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In a broadside against federal regulators, GOP presidential hopeful Jeb Bush says he'd overturn the government's sweeping net neutrality rules that currently prohibit Internet providers from favoring some Web sites over others.



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Arguing that Washington is in the midst of a "regulatory crisis" spurred by President Obama and the Federal Communications Commission, Bush [said Tuesday](#) that, if elected to the White House, he'd "repeal or reform" a number of regulations, beginning with net neutrality.

The FCC approved strict net neutrality rules earlier this year in an effort to ensure that Internet providers don't slow down some Web sites or speed up others, particularly in exchange for money. Consumer advocates and some Web-based businesses said such a policy was necessary to ensure a level playing field. But Internet providers objected to the FCC's decision to regulate them using some of the same rules the agency uses to police legacy telephone service. They've sued the FCC in hopes of overturning the regulations.

Now Bush is signaling that no matter what happens with the court battle, he'd make it a priority to roll back the rules. Here's how it could happen: Under a Republican administration, the political balance at the FCC would tip from a 3-2 majority in favor of liberals to a 3-2 majority in favor of conservatives. That would allow Republicans to undo the actions of FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler, an Obama appointee.

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Bush could also put pressure on Congress to expedite [legislation on net neutrality](#) that would water down or eliminate the FCC's rules. With the GOP in control of both chambers and the White House, crafting a new net neutrality policy would be a lot easier than it is now. Republicans could propose a net neutrality bill that contains basic protections for consumers on the one hand but stops short of using what Bush called "antiquated 'common carrier' regulation" on the other.

Telecom policy analysts have long anticipated that a Republican president might try to take this step. But now one candidate has made it clear: The FCC's net neutrality policy would not survive a Bush administration. – *Washington Post*

Broadband Internet access is a "core utility" that people need in order to participate in modern society— just like electricity, running water, and sewers, the White House said on Tuesday. A [report](#) written by the Broadband Opportunity Council, a group created earlier this year by President Obama and co-chaired by the Secretaries of Commerce and Agriculture, says that even though broadband "has steadily shifted from an optional amenity to a core utility," millions of Americans still lack high-speed Internet access.

The report cites 2013 data indicating that about 51 million Americans, or about 16 percent of the population, cannot purchase broadband access at their homes. That number may have dropped by now, but the White House says the government needs to make a bigger push to expand broadband deployment, especially in rural areas and low-income communities.

There's no one federal agency responsible for promoting broadband, although a lot of funding comes from the Federal Communication Commission's (FCC) E-Rate program, which helps schools and libraries get access, and the larger [Universal Service Fund](#), which subsidizes Internet and phone access in remote and underserved parts of the country. The White House report says that altogether, federal programs to improve broadband access amount to about \$10 billion in spending per year – and that many of those programs are badly in need of modernization. Federal agencies have committed to putting the report's recommendations, including streamlining construction procedures and simplifying broadband permitting, into action within the next 18 months.

The idea that broadband access is a "core utility" has been gaining traction among policymakers in recent years, although it's far from a universally held view. In February the FCC voted to regulate Internet providers as "[common carriers](#)" similar to telephone companies, stating that Internet access is a public utility just like electricity or water. In June, however, FCC Commissioner Michael O'Rielly [argued](#) that "Internet access is not a necessity" and that it "doesn't even come close to the threshold to be considered a basic human right."

The FCC used to consider Internet service "high speed" if it could download data at a rate of at least four megabits per second (Mbps), and upload it at a rate of at least one Mbps. In January the FCC voted to [revise the definition](#) to at least 25 Mbps down, 3 Mbps up – enough speed for someone to stream videos from Youtube or Netflix, upload and download documents or photos, or connect to a work server. (The difference in speed is a little bit more than the difference between 3G and 4G LTE mobile networks.) Internet carriers can qualify for government funding when they build networks in rural areas as long as those networks are capable of delivering at least 10 Mbps down and 1 Mbps up. – *Christian Science Monitor*

The state budget mess is no surprise to anyone familiar with Pennsylvania politics.

You like movies? It's like the movies. Even good ones are predictable. Our show is the rerunning result of a system of governing long in practice. The Legislature, like

Congress, operates first in service to itself and second (if at all) to its citizens. The fight of the moment, Gov. Wolf vs. Republican leaders over taxes and spending and stopgap measures, is but the latest example.

Here's the plot, and why it's so humdrum. Partisans out of central casting fail to agree on a budget. A liberal Democrat wants to raise taxes to lift the state from its low ranking in job creation and end its worst-in-the-nation standing in education inequity. He was elected to bring change and progress to a place known for neither. Or he was elected solely because he was not Tom Corbett.

Rigid Republicans say new taxes on natural gas would cost jobs, and avow no appetite for any new taxes or increases in old ones. After all, lawmakers were elected or re-elected to keep tight reins on spending. Or they were elected or re-elected because nobody cares about their races; mostly foregone conclusions thanks to one-party places such as Philly and gerrymandered districts throughout the state. So the plot plays out.

This week, the GOP House is poised to pass a stopgap spending measure passed last week by the GOP Senate that reflects the budget passed in June but then vetoed by Wolf. The argument is with negotiations stalled, let's at least fund schools and social services until an agreement is reached. Wolf's response to what seems a sensible if temporary solution? "They're poking me in the eye," he said. "They want to see how far they can push me." So, he'll veto the bill because it doesn't address state problems, doesn't move the state forward. I doubt schools facing cutbacks, even closures or social service providers forced to borrow funds or curtail aid much care who pokes who; they just want funding state law provides. Some observations:

Core issues - new taxes, pension and liquor reform - are the same today as six months ago. Wolf's offer last week of some pension and booze changes could have been made six months ago. Pension and booze reforms, argued for a generation in the case of the latter, were unattainable the last four years under a GOP governor and a GOP Legislature. Every governor, Democrat and Republican, since the '70s raised taxes except for the only governor not re-elected, and he (Corbett) raised fuel taxes at the wholesale level for \$2.3 billion in road and bridge repairs. There'd be no budget impasse *ever* if we had a law saying lawmakers don't get paid unless they pass an agreed-to budget on time.

We don't have such a law because we don't have initiative and referendum, as nearly half the states do, to allow citizens a direct say in changing or making laws by popular vote. What we have is a political structure protecting incumbents with unlimited campaign giving, rigged districts and no term limits; partisanship and parochialism that often prevents progress; and a governing pattern of patchwork fixes that ensures recurrence of the same problems year after year.

What we have is a state that, according to a Columbia University study, "The Democratic Deficit in the States," historically ranks at the bottom of a scale measuring government response to issues rated most important by citizens. Our current clash isn't so much about Wolf or Republican leaders, even those possibly angling to replace him (I'm looking at you Jake Corman, Mike Turzai). It's about a culture of low expectations. Or, for film buffs, it's "Chinatown." – *Philadelphia Daily News*



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