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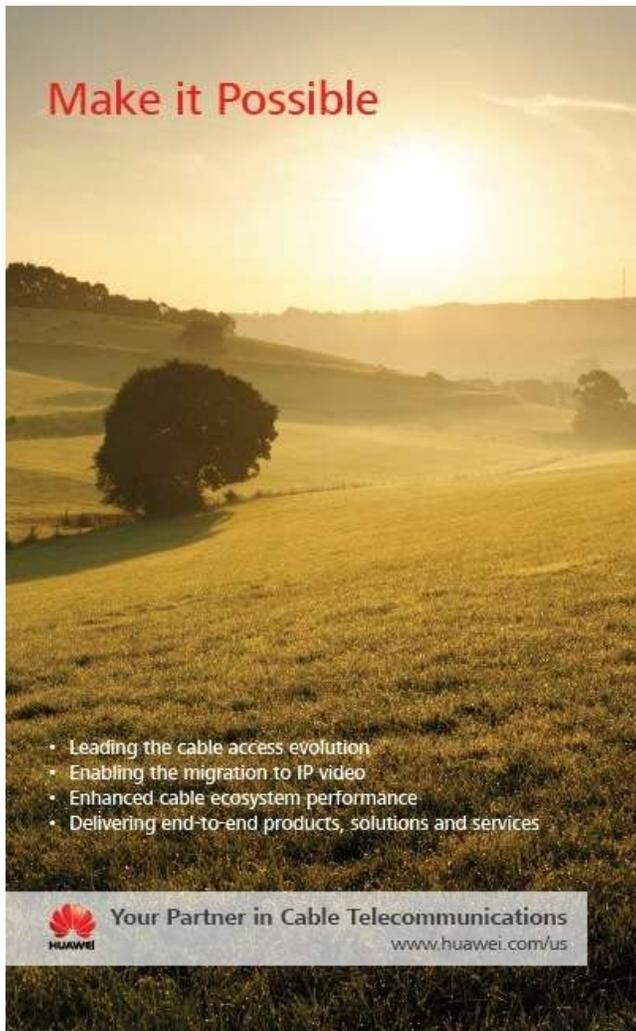
Bloomberg Republican FCC Member Says Obama Web Rules Would Risk Battle

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Net neutrality sounds like a great thing. As President Obama said last week, an open Internet is “essential to the American economy, and increasingly to our very way of life.” Without net neutrality, the president says, Internet service providers will “pick winners and losers in the online marketplace for services and ideas” by connecting customers to some sites more quickly than others. In order to maintain online fairness and freedom, he says, the FCC needs to “implement the strongest possible rules to protect net neutrality.”

So, if net neutrality rules can help preserve the Internet as we know and love it, what's the problem? They won't. That's the problem.



To the president, net neutrality rules are about pushing big service providers such as Comcast and Verizon to treat all content providers, even giants such as Netflix and Google, equally. In fact, the rules would allow Washington to tell those ISPs how to run their businesses and how much they can charge for service. The president says net neutrality “has been built into the fabric of the Internet since its creation,” and that “no service should be stuck in a ‘slow lane’ because it does not pay a fee,” but the case can be made that, in fact, net neutrality has never existed.

As reported by Wired magazine, companies such as Google, Facebook and Netflix have been paying for the equivalent of “fast lanes” for years. These companies (and others) have negotiated direct connections to big ISPs and have dedicated servers — called “peering connections” and “content delivery servers” — deep inside them. These connections, the magazine argues, are a vital part of the way the Internet works today, and if we sever them, we risk stifling online innovation.

Also, if net neutrality existed as envisioned by the FCC, the Internet would function horribly. Your favorite websites would take forever to load, and the dialed-back bandwidth would make sites such as YouTube and Netflix lightweights rather than the massive entertainment providers that they are today. The Internet has changed the world and the way we do business and improved our lives in so many ways because it has remained unregulated by the federal government. Now the

president wants to make an agency created to regulate the limited spectrums of broadcast radio and TV control a medium with unlimited reach. This is an awful idea.

In calling for the FCC to reclassify the Internet as a utility, President Obama aims to do to the Internet what he did to health insurance: Make it worse and more expensive. If the president pushes forward, he'll lose in court, as he did in January when federal judges decided net neutrality rules have no basis in federal law. The president is pursuing this power play because Congress won't pass net neutrality. For now, FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler — a former telecom lobbyist and one of President Obama's leading fundraisers in 2008 and 2012 — has (somewhat surprisingly) pushed back on the president's plans, preferring a “hybrid approach” that would tighten the reins a little on broadband service providers while maintaining room for paid prioritization agreements.

Why? Maybe he wants a solution that will stand up in court. Or maybe he knows that instead of attacking

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fast-lane agreements, Washington should be pushed to explore ideas that actually promote competition among ISPs. If we want a truly free and open Internet, that is. – *Las Vegas Review-Journal* editorial

Republican state lawmakers are looking to relieve Ohio's telephone companies from having to operate basic landline service once federal regulators give their blessing, but Gov. John Kasich and other advocates remain opposed.

