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Add internet access to the list of issues that the Trump administration wants to handle differently.



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On Friday, [Politico](#), Bloomberg, and other news outlets quoted unnamed industry sources saying that President Trump has selected Ajit Pai to chair the Federal Communications Commission. No official announcement has come yet. But Mr. Pai, who previously served on the FCC's five-member board after stints at Verizon and the Justice Department, is a vocal critic of the agency's current "net neutrality" policy.

"Net neutrality, or an open Internet, is the concept that ISPs [internet service providers] should give consumers equal access to all legal content and applications. That means ISPs could not favor or block some content-makers or charge them to provide faster delivery of their content, in what are known as 'fast lanes.'" When The Christian Science Monitor's Cristina Maza [explained net neutrality](#) in February 2015, the FCC had just adopted the policy, with support from consumer groups, internet firms such as Google and Netflix, and the Obama administration.

But the move was opposed by Pai. The agency's decision amounted to "join[ing] together the 21st century Internet with 20th century legislation," he [told the pro-free market Heritage Foundation](#) last February. Pai was referring to the

fact that the FCC mandated net neutrality under the auspices of the 1934 Telecommunications Act, and that the web complexity far surpasses the telephone and telegraph networks of the 1930s. Today's disagreements on net neutrality reflect the Internet's wide range of stakeholders.

Supporters of the policy want ISPs, such as Comcast or Verizon, to serve as impartial gatekeepers to the Internet. This helps consumers, who can access the internet's full range of content for a flat monthly fee. It also benefits the likes of Facebook and Amazon – and the startup firms that hope to follow in their footsteps – who don't have to negotiate with ISPs or pay extra for faster speeds.

But some ISPs have shown an interest in what Pai calls "usage-based plans," tailoring rates based on visits to certain sites and use of certain services, such as video streaming or mapping. In 2010, [Wired reported that](#) "Pro-net neutrality groups have argued that the carriers will try to make more money by ... discriminating against content they compete with." Pai has seen things differently. When the FCC board voted to adopt net neutrality in 2015, he wrote [in a dissenting opinion](#) that,

"The more difficult the FCC makes the business case for deployment – and micromanaging everything from interconnection to service plans makes it difficult indeed – the less likely it is that broadband

providers big and small will connect Americans with digital opportunities. And neither big nor small providers will bring rural and poor Americans online.”

Some observers agree. In a [December article for MIT Technology Review](#), David Talbot focused on the 34 million Americans who still lack home broadband service. “Cutting red tape to help install fiber [optic lines] and then adopting flexible service models to facilitate competition could...finally help end the digital divide across the United States,” he wrote.

Expanding internet access and keeping ISPs from favoring certain types of content may not be irreconcilable goals. A recent report from the Pew Research Center found that the percentage of Americans with broadband at home [climbed after the FCC adopted net neutrality](#) in early 2015. Connection speeds are also [faster than ever](#). – *Christian Science Monitor*

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Outgoing U.S. Federal Communications Commission Chairman Tom Wheeler warned Republicans against dismantling the Obama administration’s landmark “net neutrality” protections that bar internet service providers from slowing consumer access to web content.

Wheeler, in an interview this week, repeatedly questioned why Republicans would institute new policies that he said would benefit major internet service providers such as Comcast Corp, AT&T Inc, Verizon Communications Inc and CenturyLink Inc at the expense of thousands of other companies and consumers. The FCC rules set in early 2015 prohibit broadband providers from giving or selling access to speedy internet, essentially a “fast lane” on the web’s information superhighway, to certain internet services over others.

“These are serious things,” said Wheeler, who steps down Friday as Republican Donald Trump replaces Democrat Barack Obama as president. “People have made business decisions based on the expectation of an open internet and to take that away in order to favor half a dozen companies just seems to be a shocking decision. “There are a half a dozen ISPs (internet service providers) and tens of thousands of companies and millions of consumers who would be affected.”

Republican FCC Commissioner Ajit Pai, who is expected to be named acting chairman by Trump as early as Friday, said in December he thought net neutrality’s days were numbered. He said the commission should take a “weed whacker” to unneeded rules. Wheeler, a former cable and wireless industry lobbyist, questioned why Republicans would abandon conservative economic principles “to favor a half dozen companies.” “I can certainly understand why the ISPs for their own corporate interests would want to have no oversight at all and they certainly are advocating that position right now,” he said.

Wheeler said companies already are flaunting the rules by offering free or sponsored data services for some products. He said in a letter earlier this month that AT&T and Verizon’s programs “present significant risks to consumers and competition.” The companies both defended the programs. Under Wheeler, the FCC in October decided to impose stricter privacy rules on ISPs than those imposed on websites like Facebook Inc, Alphabet Inc’s Google or Twitter Inc. The Republican-controlled FCC is also likely to overturn those rules.

Internet providers fear net neutrality rules make it harder to manage internet traffic and make investment in additional capacity less likely. The Republican-controlled Congress is also considering rewriting the net neutrality rules. Some critics and companies suggested Wheeler favored Google and other tech companies during his tenure. [nL1N1DI15Q] Wheeler disputed that and said the FCC did not have jurisdiction over websites.

Wheeler suffered some setbacks late in his term. The FCC did not approve his proposal to open the \$20 billion market for rented pay-TV set-top boxes. That measure would have dealt a big blow to cable companies and created an opening for firms such as Google and Apple Inc. Wheeler tweeted a farewell Friday morning: “Upon my FCC departure, I would like to sign off with 3 words of wisdom that guided me well: competition, competition, competition.” – *Reuters*

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Millennials are often portrayed as cord cutters, getting rid of their pay TV subscriptions in order to save money and making them more difficult to reach with traditional advertising. But there’s a significant subset of Millennials who aren’t cord cutters – they’re cord nevers, people who have never paid for a cable or satellite TV subscription in their adult lives. These people are more common than you might think. A recent Pew Research Center survey put them at 9 percent of the population.

For young Millennials, that share is even higher. A stunning 35 percent of adults 18-29 are cord nevers, says Kelly Scott Madison, a Chicago agency that recently published a [report delving into Millennials’ media habits](#). The agency argues it may be more important for media people to monitor

cord nevers than cord cutters. “This is the group to watch because their tolerance for limited access to new and mainstream TV inventory is high and their entertainment choices are driven by cost effectiveness and an on-demand approach to content,” says the report.

These people do still watch some television. They can view broadcast if they have an antennae. They subscribe to over-the-top services. And some piggyback on others’ subscriptions. “Many in this subgroup are still exposed to linear TV through shared living situations, either with friends or family,” says Elizabeth Kalmbach, vice president and group media director at the agency.

She also notes that Millennials overall consume more digital video than other demographics. So while they may not be watching “The Walking Dead” on AMC, they’re probably watching it via Amazon Prime. They’re also watching YouTube videos and content on Vice and Facebook Live. Buyers would be wise to track their other options, she says. “As the marketplace evolves with more over-the-top paywalls, cable and streaming partnerships and overall options, it will be particularly interesting to see how they adjust and which platforms they think are worthwhile investments,” Kalmbach says. – **Media Life**



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