

Digital Democracy vs. Corporate Dominance: R.I.P. Internet Neutrality?

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Global Research, January 16, 2014

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

Candidate Obama promised to “support the principle of network neutrality to preserve the benefits of open competition on the Internet.”

President Obama did woefully little to do so. He’s waged war on free expression. He targets whistleblowers and journalists. He wants constitutional rights abolished.

He’s been more lawless than any of his predecessors. Except while campaigning, he’s been largely silent on preserving Net Neutrality.

It’s the last frontier of press freedom. It permits free and open communications. America’s First Amendment is its most important. Without it all other rights are at risk.

Net Neutrality is digital freedom. Mandating it is vital. Unrestricted online access is the only way to stay informed. It’s a vital source for real information.

It’s free from state or corporate control. It’s been this way so far. Public interest groups want it preserved. Everyone has the right to demand it.

It’s too precious to lose. Giant telecom and cable companies want control. They want toll roads established. They want higher priced premium lanes.

They want unrestricted pricing power. They want license to steal. They want content restricted. They want the right to censor.

They want dissent crushed. They want independent thought eliminated. They want digital democracy destroyed.

Net Neutrality denies them. They spent enormous amounts contesting. They want total Internet control.

Achieving it assures stifled innovation, oligopoly dominance, compromised free access to real information, and digital democracy denouement.

Imagine today’s Internet resembling cable TV. Imagining providers have sole control over content. Imagine consumers having no say.

At stake is digital democracy v. corporate dominance. Media scholar/critic Robert McChesney calls Net Neutrality the “defining issue” of our time.

It’s a “critical juncture (window of opportunity) to create a communication system that will be a powerful impetus (for) a more egalitarian, humane, sustainable, and creative (self-

governing) society.”

It’s too precious to lose. It’s a battle that requires winning. On January 14, Free Press.net headlined “The Fight to Save Net Neutrality,” saying:

“(T)he US Court of Appeals (District of Columbia Circuit) struck down the Federal Communication Commission’s Open Internet Order.”

It balances corporate and consumer interests. It doesn’t go far enough. It needs improving. It includes provisions too important to lose.

Verizon sued to do so. Rules prohibit providers from slowing, blocking or prioritizing some content over others. Transparency is required. Digital First Amendment rights are protected.

FCC regulation imposed stricter regulations on wired Internet services than mobile ones. Verizon argued it had no legal authority to regulate providers under common carrier rules.

It omitted explaining its real agenda. It wants nothing interfering with bottom line interests. It wants unrestricted online control. It wants digital democracy destroyed. It wants First Amendment rights abolished.

Free Press called Net Neutrality “dead (for now.)” The battle is far from over. It won’t be easy going forward.

Columbia Circuit judges [ruled unanimously](#) for Verizon. FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler may appeal.

“I am committed to maintaining our networks as engines for economic growth, test beds for innovative services and products, and channels for all forms of speech protected by the First Amendment,” he said.

“We will consider all available options, including those for appeal, to ensure that these networks on which the Internet depends continue to provide a free and open platform for innovation and expression, and operate in the interest of all Americans,” he added.

Columbia Circuit judges ruled against FCC authority to enforce rules it implemented under what Free Press calls its “complicated legal framework.”

According to Judge David Tatel:

“Even though the commission has general authority to regulate in this area, it may not impose requirements that contravene express statutory mandates.”

Regulations imposed are important. They don’t go far enough. They need to be toughened, not weakened or eliminated.

Columbia Circuit judges oppose regulations impeding maximum profits. Corporate interests matter more than consumer ones. Digital democracy is irrelevant. Free expression doesn’t matter.

Last September, Verizon’s lawyer argued that FCC regulations compromise the company’s free speech rights. Claiming it is ludicrous on its face.

Verizon wants unrestricted online control. It wants censorship rights. It wants consumer free speech denied.

It wants whatever it's against blocked. It wants sole power to decide. It wants consumers having no say.

Right-wing judges agreed. They did so disgracefully. Congressional action is required. Expect none without overwhelming public pressure.

Bipartisan complicity is deplorably anti-populist. Corporate interests alone matter. Obama is consistently hardline.

His policies belie his rhetoric. He says one thing. He does another. He's done it throughout his tenure. According to Free Press:

The Columbia Circuit "ruling means that just a few powerful phone and cable companies could control the Internet."

"Without Net Neutrality, ISPs will be able to devise new schemes to charge users more for access and services, making it harder for us to communicate online – and easier for companies to censor our speech."

Corporate gatekeepers will control "where you go and what you see."

Verizon, AT&T, Comcast and Time Warner Cable "will be able to block content and speech they don't like, reject apps that compete with their own offerings, and prioritize Web traffic..."

They'll be able to "reserv(e) the fastest loading speeds for the highest bidders (while) sticking everyone else with the slowest."

Doing so prohibits free and open communications. Censorship will become policy. Net Neutrality is too important to lose.

Free Press president and CEO Craig Aaron issued a statement, saying:

Tuesday's "ruling means that Internet users will be pitted against the biggest phone and cable companies – and in the absence of any oversight, these companies can now block and discriminate against their customers' communications at will."

"Without prompt corrective action by the (FCC) to reclassify broadband, this awful ruling will serve as a sorry memorial to the corporate abrogation of free speech."

Center for Media Justice director Amalia Deloney called Tuesday's ruling a possible "end of the Internet as we know it. For freedom's sake, we can't let this happen."

"The path forward is clear: The FCC can and must reassert its authority over this essential communications infrastructure and protect the millions of Internet users now left in the cold."

On Tuesday, a White House statement pledged support for "a free and open Internet." Obama did so years ago duplicitously.

Throughout his tenure, he waged war on freedom. He wants First Amendment rights compromised. The White House statement rings hollow, saying:

"The President remains committed to an open Internet, where consumers are free to choose the websites they want to visit and the online services they want to use, and where online innovators are allowed to compete on a level playing field based on the quality of their products."

Hopefully the battle for Net Neutrality is far from over. Digital democracy depends on preserving it.

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