

Will Trump's Telecom Deregulation & NAFTA Talks Undermine Net Neutrality in Canada?

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Featured image: Karunanathan at net neutrality rally, May 2008 (Source: The Council of Canadians)

The renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) poses a threat to net neutrality in Canada.

The Toronto Star reports, "U.S. telecom regulators have confirmed plans to roll back Obama-era rules designed to protect net neutrality."

In response, Innovation Minister Navdeep Bains has commented,

"Canada will continue to stand for diversity and freedom of expression. Our government remains committed to the principles of net neutrality."

Let's hope so.

The loss of net neutrality would mean "a two-tiered system where certain content is favoured for paid subscribers, while other streams are blocked or slowed."

The Toronto Star news report cautions,

"John Lawford, executive director and general counsel for the Public Interest Advocacy Centre [says] major wireless carriers in Canada could seek a review of Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission net neutrality policies, arguing that harmonization with the U.S. to protect investment here is now warranted..."

OpenMedia has warned,

"Canada has some of the strongest pro-consumer net neutrality safeguards in the world, recently reinforced by the CRTC's landmark decision to ban telecom providers from engaging in discriminatory pricing practices. By contrast, the U.S. under Trump is moving to rapidly dismantle its own net neutrality safeguards, and the concern is that they'll use NAFTA to force Canada into line with an agenda that prioritizes the narrow interests of U.S. telecom giants over the broader interests of Canadian consumers."

They have additionally highlighted,

“Canada has strong Net Neutrality regulations that protect free expression and create the conditions innovators need to succeed. Under NAFTA, we should not accept any policies that would weaken these safeguards or prevent us from enforcing these rules.”

But it’s very likely that the regulatory ‘cooperation’ and ‘harmonization’ agenda built into NAFTA would do just that.

The Council of Canadians has long argued for net neutrality.

In May 2008, Council of Canadians campaigner Meera Karunanathan spoke at a net neutrality rally on Parliament Hill.

We believe the Internet should be a commons that prioritizes equitable access to information over commercialization. Given the growing number of media outlets in crisis, net neutrality is an increasingly essential principle for ensuring public participation in what can and must be a much more democratic media system.

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