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The top U.S. telecommunications regulator dismissed Verizon Communications Inc.'s defense of its policy of slowing speeds for some customers during periods of heavy traffic, saying he remains concerned that the purportedly technical practice has commercial motives.

Verizon announced in July that it could begin reducing its 4G wireless Internet speeds for its heaviest users when cell sites get congested. But Federal Communications Commission Chairman Tom Wheeler sent a harshly worded letter to the carrier late last month taking issue with the fact that the policy only applies to subscribers who have unlimited data plans. Verizon and rival AT&T Inc. stopped selling unlimited plans to new subscribers years ago in favor of alternatives that charge customers more as they use more data. Their aim is to cash in on rising demand for mobile Internet services like video, games and streaming music. "My concern in this instance is that it is moving from technology and engineering issues into business issues," he said at a news conference Friday. "Such as choosing between different subscribers based on your economic relationship with them." A Verizon spokesman declined to comment.



In its response last week to the FCC, Verizon said it needed a physical means to discourage use at certain times by customers on unlimited plans, because their plans don't provide any economic disincentives to heavy use. The policy, it said, is needed to maintain the quality of its network and it was reasonable to target unlimited users who used a "disproportionate amount of network resources and have an out-sized effect on the network." In the letter, Verizon said other carriers have similar policies that haven't drawn the same controversy. On Friday, an FCC spokesman said other wireless carriers also received letters with similar questions following the initial Verizon inquiry. "All the kids do it' was never something that worked with me when I was growing up and didn't work with my kids," Mr. Wheeler said Friday, dismissing the response as an attempt to "reframe the

issue." – *Wall Street Journal*; [more from Fox Business News](#)

Back in January, a federal court [struck down](#) the FCC's net-neutrality policy, leaving Obama administration officials looking for a new way to guarantee that all online content will be treated equally.

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A few months later, in April, FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler unveiled a possible alternative, which was quickly condemned by net-neutrality proponents. In May, he tried again with his so-called "fast lane" policy – no online content would be deemed less accessible based on service providers' corporate arrangements, but telecoms could charge some companies, such as Netflix, more to deliver their content faster.

For proponents of net neutrality, the fear has been that President Obama, a longtime ally, would break with his previous commitment. This week, he did the opposite, recommitting his administration to the same position the president has always held (via Joan McCarter). "One of the issues around net neutrality is whether you are creating different rates or charges for different content providers," Obama said at a business forum with African leaders. "That's the big controversy here. You have big, wealthy media companies who might be willing to pay more but then also charge more for more spectrum, more bandwidth on the Internet, so they can stream movies faster or what have you," he said.

"The position of my administration, as well as, I think, a lot of companies here is, you don't want to start getting a differentiation in how accessible the Internet is to various user," Obama added. "You want to leave it open so that the next Google or the next Facebook can succeed." Note, Obama did not specifically comment on the pending FCC plans, but his message wasn't exactly subtle – and it's exactly what net-neutrality supporters wanted to hear him say.

As for what's next, the *New York Times* recently **summarized** where things stand. [O]n Thursday, the commission voted 3 to 2 along party lines to consider two options. Under the first option, the F.C.C. would require cable and phone companies to provide their broadband subscribers a basic level of unfettered Internet service. But as long as that condition is met, telecom companies would also be able to charge businesses like Netflix fees to deliver their movies faster to consumers than others.

Under the second option, the commission would reclassify broadband as a telecommunications service, akin to a public utility. That would allow for more stringent regulation that could prevent companies like Verizon and Comcast from engaging in unreasonable and unjust discrimination. Many consumer advocates like Public Knowledge and legal scholars like Tim Wu of Columbia Law School have recommended this option all along. Supporters of net neutrality, of course, prefer the latter.

The public-comments phase of the process is ongoing and the FCC members will reconvene later this year to reevaluate the alternatives. – **MSNBC**

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Manjula Stokes has twice sworn off television, once throwing a set off her deck in a fit over an ex-husband's sports obsession. Now she's a devotee of programs like "Downton Abbey," "Mad Men," "Survivor" and "Masters of Sex." The teacher from Santa Cruz, California, illustrates a subtle change in society's attitude toward television. The medium is growing in stature, propelled by both art and technology. More worthy programs are available at a time when viewers are becoming more comfortable setting up their own schedules to watch. "I feel it's more like reading a good book," Stokes said. "The acting is better, the direction is better. I think it's more serious as an art form."

A CBS survey of 700 people in the U.S. with Internet and television connections last year found that 28 percent said they're watching more television than they did a year ago. Seventeen percent say they're watching less, with the remainder indicating their habits are unchanged. That may not seem like much, but there's a long history of people saying they are watching, or plan to watch, less TV - even as Nielsen measurements proved the opposite is true.

In other words, liking television is becoming more socially acceptable. "You can go to a sophisticated party in New York City now and people will be talking about television

programming, not the latest art film or the latest play," said David Poltrack, CBS' veteran chief researcher. "You can go to a bar in a lower socio-economic neighborhood and they'll be talking about television. They may be talking about different programs, but they'll be talking about television."

Now, for every award-winning drama there's a series about botched plastic surgeries, naked dating or Kardashians. More than one, truthfully. But the push among cable networks during the past decade to make their own original series has significantly increased the amount of quality programs.

For years, polls uncovered a certain shameful attitude toward watching television. When asked in 2000 how much time they spent watching TV the previous day, 84 percent of respondents told the Pew Research Center it was less than four hours. That didn't jibe with the Nielsen company's finding that the average American that year watched four hours, 15 minutes of television a day.

A Gallup poll in 1990 found 49 percent of people said they spent too much time watching television. Only 19 percent said they watched too little. Nine years ago when CBS began its annual survey, more people said they were cutting back on TV time. This year, Nielsen estimates the average American watches four hours, 50 minutes of TV a day. "I think the quality is better," said Yael Chanoff, a 25-year-old writer from San Francisco. She's a fan of smart comedies like NBC's "Parks & Recreation." Many older shows Chanoff has seen, even hits like "Friends," strike her as cliché-ridden.

Some better shows now have an attention to detail that reminds Stokes, who is 59, of work done by the MGM movie studio during the last century. Cory Phare, a 33-year-old academic conference director from Denver, said he grew up watching a lot of television but drifted away. The ability to binge on well-written dramas like "Breaking Bad," "The Americans" and "Dexter" through Netflix drew him back in. He just finished going back to watch the entire run of "The West Wing." "Even when I'm on a lunch break, I pull it up on my smartphone," he said. The days of needing to choose between two good programs airing at the same time are now gone. The downside for networks is that it's harder for less-established shows to catch on because some nights more people are watching DVR playback than any individual show on a network. — **Associated Press**



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