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Federal regulators on Thursday proposed a broad new set of privacy rules for Internet providers, in what is seen as a major bid to give Web users some of the same privacy protections online as they receive from their telephone providers. The government's proposal would limit how carriers such as Verizon, Comcast and T-Mobile can handle their Internet subscribers' personal information — including their Web browsing habits, which apps they use and other sensitive data.

If approved, the rules would significantly expand the Federal Communications Commission's role as a privacy watchdog, giving it new ways to oversee an industry that increasingly relies on customer data as a source of business.

Under the proposal from FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler, Internet providers would have to seek explicit permission from their customers before sharing their data with third parties, such as marketers and advertisers. The rules would still let Internet providers use customer data to market new products to their own subscribers — though consumers could opt out of that practice. For example, Verizon could use data on its FiOS customers to advertise its cellular service to those same customers, senior agency officials told reporters Thursday.



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Internet providers would also have to provide easy access to written privacy policies, and take steps to safeguard the personal data from hackers. The FCC's unprecedented foray into the realm of online privacy stems directly from the agency's decision last year to enact stiff rules on net neutrality. Those rules subject Internet

providers to regulations that were originally written for the telephone industry. And among them are a set of privacy requirements that the FCC is now adapting to fit the broadband industry. "Today, I'm proposing to my colleagues that we empower consumers to ensure they have control over how their information is used by their Internet Service Provider," Mr. Wheeler wrote in a blog post.

Until now, regulators have largely held Internet providers accountable on privacy issues by cracking down when a carrier violates its own privacy policy or marketing materials. But with the FCC proposal, the government is laying out for the first time a series of concrete obligations for broadband firms that go beyond transparency and truth-in-advertising: It wants providers to give users specific choices about how their information is used.

Internet providers are becoming more interested in using customer data for advertising purposes. For example, AT&T operates a program in some markets that gives consumers a monthly discount on Internet service in exchange for letting

AT&T track their Web history. And Verizon's recently launched streaming video app, Go90, is integrated with AOL's substantial digital advertising technology, which could benefit from greater insight on how consumers behave online. Whether businesses like these should be regulated more heavily is something the FCC intends to ask the public about if the proposal moves forward at the agency's monthly meeting March 31.

The proposal is already generating pushback from the broadband industry. In a blog post Wednesday, AT&T argued that its data collection practices are little different from those of Google and Facebook, which are online services the FCC has repeatedly vowed not to regulate. "There is no basis for treating ISP data as somehow 'proprietary' or subjecting ISPs to unique privacy requirements," the company said.

FCC officials argued Thursday that Internet providers' control over large digital networks gives them far more knowledge about a consumer's behavior than what a single Internet company could gather alone. "An ISP handles all of its customers' network traffic, which means it has an unobstructed view of all of their unencrypted online activity — the websites they visit, the applications they use," the FCC said in a fact sheet on the proposal.

The FCC's expanding privacy jurisdiction also raises fresh questions about the proper role of other regulators in monitoring privacy violations. The Federal Trade Commission, for instance, has long been considered the government's top privacy watchdog. But whereas the FTC has only a limited ability to establish new rules, the FCC is different because it can create binding obligations on Internet providers.

But the FCC should not stray too far from the FTC's approach, Verizon said in a statement Thursday. "We believe any new rules put forward by the FCC should align with the successful approach that the FTC has used for years across the entire ecosystem," the company said. Consumers need to be able to trust that Internet providers will be responsible with their data, said Laura Moy, a visiting assistant professor at Georgetown Law. "Broadband is not something we want people to have to choose whether or not to use — and that means we need to expect all Americans are going to be sharing very sensitive information with their broadband provider," she said. — *Washington Post*

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Texas Gov. Greg Abbott announced an initiative Thursday that will attempt to bring affordable broadband Internet access to all school districts in the state.

EducationSuperHighway, a non-profit, has partnered with the state to create an action plan to improve access. Network experts from the non-profit also will work with nearly 1,000 schools that currently lack access to high-speed fiber. "Learning is no longer limited by bricks and mortar — it is expanded exponentially by bytes and bandwidth," Abbott said in a news release. "Expanding technology in our classrooms will allow the state of Texas to meet future workforce needs, help teachers build a pipeline of qualified graduates, and support our students in their efforts to learn without limits. Every single child deserves access to quality education, and with the expanded use of technology in the classroom, that opportunity will be available to all Texas students."

The non-profit will work with the Texas Education Agency and its regional service centers and Internet providers to create the action plan. Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick has also charged the Senate Education Committee to study broadband access in school districts before the 2017 legislative session and make recommendations on a statewide plan to build necessary infrastructure for broadband access.

According to a [recent survey of 1,223 Texas public school districts](#) by the Texas Education Agency, only 26 percent of campuses met target connectivity to the Internet. Rural campuses tended to have slower speeds than their urban peers. Those with lower speeds point to not having necessary funds to build better infrastructure. — *Austin (TX) American-Statesman*

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There's no question that the 717 area code is running low on new phone numbers. That's been known for years. The age-old question is, what should be done about

it?

The state Public Utility Commission voted 5-0 on Thursday to ask the public for comment on how to solve the impending “exhaustion” of numbers, now predicted to hit in the fall of 2018. “...(W)e need input from consumers, the industry and other interested parties involved regarding this decision,” said the commissioners. Its vote comes as the PUC weighs an October filing by Neustar Inc., the North American numbering plan administrator, proposing to fix the dilemma by one of two ways.

Neustar suggested instituting an overlay — the option favored by the telecom industry in the state — or a geographic split. With an overlay, all new phone numbers in the 717 region would get the new area code. This would create a 67-year supply of new numbers. The downside is that dialing any local number would require dialing the area code, even from a 717 number to another 717 number.

With a split, all phone numbers — existing and new — in a certain geographic part of the area-code region would get a new area code. This would create as much as a 71-year supply. But customers who get a new area code would probably be saddled with at best an inconvenience and at worst a hardship, especially for businesses, schools and the like.

These are two of three possible solutions permitted by the Federal Communications Commission to phone number exhaustion in an area code. The third is to shift the area-code boundary, so some phone numbers get a new area code and capacity is freed in the overcrowded area code. Interested parties can submit comments to the PUC (Attention: Secretary) at the following address: P.O. Box 3265 Harrisburg PA 17105-3265. The PUC also will public hearings on the issue, at dates, times and places to be announced.

Numerous area codes across the nation have run short of numbers in the past three decades, largely due to fax machines, cell phones and computers gobbling up numbers at a rapid rate. But conservation measures, such as allocating blocks of new numbers to telecoms in smaller quantities, have extended the lifespan of many area codes, including 717.

The 717 area code covers some or all of 16 counties in southcentral Pennsylvania, including Lancaster County. The 717 area code was established in 1947. Today it is among 11 area codes in use in Pennsylvania, four of them overlays. The 717 area code initially ran low on phone numbers in the mid 1990s. The answer in 1998 was to give what was the northern half of the 717 region, including Scranton, Wilkes-Barre and Williamsport, a new area code, 570.

NANPA raised the alarm again in 2009. A public hearing was held in Lancaster on the issue in 2010. At that time, the “well” of numbers was to run dry in fall 2012. But in 2011, NANPA revised its predicted exhaustion date to late 2016. With this new filing to the PUC, NANPA has pushed back the predicted exhaustion date even later, to the fall of 2018. – *Lancaster Intelligencer*



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