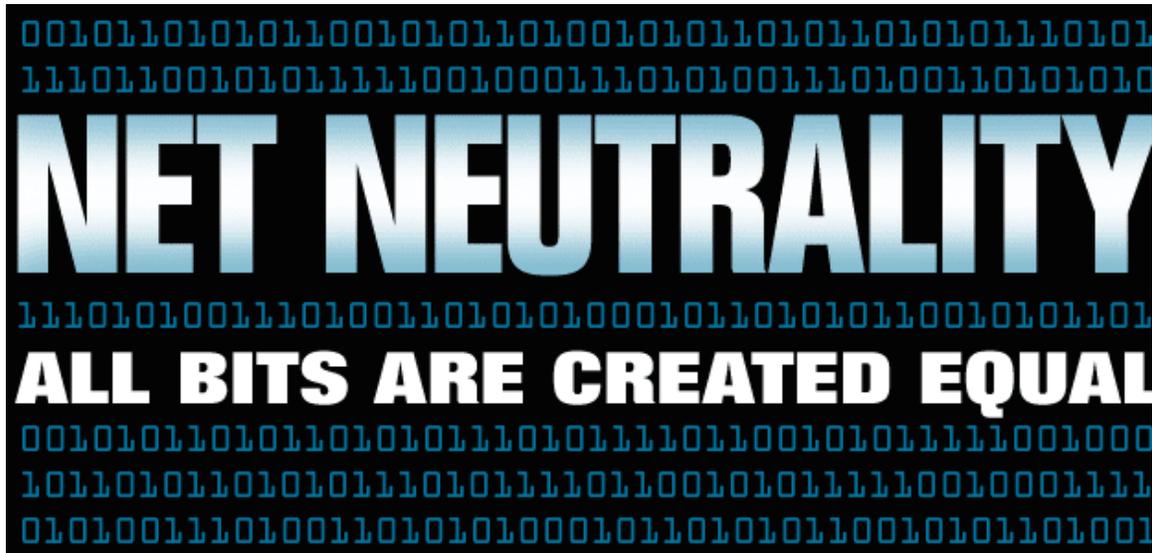


Senate addresses the net neutrality debate

By Pietro Lombardi – September 17



WASHINGTON – Congress is exploring whether new regulations on the Internet are needed to keep up with the times.

“My [web series](#) would have been impossible without net neutrality,” said actress Ruth Livier, who was a witness at the Senate Judiciary Committee’s hearing on net neutrality. That is why, she said, a clear set of rules is needed to preserve net neutrality. Yet, lawmakers and experts disagreed over the need for new rules on the Internet.

Fast lanes vs. net neutrality - The main battlefield is a set of rules proposed in May by the Federal Communications Commission, called “[Protecting and Promoting the Open Internet](#).”

“Allowing the Internet to become a two-tiered system of ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots,’ controlled by a small number of corporate gatekeepers, would destroy everything that has

made it one of the greatest innovations in human history,” said Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy, D-Vt.

The Chairman called for a meaningful action by the FCC to protect the Internet openness. “Meaningful rules would stop so-called ‘paid prioritization’ deals that would allow large corporations to drown out smaller competitors. Meaningful rules must go beyond the antitrust laws, which play an important role as a backstop but alone are not enough to promote and preserve free speech and innovation online,” Leahy said.

Leahy, along with Rep. Doris Matsui, D-Calif., proposed in June the [Online Competition and Consumer Choice Act](#), a piece of legislation directing the FCC to ban paid prioritization agreements online.

But some witnesses and lawmakers are skeptical about new regulations, and there are deep partisan divide over the issue.

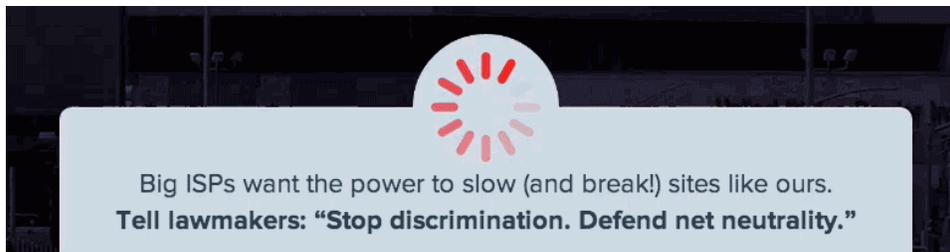
“Internet has been successful precisely because of the hands-off approach. The lack of government intervention has allowed competition going beyond any imagination,” Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Ia., said.

According to the advocates of net neutrality, the proposed FCC regulations would permit Internet service providers to create “fast lanes” that users can access by paying extra fees. In this way, those who pay get their content delivered in a preferential way, thus destroying net neutrality.

The bottom line is whether broadband providers should be able to speed up, slow down, block or otherwise manipulate the traffic that you request online or not.

Internet companies in favor of net neutrality - Silicon Valley backs net neutrality. Big Internet companies, including Facebook, Yahoo, LinkedIn and Twitter, oppose Internet providers' efforts to manipulate Internet traffic. Google joined this alliance last week, with a [message](#) to Internet activists.

“If Internet access providers can block some services and cut special deals that prioritize some companies' content over others, that would threaten the innovation that makes the Internet awesome,” the company wrote.



Netflix, Mozilla, Kickstarter, Etsy and WordPress showed their visitors a “loading” icon representing how looser restrictions on Internet service providers (ISPs) could result in slower Web services for some.

Wireless companies against net neutrality - On the other side are the large Internet providers, such as Verizon and AT&T, which oppose net neutrality for the wireless industry. These companies argue that the wireless industry is different from traditional broadband providers. The former use a limited resource, the airwaves that carry phone calls and data traffic. The latter, using means like fiber optic Internet, have a much greater capacity. As a consequence of such a limitation, wireless companies say, they might have to slow down the heaviest mobile data users.

Among the big wireless companies, only Comcast [declared itself in favor of net neutrality](#). Yet many experts say that this is just a public relations strategy, since Comcast is trying to get its merger with Time Warner Cable approved by federal regulators.

Americans don't like "Fast lanes - "The vast majority of Internet users seem to support the principle of net neutrality.

Monday was the deadline to comment the FCC's proposed net neutrality rules. That day, the agency released an updated count on the number of comments received, which was much higher than estimated. The public filed three million comments on the issue, more than 17,000 only during [the last 30 days](#). Last month's sprint is partly attributed to initiatives, such as the [Internet Slowdown Day](#), promoted by the supporters of stronger net neutrality rules.

This is by far a record number for an FCC proceeding.

"An overwhelming number of comments called on the FCC to enact meaningful rules that will protect consumers and preserve competition online. I agree, and the FCC should heed their call," Leahy said.

Earlier this month, the Sunlight Foundation, a government watchdog group, [analyzed the first 800,000 comments](#). The group estimated that less than 1 percent of comments were clearly opposed to net neutrality.

Yet, groups against stricter rules on net neutrality, such as American Commitment, gathered hundreds of thousands of signature "[To stop the Federal Takeover of the Internet](#)."

According to a recent poll, carried out by San Francisco-based [CALinnovates](#), two-thirds of Americans don't like the so-called "fast lanes".