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It was a fairly sleepy congressional hearing, the last in a two-week marathon of appearances by Federal Communications Commission Chairman Tom Wheeler before lawmakers to defend his agency's net neutrality rules. But then Louie Gohmert chimed in.

Gohmert (R-Tex.), an outspoken critic of the agency's rules that prevent Internet providers from blocking Web sites or speeding some of them up over others, exploded during a House Judiciary Committee hearing Wednesday. His voice rising to a shout, Gohmert threw a stream of accusations at Wheeler, complaining that the FCC had cut off Internet providers' ability to find new ways of making money. "Before the FCC came in, everybody could explore new business models," Gohmert said. "You're playing God with the Internet ... That's not your job. "Congress wasn't asking you to take over the Internet," he added, referring to the FCC's congressional charter.

Wheeler didn't respond directly to Gohmert. But during the hearing, he defended the FCC's new net neutrality rules. He also noted that some Republicans agree that there is a need to put some limits on Internet providers, pointing to a bill backed by Reps. Greg Walden (R-Ore.) and Fred Upton (R-Mich.), as well as Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.). "Mr. Walden and Mr. Upton and Sen. Thune have [proposed] legislation to ban blocking, ban throttling, and ban paid prioritization — the things we ban" in the net neutrality rules, said Wheeler. "So I think there's suggestion that people other than us" believe there is a problem.

Last month, the FCC passed strict new rules for Internet providers, voting to

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regulate them using the same legal tools it uses to police legacy phone service. Those rules have now been challenged by two lawsuits — one from a trade group representing Internet providers, and another from a small, Texas-based broadband company. [Catch video of the hearing here.](#) — *Washington Post*

With only days left in the first quarter, cable giant Comcast Corp. has once again pushed backed the expected closing date for its acquisition of Time Warner Cable Inc.

Comcast said in a [blog post](#) Wednesday that it now expects the megamerger to close in the middle of the year; its previous guidance was “early” 2015. Comcast Executive Vice President David Cohen said recent regulatory delays, including the Federal Communications Commission hitting pause this month on its informal “shot clock” for completing the review, contributed to the company’s decision to revise the time frame. Comcast’s proposed \$45 billion takeover, which would unite the two largest U.S. cable companies and create a behemoth in broadband access and pay television, has been under intense scrutiny from regulators since it was announced more than 13 months ago.

The FCC has asked for large amounts of information from the merging parties and their competitors, resulting in millions of pages of documents for the agency to sift through as it weighs whether the deal is in the public interest. The merger will require approval from both the FCC and the Justice Department. One major cause of the delay has been a dispute between big TV channel owners and the FCC over the confidentiality of programmers’ contracts with Comcast and other pay-TV providers. AT&T Inc.’s \$49 billion deal for DirecTV has also faced delays in the review process due to this dispute, which is playing out in D.C. federal court.

Comcast has called the court case a “procedural matter” unrelated to the merits of its Time Warner Cable takeover. The FCC’s 180-day review, which would have expired at the end of March, was put on hold pending the court decision. As of mid-March, Comcast still hadn’t begun the process of negotiating with regulators over conditions for possible approval, The Wall Street Journal reported at the time. While AT&T has started those talks, it had yet to tackle major issues. — *Wall Street Journal*



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