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Civil liberties activists long warned that the federal government must adopt “net neutrality” requirements that prevent broadband companies from charging websites for prioritized access to their lines or risk the loss of freedom and openness online. Yet, the Federal Communications Commission repealed Obama-era net neutrality regulations a year ago, and the internet did not break.

Fierce Video

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Unfortunately, there is a growing movement in Washington to change a technology law that has received far less attention than net neutrality but is more central to how the internet operates. The outcome of this debate actually could break the internet as we know it or, at the very least, change the playing field for online speech.

USA Today

[AT&T turns on its mobile 5G network on Dec. 21, starting with 12 cities and mobile hotspot](#)

In 1996, as part of an overhaul of U.S. telecommunications laws, Congress quietly added a tiny provision that became known as Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act. The law states that online platforms cannot be treated as the publisher of information that is provided by a third party. This means that Yelp cannot be sued for user reviews, Twitter is not responsible for tweets, and Wikipedia is immune from lawsuits stemming from user-written articles.

Bloomberg

[Instagram Was Bigger Russian Election Tool Than Facebook, Senate Report Says](#)

Courts have interpreted Section 230 quite broadly in the past two decades, smoothing the way for social media, search engines, online forums and any other platforms that rely on user-created content. Section 230 provides the most far-reaching protections for online platforms in the world, and it is no coincidence that many of the most successful internet companies are based in the United States.

Variety

[TiVo FCC Filing Suggests Android TV Device Coming in Time for CES](#)

The platforms are free to set their own community rules, and they do not need to fear liability for their moderation (or lack thereof). I spent more than two years writing a book about the history of Section 230. The book, which will be published in the spring, is titled “The Twenty-Six Words That Created the Internet” (Cornell University Press). The title is not an exaggeration. Section 230’s simple but sweeping immunity has shaped the free and open internet that we know today.

New York Post

[MLB eyes giving teams streaming rights challenging pay-TV model](#)

Section 230 has resulted not only in economic prosperity for technology companies but in protections for online speech that far exceed those of the First Amendment. Unfortunately, Section 230 also has allowed platforms to dodge responsibility, even if they failed to adequately police their sites for harmful or illegal user content. Even if a site encourages its users to defame others, Section 230 likely will protect the operator from a lawsuit.

Bloomberg

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Pennlive

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Section 230 has largely flown under the radar in Washington until recently. That changed due to a number of high-profile incidents on social media, such as the distribution of fake news, ISIS propaganda and discriminatory job advertisements. Platforms also have banned some political commentators for violating their policies on hate speech and harassment, attracting criticism for censoring speech. A growing group of advocates and policymakers wants to eliminate Section 230 entirely or scale it back significantly. Indeed, at a hearing this month about Google’s business practices, Congress members criticized the

broad protections that Section 230 provides to platforms such as Google.

What would happen to the internet if Section 230 disappeared? The most visible challenge to Section 230 came after a 2016 federal appellate court ruled that victims of sex trafficking could not sue Backpage, the site where they were sold by pimps. Congress responded earlier this year by amending Section 230 to allow certain sex trafficking-related civil and state criminal claims against platforms. Two days after Congress passed the Section 230 amendment, Craigslist shut down its online personals site. "Any tool or service can be misused," the site wrote. "We can't take such risk without jeopardizing all our other services, so we are regretfully taking craigslist personals offline."

The internet will survive without online personal ads. But eliminating Section 230 entirely likely would extend that chilling effect to social media, consumer review sites, Wikipedia and just about every other site and app that is a centerpiece of online life. Just as Craigslist took a risk-averse approach after the sex trafficking amendment to Section 230, any rational platform would severely curtail user content in a Section 230-free world.

Perhaps the public and lawmakers will determine that the social harms of Section 230 outweigh the benefits of the free speech that have come to define the internet in the United States. But the frank discussion must occur before Congress considers further changes to Section 230.

After the netroots community's clamorous opposition to changes to the FCC's net neutrality regulations, it is surprising to see activists' relative indifference about changes to Section 230. Perhaps the large platforms have angered all sides of the political spectrum with their lack of transparency, arrogance and imperfect moderation practices. Or maybe Section 230 just isn't as interesting as net neutrality. But its impact on the internet is exponentially greater. — **Baltimore Sun**

An area telecommunications company has come up with a unique way to build awareness about the company — while having a bit of holiday fun.

