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Many Republicans have no fondness for net neutrality — the idea that cable and phone companies should treat all information equally as it travels over their broadband Internet networks. So it comes as no surprise that some of them are trying to throw a wrench into the Federal Communications Commission's plan to adopt strong Internet rules.

Republicans and large telecommunications companies are natural allies in opposing government regulations. Now, two Republican lawmakers, Senator John Thune of South Dakota and Representative Fred Upton of Michigan, have proposed a bill that they claim would achieve neutrality on the Internet without the kind of regulation the F.C.C. is expected to approve next month. But the legislation has such large loopholes that powerful cable and phone companies like Comcast and Verizon would feel almost no effect.

Mr. Thune and Mr. Upton say their bill would forbid the cable and phone companies from giving preference to traffic from certain businesses, like Amazon and Google, that are willing to pay more for faster delivery, which would hurt smaller companies. The legislation would also prohibit such companies from blocking or slowing downloads from certain sites.

Those are excellent goals, but there is a giant caveat in the bill: Companies would be allowed to offer "specialized services" that would not be subject to any of those rules. Conceivably, almost anything could be called a "specialized service," which is really just linguistic sleight of hand.

The bill would also prohibit the F.C.C. from classifying broadband Internet access as a telecommunications service, something the commission has been moving closer to in recent months. Courts have ruled that the commission now has limited authority to regulate broadband, but the telecommunications designation — which already

applies to home phone lines and cellphone service — would give the commission the authority it needs to prohibit companies from engaging in unfair and unreasonable business practices. The chairman of the F.C.C., Tom Wheeler, recently suggested that the agency would vote on Feb. 26 to reclassify broadband.

The good news is that even if Republicans in Congress, who receive big donations from telecommunications companies, can push through Mr. Thune's and Mr. Upton's legislation, President Obama would almost surely veto it. In November, the president called on the F.C.C. to reclassify broadband. But Republicans could try to get the proposal through by attaching it to unrelated bills the president would find difficult to veto. Democrats in Congress and President Obama should be ready to defend the F.C.C. — ***New York Times* editorial**



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