrality is only the fifth round of a 12-round boxing match," Wedbush Securities Managing Director Dan Ives said. – ***Associated Press***

Comcast NBCUniversal plans to hire an additional 11,000 veterans, military spouses, and National Guard and Reserve members, bringing its total to 21,000 military hires by 2022. Comcast's previous commitment, made in 2015, was to hire 10,000 military community members by the end of 2017, which it exceeded.

"Comcast NBCUniversal has greatly benefitted since we began our focus on hiring members of the military community in 2010, and we are pleased with our progress," said Dave Watson, president and CEO of Comcast Cable. "We now have thousands of military employees across the country who have translated their valuable experiences in the armed forces to our workforce. We are so thankful that these individuals chose to serve our country, and we are proud to call them teammates as they now help to serve our customers and make a meaningful difference in our company."

Comcast NBCUniversal has an expansive program to support veterans who recently have transitioned into the workforce, including peer-to-peer mentorship with other veteran employees, digital and in-person professional development opportunities designed specifically for veteran and military spouse employees, and opportunities to stay engaged with the military through volunteering with local veteran-serving organizations. The company also has an 8,400 member strong VetNet employee resource group dedicated to supporting our military workforce.

"I'm incredibly proud that the entire Comcast NBCUniversal family embraced our commitment, showing our support for the military community through not only our hiring efforts, but also through support of veteran-serving non-profit organizations and work with veteran-owned businesses," said Brigadier General (Ret.) Carol Eggert, senior vice president of Military and Veteran Affairs at Comcast NBCUniversal.

In August, the company announced that its Internet Essentials program expanded eligibility to low-income veterans, nearly one million of whom live within the Comcast's service area. The expansion will be furthered through new nationwide partnerships with the Elizabeth Dole Foundation and the PsychArmor Institute, two of America's leading veteran-serving non-profit organizations that will help support the creation of veteran-specific digital skills training videos and supplementary materials, which will be made available online and delivered in classrooms at Comcast-sponsored computer labs in 10 markets.

The goal is to connect more low-income veterans to Internet resources, including: online social support networks, health benefits, access to colleges and scholarship programs, digital and technical skills training programs, as well as news, games, and entertainment. This year the company became a founding partner of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Hiring 100,000 Military Spouses campaign, which is raising awareness of military spouse unemployment and encouraging employers to make military spouse hiring commitments, ultimately resulting in a combined 100,000 military spouses hired by the end of 2021.

Military spouses are still unemployed at a rate of 16 percent, over four times the rate of their civilian counterparts, and Comcast NBCUniversal is committed to helping to close that gap. — *Philadelphia Tribune*

Decisions, decisions.

The months of ads are coming to an end. The signs have made their impact. You've gotten all the postcards and the phone calls and the knocks on your door. Tuesday is Election Day. The minute you walk into the voting booth, all of the pleading and the mud fades to background noise. The candidates have had their chance. Now it's time to make your choice.

You get to take it all into consideration. You can decide if this TV spot or that YouTube video made a real difference to you. You can toss that aside and think about the candidate forum you went to or the debate you watched online. You can think about the newspaper articles you read about this guy running for governor or that one that already has the job. You can think about everything you have taken in about the candidates on the ballot for the U.S. Senate.

There are the people running for Congress in this race. There are the ones up for state Legislature. Let's face it — there's a lot going on. It seems like the midterms have been being waged since the minute the counting was done after the 2016 presidential election. The 2017 elections were barely a blip on the radar compared to the all-out focus on 2018 by Democrats and Republicans alike on the national, state and local levels.

The stakes are made to feel downright apocalyptic. Vote one way, and there are plenty of people loudly telling you that will lead to anarchy. Vote the other way and you've got a chorus loudly informing you that you are advocating for goose-stepping martial law. It's all very big picture, but when it comes to something as important as your vote, it's OK to focus small.

The important things are made up of small pieces. According to Gallup polling, the most important issues to voters are health care, the economy and immigration. That's not hard to see, but thinking about them as big concepts can make them seem intimidating. Don't let it be scary. Think about what the

issues mean to you and your family and vote accordingly. Vote for what health care means to your kids. Vote for how decisions about the economy can affect your job or your bank account. Vote for immigration policies that make sense for your life.

You can haggle about the right way to vote. You can argue all day on Thanksgiving about who got elected and how people should have cast their ballots. Everyone has an opinion about it, and everyone has an opinion about why, exactly, someone might be wrong. But there is only one wrong way to vote, and that's to not vote at all. Tuesday is your chance to be heard. Don't be quiet. – **Pittsburgh Tribune-Review** editorial



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