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Most issues look different from rural America, but that's especially true of net neutrality.

No one doubts that net neutrality policies to keep the internet open and free for all users are vital. No internet provider or tech company should be allowed to block websites, censor or discriminate against viewpoints, manipulate cyberspace to shut out competition or otherwise interfere with our online experience.

But for many activists and tech advocates in high-connectivity urban areas, that's all that net neutrality means. In rural America, however, effective net neutrality means much more.

The advertisement for Cablefax Daily features a woman with blonde hair, wearing a dark blue blazer over a light blue collared shirt, smiling while talking on a black corded telephone. She is sitting at a desk with a white computer keyboard in front of her. The background is a light blue gradient with a subtle pattern of diagonal lines. The text in the advertisement reads: "ESSENTIAL READING for INDUSTRY EXECS" in large, bold, blue letters. Below that, it says "Cablefax Daily: THE vital business tool for MSOs, programming execs, telco/satellite distributors, tech vendors and more. Get the news that matters to you--free for 3 weeks." At the bottom, it says "Go to <http://www.cablefax.com/3wktrial>."

Most fundamentally, net neutrality policies must also accelerate the deployment and build-out of new high speed networks to rural areas. A neutral internet doesn't mean much if you don't have network access in the first place, and almost 40 percent of rural Americans still lack high speed

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broadband. This is a key issue often overlooked in the debate. Policies that slow down the national effort to connect rural areas actually set net neutrality back. That may not be obvious in connected meccas like Silicon Valley or Washington, D.C., but it's painfully true on the ground in places like McGregor, Minnesota, or Duckwater, Nevada, where access is spotty and incomplete.

And this is how the current debate in Congress over competing proposals on net neutrality so frequently misses the point. The urban tech and activist community has largely lined up behind a quick fix proposal using a procedural shortcut called the Congressional Review Act. This CRA approach has some benefits — it bypasses many Senate rules and can guarantee an early vote on net neutrality. And it puts in place strong FCC open internet regulations on no blocking, throttling or discriminating online.

But for rural America, the CRA approach unfortunately contains a massive poison pill. It not only establishes net neutrality, but it also imposes a whole separate set of invasive economic regulations for broadband called Title II that will drive away investment needed to bring high speed networks to our communities. Title II has been tried before and the results have been a disaster for broadband build-out. One study found it to drive down network investment by roughly \$35 billion a year. Another pegged the loss at as much as 5.5 percent.

Perhaps if this was the necessary price of enacting net neutrality it would be worth it — although even then I would question asking rural Americans to once again stand at the back of the line and sacrifice for the broader good. Instead of using the CRA shortcut, Congress simply needs to follow regular order, do its job and pass real net neutrality legislation. One that keeps the internet open and free, stops all internet companies from manipulating, prioritizing or discriminating online, and ensures transparency and open competition in cyberspace, while avoiding the damage to investment and rural build-out that the CRA would inflict.

There is broad bipartisan support for the principles of net neutrality and over three-quarters of Americans support the idea. And the industries that would be affected have pledged to support a bill and say they are willing to accept new regulation in exchange for certainty and predictability. A true net neutrality bill (as opposed to the shortcut CRA) would have other benefits. It makes net neutrality permanent and ensures that a future administration could not turn its back on these protections. The CRA approach by contrast leaves the issue at the FCC where it can be changed anytime the political winds shift.

Legislation also guarantees more comprehensive protection — reaching not just internet providers but the big social media and tech monopolies that shape so much of what we see and access online. The CRA approach cannot bring evenhanded regulation to the entire internet ecosystem, but a real congressional law can. For net neutrality to be meaningful, it must reach all Americans. — San Antonio Express News

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Northern Wisconsin leaders are frustrated by the lack of progress on broadband internet access in the area. Dan Corbin, the chairman for the town of Summit, told Wisconsin Public Radio that residents in areas of Douglas County and the city of Superior have yet to see expanded broadband services. "I'm lucky enough where I live I have the 25-megabit service," Corbin said. "It's very good, but you don't have to get very far from there and that service goes down to 0.1 megabits."

Superior City Councilman Tylor Elm said residents are paying the same rate for slower internet service when compared to La Crosse. CenturyLink, the area's main internet provider, said it is meeting timelines and requirements set by the Federal Communications Commission. CenturyLink received \$332 million in federal subsidies under the FCC's Connect America Fund, which aims to provide high-speed internet to mostly rural areas. The money is set to bring high-speed internet to more than 129,000 addresses in the state. The company said it plans to expand service in Superior over the next several years.

CenturyLink plans to spend \$12.3 million to expand broadband services to more than 5,250 homes and businesses in Douglas County by 2020, said Wisconsin State Broadband Director Angie Dickison. "Those are all governed and administered at the federal level by the FCC, but we are certainly keeping an eye on what's happening there," she said. Companies must certify the addresses where they've extended service to in a report to the FCC this spring, she said. The FCC will also have performance measures in place in June to assess the quality of service providers are offering. Companies that don't meet the FCC's guidelines will have to return funding. — Associated Press

Discovery Communications and Scripps Networks have officially completed their \$14.6 billion **merger** and the new combined company will be known as Discovery Inc.

Discovery Communications CEO David Zaslav will remain the chief executive and Scripps' former president, chairman and CEO Kenneth Lowe will join Discovery's board of directors. "Today marks another critical milestone for Discovery, as we become a differentiated kind of media company with the most trusted portfolio of family-friendly brands around the globe," said Zaslav in a **statement**. "As a new global leader in real life entertainment, Discovery will serve loyal and passionate audiences around the world with content that inspires, informs and entertains across every screen; deliver new ways for advertisers and distributors to reach highly targeted audiences at scale; and leverage our leadership position to create new value and growth opportunities for all of our stakeholders."

Now that the merger is official, the companies are expecting cost synergies of approximately \$350 million. In recent calls, Discovery management has said that cost synergy estimates could end up being too conservative. The company anticipates the merger will be accretive to adjusted earnings per share and to free cash flow in the first year after closing. Last week, Discovery revealed the executive leadership structure for the combined companies. Both Discovery CFO Gunnar Wiedenfels and Jean-Briac Perrette, who is currently serving as president and CEO of Discovery Networks International, will continue in their roles, along with several other Discovery executives.

Kathleen Finch, currently chief programming, content and brand officer for all six Scripps Networks brands, will become chief lifestyle brands officer for the combined company with management oversight of HGTV, Food Network, TLC, ID, Travel Channel, DIY Network, Cooking Channel, Discovery Life, American Heroes Channel, Destination America, Great American Country and Lifestyle Digital Studios in the U.S. Nancy Daniels, currently president of TLC, will assume the new role of chief brand officer and lead all aspects of Discovery Channel and the Science Channel brands. Rich Ross, currently group president of Discovery Channel and Science Channel, is leaving the company.

