

Net Neutrality Killed as FCC ‘Hands Keys to Internet to Handful of Multi-Billion Dollar Corporations’

"The fight to save net neutrality does not end today. This agency does not have, the final word. Thank goodness."

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Featured image: FCC commissioners Jessica Rosenworcel and Mignon Clyburn joined protesters outside the panel's headquarters on Thursday before issuing a dissent to Republican chair Ajit Pai's proposal to end net neutrality protections. The repeal was passed with a 3-2 vote. (Source: Free Press/Flickr/cc)

The nonpartisan First Amendment advocacy group Free Press vowed to take the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to court Thursday after the Republican-controlled panel moved to gut net neutrality protections that prohibit internet service providers (ISPs) from charging for and discriminating against content, in a 3-2 vote along party lines.

The FCC just voted to repeal [#NetNeutrality](#) but the fight is NOT over. Tell Congress to use a "resolution of disapproval" to overturn the FCC's vote: <https://t.co/GU5lfEZOFr>

— Free Press (@freepress) [December 14, 2017](#)

The ACLU released a [statement](#) calling the “misguided” decision “a radical departure that risks erosion of the biggest free speech platform the world has ever known.”

“Today’s loss means that telecommunications companies will start intruding more on how people use the internet. Internet service providers will become much more aggressive in their efforts to make money off their role as online gatekeepers,” said Jay Stanley, senior policy analyst for the group.

Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) also denounced the ruling:

Once again, the Trump administration has sided with big money and against the interests of the American people. The FCC’s vote to end net neutrality is an egregious attack on our democracy. With this decision the internet and its free exchange of information as we have come to know it will cease to exist. The end of net neutrality protections means that the internet will be for sale to the highest bidder, instead of everyone having the same access regardless of whether they are rich or poor, a big corporation or small business, a multimedia conglomerate or a small online publication. At a time when our democratic institutions are already in peril, we must do everything we can to stop this decision from taking effect.

Free Press and their many allies rallied outside the FCC headquarters in Washington, D.C. as the five commissioners prepared to vote on FCC chair Ajit Pai's proposal to roll back the Obama-era protections. The protest represented the final push to stop the vote in its tracks, following hundreds of [demonstrations](#) outside Verizon stores across the country last week, Fight for the Future's "[Break the Internet](#)" action earlier this week, and thousands of calls to members of Congress.

The two Democratic commissioners on the panel, Mignon Clyburn and Jessica Rosenworcel, met with protesters outside and issued powerful dissents ahead of the vote, with Clyburn noting,

"The fight to save net neutrality does not end today. This agency does not have, the final word. Thank goodness."

In addition to Free Press's plan to sue the FCC, the group urged supporters to push Congress to nullify Pai's plan using the [Congressional Review Act](#) (CRA), which allows representatives and senators to review new regulations and overrule them by passing a joint resolution.

Forty [senators](#), including one [Republican](#), have voiced opposition to the net neutrality rollback, while a handful of Republican representatives have said they disagree with Pai's plan. But the loudest opposition so far has come from the public and groups like Free Press and Fight for the Future.

"Why are we witnessing such an unprecedented groundswell of public support" for net neutrality, asked Clyburn in her dissent. "Because the public can plainly see a soon-to-be-toothless FCC is handing the keys to the Internet to a handful of multi-billion dollar corporations."

With the vote, ISPs like Verizon—Pai's [former employer](#)—will no longer be prohibited from blocking or slowing down certain websites and content, and will be able to charge fees to web companies that can afford to pay them for access to an internet "fast lane," leaving smaller sites struggling to reach audiences.

Despite comments from millions of Americans who spoke out in favor of the protections, Pai did not mention the widespread opposition to net neutrality in his order to repeal the rules. Last week, he [refused](#) to release documents related to potentially fraudulent comments left on the FCC's public comment website.

"That speaks volumes about the direction the FCC is heading," said Clyburn. That speaks volumes about just who is being heard."

"I dissent from this rash decision to roll back net neutrality rules," added Rosenworcel. "I dissent from the corrupt process that has brought us to this point. And I dissent from the contempt this agency has shown our citizens in pursuing this path today."

Online, open internet defenders reacted to the ruling.

The Trump administration lets down internet-users worldwide by scrapping [#netneutrality](#) This decision is a historic mistake, we need a level playing field, more fair competition on the open internet, more protection of consumers and more freedom of speech online!

— Marietje Schaake (@MarietjeSchaake) [December 14, 2017](#)

FCC's [#NetNeutrality](#) hearing is being received well pic.twitter.com/4DmaasTgRY

— jordan yule log ☐ (@JordanUhl) [December 14, 2017](#)

There is no shortage of people who believe Washington is not listening to their concerns, their fears, their desires. Add the [@FCC](#) to the list.

Today's decision to roll back [#NetNeutrality](#) is wrong and shows enormous contempt for public opinion.

I dissent.

— Jessica Rosenworcel (@JRosenworcel) [December 14, 2017](#)

BREAKING: The FCC just voted to gut all existing [#NetNeutrality](#) protections, allowing ISPs to control what we see and do online with new fees, throttling, and censorship. BUT THIS IS NOT OVER. We can overturn the FCC's decision in Congress. Here's how: <https://t.co/xSJHbLq2Wn>

— Fight for the Future (@fightforthefttr) [December 14, 2017](#)

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