

**An information-packed conference agenda must include a night to unwind.**



March 10, 2016

**Christian  
Science  
Monitor**  
**Proposed  
FCC plan  
expansion  
raises  
questions: Is  
Internet  
access a  
right?**

**Kansas City  
Star**  
**KC-based  
Hallmark  
Cards will  
take Crown  
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**Fierce Cable**  
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deliver  
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Federal Communications Commission officials soon will seek to impose new customer-privacy rules on Internet access providers, a move expected to fuel an already fierce conflict with the industry.

The new rules, which could be brought up at an FCC meeting as soon as this month are intended to help shield tens of millions of consumers from potentially unwanted use of their Internet data by the providers, many of whom are looking to boost profits by using customer data to sell more targeted advertising online.

The Internet access companies—which include cable and wireless firms—are digging in for a regulatory fight, arguing that tough new FCC rules could put them at a disadvantage, particularly against Internet-services firms such as Alphabet Inc.'s Google unit or Facebook Inc. that wouldn't be covered by the new FCC rules.

Until recently, online privacy has largely been the domain of the Federal Trade Commission, another independent regulatory agency which has a long track record in privacy enforcement but which some privacy advocates believe is hamstrung by limited legal authority. Google and Facebook—which also use customer data—are regulated by the FTC.

The fast-growing digital advertising market is worth tens of billions of dollars each year, and the ability to use customers' data can give telecommunications firms an important edge. That makes the FCC's effort to impose new restrictions on data a potentially high-stakes battle for Internet service providers. It is also fueling a long-running conflict between FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler and the providers, who have sparred recently over net-neutrality rules as well as the agency's efforts to open up the market for pay-TV set-top boxes.

[campaigns](#)

[Los Angeles Times](#)  
[Fox and Sky invest in streaming start-up FuboTV](#)

[Variety](#)  
[Apple TV Scores March Madness App Exclusive: Split-Screen Games](#)

[pennlive.com](#)  
[Op-ed: Pa's endless impasse proves we need to fix the way we pass budgets](#)

[Pittsburgh Post-Gazette](#)  
[Pittsburgh-area students drawn to presidential debates](#)

[pennlive.com](#)  
[John Kasich's Pa. primary bid may depend on the definition of 'closed.' Here's why.](#)

Mr. Wheeler is hoping to put the new privacy rules up for a preliminary vote at this month's commission meeting. He is expected to announce his plans as soon as Thursday. On one level the new rules likely will be mundane stuff. They are expected to require the companies to explain more clearly to customers how their data would be handled. The rules are likely to give customers more ability to opt-in or opt-out of various data uses, depending on the specific types of data involved. And they will lay down new standards for keeping data secure from breaches.

Still, they are expected to spark a contentious industry battle. Some advocates worry the FCC move could open the door to more onerous regulation of telecommunications firms' practices than they have previously experienced under the FTC. "Despite objections and concerns I have about the FTC, which are significant, it's still a far saner regime" than the new FCC system is likely to be, said Berin Szoka, president of TechFreedom, a market-oriented think tank. That is partly because of the FCC's sweeping powers to classify practices as improper under the law.

But many privacy advocates believe FCC regulation would be an improvement. They regard the FTC as somewhat hamstrung when it comes to protecting privacy, for example because of its limited ability to impose fines on offending companies, particularly for first offenses. Some experts disagree, saying FTC oversight has been effective.

Privacy advocates also say telecommunications firms have access to so much data—even more than Google or Facebook—that they ought to be regulated differently. "The larger and deeper the data set, the more able I am to target you personally," said Harold Feld, a senior vice president at Public Knowledge, a consumer group.

Peter Swire, a privacy expert and former Obama administration adviser who is now at Georgia Tech, has raised doubt about those differences, saying in a recent study that Internet access providers have access to somewhat less information than many assume. Other experts have disputed his conclusions, however. Even some Internet firms that wouldn't be covered by the FCC's rules are worried that the FTC would start to get tougher in a sort of copycat response. For their part, consumer advocates worry that telecommunications firms will try to weaken the existing tough restrictions on use of phone data.

