

# Save the Internet! Prevent Mega-corporations from Destroying Internet Freedom

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To ensure the Internet is open to all on an equal basis we must act now to prevent mega-corporations from destroying Internet Freedom

Update: Actions every day starting on Wednesday, May 7th, at noon and 5 pm. To Save The Internet, we are building a People's Firewall against the FCC's proposed rule that will create a 'pay to play' Internet by ending net neutrality. The FCC is located at 445 12th Street, SW, Washington, DC 20554.

If we act NOW, we can ensure a free, open and equal Internet for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. On Wednesday, May 15 the FCC will vote on a proposal to end net neutrality and impose class-based Internet discrimination, but we have the power to stop them.

To ensure the Internet we want, [we must take action today](#); and people need to plan to come to Washington, DC beginning next Wednesday to join in a series of escalating protests that will undermine the legitimacy of the FCC leadership and force them to pay attention to the public interest rather than the interests of mega-corporations.

Already more than a million people have written the FCC in favor of net neutrality and the Commissioners are receiving more than 100 calls per day from citizens. They know the public wants a free, open and equal Internet. Now we have to show them we will revolt if it is taken away from us.

The proposal by Obama appointee, Tom Wheeler, a long-time industry lobbyist and Internet profiteer, will put in place a pay-to-play Internet where the wealthiest will have superior service to the rest of us, where big corporations will have faster websites than independent sites and where free speech is stifled by money. The Internet has become the great democratizer of media where independent and social media have flourished and allowed people to create an alternative to the concentrated corporate media. We will not let Wheeler undermine media democratization and turn most of us into second-class Internet citizens.

This is an issue that affects all of us - Internet news sites like this one and other independent media, advocacy websites, community radio, social media, blogging sites and you, who are reading this article on the Internet. Democratized communication depends on the Internet being free and open to all on an equal basis. Wheeler's proposal will undermine open communication and free speech on the Internet.

The primary driving force for Wheeler's proposal is profit for a small group of massive monopoly corporations. Corporations like Comcast, Verizon and AT&T see the Internet as a

money machine as do Google, Netflix and YouTube, among others. They already make huge profits, profits so large that they can buy domination of government. [We need to act NOW to put the public interest first](#) and prevent the plutocrats from invading our Internet commons where we have been free to communicate and create.

The FCC is being Driven off Track

When President Obama ran for office, his position was the opposite of what is now being proposed by the FCC Chairman. In April 2008 during his presidential campaign, Barack Obama took the side of the people [saying](#):

“The most important thing we can probably do is to preserve the diversity that’s emerging through the Internet...something called net neutrality. I will take a backseat to no one in my commitment to network neutrality.”

[The New Yorker, in “Good-Bye Net Neutrality, Hello Discrimination,” points out](#) how at a 2008 Iowa forum Obama explained:

“What you’ve been seeing is some lobbying that says that the servers and the various portals through which you’re getting information over the Internet should be able to be gatekeepers and to charge different rates to different Web sites ... And that I think destroys one of the best things about the Internet—which is that there is this incredible equality there.”

Obama was right when he campaigned, but he has made the FCC into an [illegitimate plutocratic agency](#) that is doing the opposite of what he promised. In essence, he campaigned telling the people what they wanted to hear, but as the President, he has governed for the mega-corporations.

Every current member of the FCC was appointed by Obama and confirmed by the Democratic Party controlled senate. This is Obama’s FCC.

When President Obama appointed Thomas Wheeler as the Chair of the FCC, it was a signal that his administration was taking the free and open Internet into a tiered Internet that favors the wealthy. Many in the Internet freedom community expressed deep concerns about the appointment but were ignored by the Democratic-controlled Senate that confirmed Wheeler.

Wheeler represented the telecom industry in Washington, DC for decades in between stints where he was an investor who profited from the industry. From 1979 to 1984, Wheeler headed the National Cable Television Association, now the National Cable and Telecommunications Association. He worked in the telecom industry for 8 years where he became a millionaire, followed by taking over as head of the Cellular Telecommunications & Internet Association in 1992 until 2005.

