

“Net Neutrality”: Internet Freedom without Gatekeepers

Implications of the FCC Ruling

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On December 21, 2010 FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski gave AT&T a decision that was gift-wrapped for the holiday season. By a [3-to-2 vote](#), the FCC passed a rule that, in the chairman’s words, “protects Internet freedom.”

If only that were true.

After a [year of promises](#) to deliver on [President Obama’s pledge](#) to protect Net Neutrality, this chairman has pushed through a rule that favors the very industry his FCC is supposed to regulate, leaving Internet users with few protections and putting the future of the open Internet in peril.

The chairman chose to ignore the voices of more than [2 million people](#) who have urged Washington to support real and lasting Net Neutrality protections. His rule, for the first time in history, allows discrimination over the mobile Internet, paving the way for widespread industry abuses.

Now, the chairman is trying to [spin the media](#) that this toothless decision is a win for Obama and for Internet users. Free Press and our allies are not going to let him get away with that.

The FCC rule doesn’t do enough to stop the phone and cable companies from dividing the Internet into fast and slow lanes. It doesn’t stop them from [splitting the Internet into two](#) — one Internet for those who can pay to access special sites and services, and another neglected network for the rest of us.

The rule fails miserably to protect wireless users from discrimination, a prospect that’s especially troubling for African American and Latino communities who [increasingly access the Internet](#) via mobile devices.

Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.) [underscored this point](#). “Although the new rules bar fixed broadband Internet providers from ‘unreasonable discrimination’ against Web traffic,” she said on Wednesday. “They exempt mobile broadband providers — leaving millions without critical consumer protections and leading to a fractured Internet.”

The FCC vote is a textbook example of industry capture of a federal agency. Chairman Genachowski gave AT&T veto power over this rule. What he’s now characterizing as a “reasonable compromise” looks, to anyone who compares his order to his earlier promises, as a near total capitulation to industry.

By failing to protect the open Internet, Genachowski has put at risk one of the essential needs of any healthy democracy: our right to freely access information, engage in political discourse and govern ourselves.

We'd be lying if we didn't tell you that this vote was a major setback. But this bad rule is not the end of the story. Free Press and our many allies are going to [keep fighting](#) to secure your right to an Internet without gatekeepers.

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