The FCC already has been stepping up its enforcement in privacy and security. In a possible foreshadowing of what is to come, the FCC announced a landmark settlement this week with Verizon Communications Inc. over its use of so-called supercookies, pieces of software that track customers' Web usage and are difficult to eliminate. Verizon agreed to pay \$1.35 million in the settlement, the FCC's first involving supercookies.

The privacy fight echoes a continuing battle over whether Internet access firms should be regulated as common carriers to ensure that all Internet traffic is treated equally. That is a fight that is still playing out in the federal courts.

The battle over privacy is actually a spinoff from that bigger conflict. Adoption of the net-neutrality rules meant that the FCC also had to come up with some standards of its own for regulating the broadband firms' handling of customer data. However, if the FCC loses its court fight over the net-neutrality rules, the basis for its privacy rules also could be eroded. – *Wall Street Journal*

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President Obama, backing a [plan](#) to connect low-income families to more affordable broadband services, on Wednesday set a goal to get 20 million people subscribed to high-speed Internet by 2020.

In a Facebook post, Mr. Obama said a lack of broadband at home took a particularly harsh toll [on students](#) caught in a "homework gap," unable to complete school assignments because the work requires access to the web. "All of America's students should be able to get online, no matter where they live or how much their parents make,"

Mr. Obama wrote. "We're calling this effort ConnectAll — and it's not just good for students, it's good for folks looking for jobs or workers hoping to learn new skills."

The White House also released a report outlining the economic effects of broadband adoption, focused on how families without broadband at home are at a disadvantage in finding jobs. Job seekers who search online find employment 25 percent faster than those who use traditional methods like newspaper classifieds, according to a report released by the Council of Economic Advisers.

The announcement underscores the government's view of high-speed Internet as a utility that should be regulated like water and power and should be extended to all residents. The White House has pushed for more affordable broadband with its [ConnectHome](#) initiative, announced last July, to put affordable broadband services in public housing. Mr. Obama in late 2014 urged the Federal Communications Commission to classify broadband services as utilities, a view fiercely opposed by telecom service providers.

The White House on Wednesday also said it would support the F.C.C.'s proposal to reform its Lifeline phone program. That effort, announced earlier this week, will give low-income homes a \$9.25 monthly subsidy for wireless and fixed broadband services. The broadband subsidy will be part of a revamp of a three-decades-old phone program for low-income homes. The fund comes from line-item charges to every wireless phone bill and the proposal will go to a vote on March 31.

Connecting 20 million more people to broadband would push adoption rates to about 82 percent, up from 76 percent at the end of 2014, according to the White House. – ***New York Times***

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Over the last few months a growing number of companies have stated they're worried that Charter's acquisition of Time Warner Cable and Bright House Networks will create a new Comcast-esque company with every incentive to hinder the development of Internet video. Companies like Dish, Time Warner and HBO have been [vocal critics](#) of the merger, prompting an [FCC investigation](#) into potential foul play. Dish has been the most vocal, alleging that Charter has [already tried to sabotage](#) its Sling TV service by urging broadcasters to avoid licensing content to the service.

In a new [blog post](#), Charter once again breathlessly insisting the new, larger company will stay on its very best behavior. "To be clear, we are excited about programmers like HBO who are starting to offer over-the-top versions of their content through products like HBO NOW, simply because it makes our unlimited, high-speed broadband more valuable for consumers," the company said. "It also benefits consumers by providing them more ways to access programming, which in turn places less pressure on service providers like Charter to give in to a programmer's demand for a sky-high rate increase."

To ease passage of the deal Charter has promised to adhere to the FCC's net neutrality rules for three years -- even if the rules are demolished by the lawsuits Charter is currently aiding designed to overturn them. The company has also promised to [avoid imposing usage caps](#) for the same amount of time should the deal be approved. – DSL Reports

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