The Ohio Telecom Association is arguing that the more money telephone companies must spend on traditional landlines, the less they have to spend on advanced broadband and other high-speed connections. Ohio's current requirements that "companies of last resort" continue to service landlines, regardless of cost, would delay transition to the modern services "that consumers and businesses demand." But critics say the language is unnecessary at this time and could be harmful to low-income, rural and elderly Ohioans who rely on traditional landlines.

Lawmakers received letters supporting the plan from a variety of areas, including the Stark Development Board, Tuscarawas Community Improvement Corp. and Belmont County Port Authority. "Better utilizing high-speed broadband and wireless applications is critical for our rural communities to survive and thrive in today's Internet marketplace," wrote Joel Pierre of Appalachian Gateway Development. "I ask you to support any upcoming telecommunications legislation that will encourage investment in (high-speed) infrastructure."

Kasich would veto the provision. "Given that the Federal Communications Commission is still writing the regulations on this issue and no one knows exactly what they will say, it's premature to take these kinds of actions right now," said spokesman Rob Nichols. "We are hopeful we can avoid a veto, and there are a lot of good conversations taking place." The FCC has been looking at its Internet regulations after its previous rules were tossed out by a federal court in January. One of the issues being examined is how to treat Internet providers, and that has implications for phone service.

On Monday, President Barack Obama called for the FCC to treat Internet providers like public utilities, which would mean that those providers would be regulated much more tightly than in the past. Such tighter regulations could mean that phone calls over the Internet (known as voice over Internet protocol, or VoIP) would be subject to regulation. AT&T, Comcast and Verizon have opposed such regulation. In committee, Rep. Nick Barborak, D-Lisbon, questioned whether customers, particularly those living in Ohio's hills and valleys, would still get comparable phone services and prices once traditional landlines go away.

Jon Kelly, an attorney for AT&T, said companies still have time to work things out because the FCC is not expected to act until 2018 or 2020 on allowing companies to withdraw landline service. "Wireless is being built out extensively to cover the gaps in those rural areas," he said. Kelly told lawmakers that 17 of 21 states where AT&T operates as the incumbent landline carrier already have passed similar legislation. Failing to act could affect where it invests money in the future, he said. "Ohio is in the last pack, unfortunately, of states to even get ready for this transition," he said. "Ohio needs to catch up."

Replacing landline service with wireless comes with its own issues. After superstorm Sandy destroyed landlines in parts of New York and New Jersey, for example, Verizon tried to avoid replacing the lines by having customers switch to a wireless service. A public outcry over the quality of wireless service caused Verizon to replace at least some of the landlines with fiber-optic cables instead. AARP Ohio is wary that the proposal not only would mean that rural Ohioans would lose their traditional landlines but that it also would deny them fiber-optic service. "They will only have wireless telephone service with no price controls or guarantees for low-income Ohioans in these areas," said Jane Taylor, state director for AARP Ohio in a statement. "Additionally, there are areas of Ohio where wireless service is minimal, and to provide the speed needed for those receiving tele-health services in those areas will be even more expensive."

Ohio Consumers' Counsel Bruce Weston also opposes the plan, arguing that it is not yet needed and would "yield to federal regulators too much, too soon, about Ohio's telephone policymaking." Some lawmakers questioned whether the bill needs language guaranteeing that service will be provided in rural areas. Others questioned why such a significant utilities issue was being vetted in the Agriculture Committee rather than the Public Utilities Committee, where members are more up to speed on the issue. The proposal was amended into House Bill 490, which is now a large, multifaceted bill dealing mostly with agricultural and environmental issues. – *Columbus (OH) Dispatch*

Time Warner Cable this week wrapped up a nearly yearlong upgrade to its Los Angeles network, completing a switch to all-digital from analog systems. Now, Time Warner Cable's entire base of pay-TV customers will have digital television channels. For years, subscribers have been converting to all-digital

packages, which provide clearer television picture and sound, but the company continued to provide analog as well as digital signals. It just now finished its transition to all-digital.

The upgrade resulted in increased speeds for its high-speed Internet customers. The reason: each analog channel requires as much capacity on the network as three or four high-definition channels. A Time Warner Cable spokesman said the company was using the freed-up capacity on its network to increase Internet speeds for customers. Customers who had standard Internet service, or up to 15 megabits per second, will have up to 50 megabits per second.

The upgrade required Time Warner Cable technicians to replace network hardware and wiring throughout the region. The company this week also completed a similar upgrade in New York. It is planning improvements to its networks in San Diego, Kansas City, Dallas, San Antonio, Hawaii, Charlotte, N.C., and Raleigh, N.C. The company also said it has added Wi-Fi hot spots in San Diego and Palm Springs. Previously the bulk of Time Warner Cable's Wi-Fi hot spots in Southern California were in Los Angeles. – *Los Angeles Times*



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