



WHAT IS NET NEUTRALITY?

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Net Neutrality means that the government will—one day—control the internet.

“Wait a second!” I can you hear you saying. “That sounds bad.” But almost everyone you know says that Net Neutrality is *good*. Doesn’t “neutral” mean that no one is picking winners and losers, that everyone is equal?

Maybe according to the dictionary, but not according to the people behind the Net Neutrality movement. For them, “neutral” means the government regulates the internet like a public utility—and that means bureaucrats making key decisions about how the internet is run.

And that’s exactly what happened in 2015.

The Federal Communications Commission—or FCC—under the Obama Administration, came up with Net Neutrality rules and regulations and imposed them on consumers. No open hearings—they just did it.

Here’s what they said: Internet Service Providers, or ISPs—AT&T, Verizon, and other companies that lay the cable that goes to your house—are basically monopolies like your typical utility company. To prevent abuse of this position, Net Neutrality rules prohibited them from charging websites different prices no matter how much or how little bandwidth they use.

But this is exactly *the opposite* of what utilities are allowed to do. Electricity providers, for instance, are allowed to create pricing tiers—the more you use, the higher the price goes. If you use significantly more power than your neighbor, you pay more for the privilege.

“Net Neutrality” forces ISPs to charge all users the same price no matter how much data they send through the internet.

It’s a bad idea. Here’s why:

The internet consists of a physical infrastructure consisting of cable and phone lines that carry the data—we call it “bandwidth.” But of course, there’s a limit to how much data it can carry. In 2014, just two companies, Netflix and Google (which owns YouTube), consumed more than 52% of the total bandwidth of the entire internet. All those data-heavy movies and videos clog up the “pipe.”

To combat this massive resource drain, the ISPs floated the idea of creating “fast lanes”: bandwidth that would be dedicated to the big users in exchange for higher usage rates. You

use more, you pay more. Believe me, I'm no fan of ISPs, but shouldn't they be allowed to charge companies more if they use more bandwidth?

Furthermore, if companies like Google and Netflix have to pay higher prices for more bandwidth, they'll be motivated to find new ways to push more data through the "pipe." And creative startups would no doubt see a great business opportunity to do the same thing.

End result: More efficient, faster internet. Consumers win.

The big bandwidth users didn't see it this way. Instead, they lobbied for the new rules to prevent the ISPs from charging them differently than anyone else. Naturally, they want to pay as little as they can for bandwidth. So, they mounted a big PR campaign to convince the public to back the new regulations. And it worked. How could it fail with a name like "Net Neutrality"?

They argued that without regulations, a very small number of companies—the ISPs—would wield enormous censorship powers. Our free speech would be in jeopardy.

Ironically, the only companies that have been censoring content are many of the same ones that want Net Neutrality: Google, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter—the big users. Companies that, coincidentally, had a very close relationship with the Obama Administration.

YouTube's parent, Google, had more than 427 meetings at the Obama White House during his presidency—a rate of more than one per week. All those visits apparently paid off. Following decades of exploding internet growth, the government suddenly interjected itself with a bunch of new rules to stop a non-existent threat.

Those rules were rescinded in 2018 when the FCC rolled back the Obama-era regulation under the principle that innovation would be much more likely to happen if the government got out of the way. In other words, the FCC returned the internet to its pre-2015, pre-Net Neutrality state.

Sounds like common sense, right? Just leave the internet alone and let tech do its thing.

Unfair or bad-faith practices by ISPs, should they occur, can be addressed by existing anti-trust laws—as they always have. But all that followed the rollback decision was... hysteria. "Taking away #NetNeutrality is the Authoritarian dream," actor Mark Ruffalo intoned. Authoritarianism used to be when the government forced its will on the people. Now, according to Hollywood activists, it's when it doesn't!

Or, let's put it another way: if you want the current—or any other—administration to control the internet, you're for Net Neutrality. If you want the internet to remain free of government meddling, you're against it.

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