Recent Communications Inc. this month launched a Holiday Hotline, which runs through Christmas night. Callers of all ages can dial the hotline — 484-552-2180 — and leave a message for one of four holiday characters: Frosty the Snowman, Buddy the Elf, Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer or Santa Claus. Depending on which character they choose, the caller is asked a question, which they answer in a voicemail for the character, according to Charlotte Conroy, managing partner and director of marketing and development for Recent Communications.

Frosty the Snowman, for example, asks callers to tell him how they dress up their favorite snowman; Buddy the Elf asks the caller's favorite Christmas song to sing with family and friends; Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer asks callers to tell him their favorite games to play with family and friends; while Santa Claus asks callers what is on the top of their wish list this year. The voicemail file is then sent via a WAV audio file to Recent Communications' email box as part of the

company's cloud-based phone system. "We are saving all audio voicemail files and those that are appropriate and do not include last names or exact home addresses, we are sharing on our Facebook and Twitter social media pages," Conroy said. Conroy actually came up with the idea for the Holiday Hotline last winter, adding that she took inspiration from other holiday-themed hotlines she has heard. This year is the first time the company launched the hotline. "I was trying to do something fun and different to make us stand out. Everyone has kids and grandkids. As a phone company I thought, 'let's do something fun,'" she said.

Conroy said she has talked about the hotline at several events hosted by the Montgomery County and Main Line chambers of commerce. The company also mentioned it in holiday cards sent to clients, and has promoted it on its social media platforms. And of course, employees are talking about it in person with clients. "This Holiday Hotline allows our team to have something festive to discuss with customers, potential customers and partners — while showcasing some of our VoIP services," Conroy added. "With our Holiday Hotline, we are demonstrating how we can provide in-market telephone numbers, customize automated attendants to seamlessly route incoming calls, offer unlimited voicemail boxes, and integrate mobility features like receiving voicemails via email."

In addition to fun and awareness building, Conroy said the holiday initiative is an opportunity to be seen in a different light than many of the company's competitors, which include Vonage, RingCentral, Comcast and Verizon. "We are very different from many local and national companies offering telecom, as we are truly full-service. We collaborate with all of our clients to understand how communications can support all aspects of their organization to then design solutions to best fit their operational, financial, and technology goals," Conroy added.

In business since 2000, Recent Communications Inc. is a family-owned and operated full-service telecommunications company that designs, installs, and support business phone systems, VoIP services and unified communications solutions for businesses across a variety of industries. The company doesn't manufacture equipment, but installs and supports equipment from nearly 20 technology partners and manufacturers, according to Conroy, adding that the company started as an on premise telecom provider.

Now the company is on premise and cloud-based, offering a variety of equipment options. "We understand the best fit. That's what makes us different — we can do everything in the wheelhouse in telecom," Conroy explained, adding that many people only hear about cloud-based solutions. "But depending on what they do, and how critical phones are for their operation, Cloud may not be their best system. We are truly consultative."

While many of Recent Communications' customers are headquartered in the Delaware Valley and Mid-Atlantic regions, the company, "also grows with our customers as they open new offices across the country and support staff working remotely." The company works with companies that range from five to 1,000 employees. "Our local focus and national reach ensure all of our customers get immediate and personalized support, hands-on training of the technology and ongoing

partnership as they grow and adapt to their competitive marketplaces,” Conroy added. Recent Communications has 10 employees and is located at 555 Second Ave. in Collegeville. – ***Delaware County Daily Times***

Montgomery County, Pennsylvania officials have approved a new balloting system that includes creating a paper trail. Officials hope to about 400 voting machines will be in place for the May 21 primary election.

Kenneth Lawrence, vice chairman of the County Board of Commissioners says the county is staying with Dominion Voting Systems to provide the machines at a cost of nearly \$6 million. “This new system will be a modern system, with voter-marked paper balloting with a verifiable paper trail so we can audit to make sure that ballots are counted correctly,” Lawrence said.

All electronic voting machines, as are common in many parts of Pennsylvania and New Jersey, have drawn criticism since they don’t have a paper record that could be audited in the case of a malfunction or dispute. Lawrence said the new machines will also be capable of quickly counting absentee ballots. “Currently now absentee ballots aren’t counted until after 8 p.m. when the polls close, now those absentee ballots will just be run into the machine, they won’t have to be counted by hand,” he said.

Once the county acquires the equipment, it will schedule instructional sessions for voters and poll workers before the primary. Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf has ordered statewide upgrades of the voting system before the 2020 presidential primary. **It’s estimated** that would cost Pennsylvania counties a combined \$125 million. – ***WHYY-TV/FM, Philadelphia***

