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Federal regulators are expected to vote this month to scrap the agency's 40-year-old rules preventing cable and satellite providers from showing NFL games that have been blacked out in their home markets due to low attendance. Federal Communications Commission Chairman Tom Wheeler wrote an [op-ed in USA Today](#) on Tuesday announcing a Sept. 30 vote on a proposal to scrap the agency's sports blackout rules.



Passed in 1975, the rules ban cable and satellite providers from carrying games blacked out on local broadcast television. The proposal is expected to pass, as advisers to two of the other four commissioners say they would support it. The measure would need three votes to pass. "The bottom line is the NFL no longer needs the government's help to remain viable. And we at the FCC shouldn't be complicit in preventing sports fans from watching their favorite teams on TV," Mr. Wheeler wrote. "It's time to sack the sports blackout rules for good."

The National Football League's blackout rule blocks local broadcast of games where fewer than 85% of seats have been sold 72 hours before kickoff, to encourage more fans to attend because they can't watch the game at home. Blackouts were once common but there were only two last year, in San Diego and Buffalo, both in December. The NFL and the

broadcasters have opposed scrapping the blackout rules, arguing they would only accelerate the migration of sports from free, over-the-air channels to pay-TV.

Pittsburgh Steelers Hall of Fame wide receiver Lynn Swann, who has been the face of the league's campaign to preserve the blackout rule, pointed to the over 16,000 fans who have petitioned the FCC to keep the rule in place. According to the NFL, 205 million unique fans watched a game last season and 17 million watched the average telecast. "These letters represent a growing chorus of fans calling on the Commission to maintain the current rules, which help to keep NFL games available to every viewer on free, broadcast television," Mr. Swann wrote to the FCC. "We hope that the FCC will put sports fans' interests above pay-TV special interests and keep the rules."

Joining the NFL in opposing the rule change are the AFL-CIO and the National Urban League. Local businesses often purchase blocks of tickets in the days leading up to the game to avoid blackouts, but Mr. Wheeler said they shouldn't have to take that step. The

"most egregious case," he said, involved the Green Bay Packers, who faced the threat of a blackout during last season's playoffs when the weather forecast called for a low of minus 15 degrees and a sellout looked uncertain. "Despite decades of unbelievable fan support and loyalty—Green Bay had sold out every regular season game since 1959—local Packer fans were effectively told that if more people didn't buy tickets to go freeze, the rest of the community wouldn't be able to watch the game on TV," Mr. Wheeler wrote.  
– *Wall Street Journal*

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Your Internet won't be any slower than usual on Wednesday, but it might look like it is.

Top sites on the Internet, including Netflix and Reddit, will be displaying a constant "loading" symbol -- [the so-called "loading pinwheel."](#) It's part of a protest called ["Internet Slowdown Day,"](#) a push against the U.S. government's support for so-called Internet fast lanes. The Federal Communications Commission in May proposed allowing broadband providers to charge companies like Amazon and Netflix for prioritized access to consumers. The proposal is now open for public comment and could be changed before a final vote to implement it.

As part of the Internet Slowdown Day protest, the websites will also include a prompt to contact your lawmakers about the FCC proposal. "It's always hard to explain complicated topics to a lot of people, and the FCC made it harder by trying to fool the public into thinking their proposal was real net neutrality, when it was actually what the cable and phone lobbyists always asked for," said organizer David Segal, executive director of civil liberties group Demand Progress and a former Rhode Island state representative.

Net neutrality refers to the principle that high-speed Internet providers should treat all types of Web content equally, which led to a set of rules the FCC approved in 2010, designed to keep the companies that hold the keys to the Web from playing favorites. Sites including Netflix, Reddit, Vimeo, Etsy, Upworthy and Digg plan to take part in this week's demonstration, which will last from midnight Wednesday to midnight Thursday.

Broadband Internet providers, many of them cable companies, argue that as businesses providing a service, they have a right to charge websites. Netflix accounts for around a third of data consumption online during peak hours, and Internet providers say the company should therefore help foot the bill for delivery. But those fees would be easier to absorb for the Web's biggest, and richest, sites, activists say. Smaller, less profitable sites would have a tough time competing.

Segal said altering the FCC plan is an uphill battle, but he's optimistic. "We can never ever underestimate the power of cable and phone companies in D.C., but we definitely have a shot of winning," he said. "We have the momentum and are building impressive support in the public, industry, and policymakers." – *CNN*



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