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With Republicans now in power across the government, Congress has moved aggressively toward undoing Obama-era tech policies.

Net neutrality, the rule that ensures equal access to all websites, and broadband privacy rules are the first targets. Lawmakers also hope to play a bigger role than in the last administration on policies of particular concern to Silicon Valley and internet users, including driverless cars and the scaling back of Federal Communications Commission powers concerning broadband providers.

We talked to Senator John Thune, Republican of South Dakota, who leads the commerce committee that oversees the technology and telecommunications industries, about these efforts. The interview was edited for clarity and length.

How do you want to change net neutrality rules?

We're open for business. We think a legislative solution is the best alternative and that the F.C.C. under Chairman Tom Wheeler went too far with regulations that were overreaching and basically classified the internet as a public utility under a 1934 statute. Congress needs to be heard from, or you will have a constant back-and-forth on this issue depending on which party is in the White House.

What would your law look like?

What's really worked for the internet is the light touch. Legislation would basically prevent blocking, throttling and paid prioritization but doesn't go to the extreme of reclassifying broadband as a telecommunications service.

How about bans on zero rating, which is the practice by T-Mobile, AT&T and Verizon of giving unlimited streaming to select content?

On zero rating, F.C.C. Chairman Ajit Pai has already expressed a preference on that: It is something consumers seem to love. To be able to download or stream without letting it count against your data plan is extremely popular with consumers. I don't have a problem with that.

Will you work with the F.C.C. chairman, and how will you get Democrats on board?

It may take action by the F.C.C. first in order to get the stars aligned. I think that if the F.C.C. starts moving in the other direction, it might prompt Democrats on the Hill to say, "You know what, maybe a legislation solution makes sense."

What about broadband privacy rules created in early 2016? Senator Jeff Flake of Arizona and Representative Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee have proposed killing privacy rules through a shortcut legislative process known as the Congressional Review Act.

We are following it. I probably will support it because it is consistent with my view on the issue. But I also think we want to get the best possible outcome that doesn't create two sets of privacy rules for broadband and edge web companies, which is what you have today.

What can Congress do to help resolve the digital divide? What tools are at your disposal right away?

We passed the Mobile Now Act, which was designed to expand spectrum access to get more wireless broadband. We want to get to 5G wireless broadband before anyone else. The Universal Service Fund is another area.

How do you want to reform the Universal Service Fund, which allocates \$8 billion a year to bring broadband to underserved areas?

We've tried to get broadband-only services covered under U.S.F. because now you have to offer phone and internet.

Ajit Pai got a lot of criticism for recently stopping nine broadband providers from participating in the Lifeline program, which gives subsidized broadband to low-income individuals. Do you believe in Lifeline, and what do you think of his actions?

Like any government program, it ought to be run efficiently. There have been issues of it in the past in regards to abuse and waste. As for these nine providers, they were basically approved right before transition. What he's done is put them on a pending status.

You've been an advocate of driverless cars. How are you going to get driverless cars on the road faster?

Autonomous vehicles have enormous potential to save lives. There are barriers that make it difficult not just for testing, but for developing these technologies. Some are simple, like requiring that in every vehicle there be a human steering wheel and a human accelerator. We're going to look at where are some of the barriers to these technologies that are standing in the way. – **New York Times**



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