Wheeler went on to become a major Obama fundraiser and bundler in 2008 and 2012. His biography page [on the FCC says](#): “He is the only person to be selected to both the Cable Television Hall of Fame and The Wireless Hall of Fame, a fact, as President Obama joked, that made him ‘The Bo Jackson of Telecom.’” Appointing Wheeler was akin to putting the industry in charge of the future of the Internet. His recent proposal is exactly what the

industry wants; and exactly what the people oppose.

The problems at the FCC run deeper than Wheeler; the agency is littered with industry lawyers, executives and lobbyists who have gone through the “pernicious corruption of the revolving door” as [Lee Fang describes in VICE](#). Fang writes:

“The FCC is stocked with staffers who have recently worked for Internet Service Providers (ISP) that stand to benefit tremendously from the defeat of net neutrality.”

Fang describes people who worked for Comcast, TDS Telecom, Verizon, AT&T, industry groups like the Wireless Association (CTIA), the National Cable and Telecommunications Association and the U.S. Telecom Association have been recently hired at the FCC. The executives, lawyers and lobbyists from these Internet corporations and associations have worked against net neutrality for years and now inside the Obama-FCC. The fox is definitely guarding the hen house. The people need to expose these foxes and delegitimize any action they take.

President Obama and the Democratic Party-controlled Senate which confirmed Wheeler and all the FCC Commissioners are to blame for the direction of the FCC. [Polls show](#) Obama’s popularity sinking and increased likelihood of the Democrats losing the Senate. If Wheeler’s proposal becomes law, it will be the death knell for Democratic hopes of keeping their Senate majority and also result in big losses in the House of Representatives. Obama’s legacy will include being the President who destroyed the free, open and equal Internet. Unless the Democrats join with the people and act now to stop the FCC, people will stay home or vote against them in the Fall. Obama could call Wheeler today and change the direction the FCC is going.

What Should Be Done?

[John Nichols writes in the Nation](#):

“A free and open Internet is essential to modern democracy. But that freedom and openness will be maintained only if Americans use their great democratic voice to demand it.”

It is up to us to prevent the further corporatization of the Internet and to keep it free, equal and open to all. It will take more than our voices, it will taking our bodies stopping the machine of corporatocracy. What are our demands?

1. Reject the proposal. This is the Obama FCC. Obama appointed three Democrats and two Republicans to the Commission, as required by law. The political apparatus of the Democratic Party needs to demand this proposal be rejected.
2. Reclassify broadband Internet access as a telecommunications service that can be regulated in the public interest. [Under President Bush the Internet was redefined](#) as an “information service” limiting the FCC’s ability to regulate in the public interest. This decision needs to be reversed so the FCC can properly regulate the Internet. [Wheeler opposes this but said](#) in response to opposition to his proposal that reclassification is on the

table.

3. Put in place net neutrality regulations. The Commission should act consistently with President Obama's campaign position – net neutrality. Acting opposite of what the people voted for [undermines the democratic legitimacy of government](#) on the critical issue Internet freedom.

Beyond these initial steps we need to do more to protect the Internet in the long-run. [Robert McChesney tells The Real News](#) that the Internet is controlled by a cartel: “We basically have three enormous companies–Verizon, Comcast, and AT&T–and a few other quasi-enormous companies that have more or less divvied up the market for internet service...” The result is the United States, formerly a leader in the Internet, now provides expensive, poor service to Americans:

“By setting up this cartel, what we have in America today is Americans pay much more to get cell phone service, much more to get wireline broadband than people do in most other countries, and we get a much lower service. It's one of the cruel ironies that here we are in the United States, the country that invented the Internet, the country that in 1999 or 2000 was light years ahead of most places in the world. We were at the top of the list in the quality of Internet service and the percent of the population that was online. And we've fallen now, so that depending on the ranking, we rank between 15 and 30, sometimes 35 or 40, on rankings from what you pay, the speed, the quality of the service. And it's not an accident. This is what happened when very powerful corporations own the government, when they basically have the regulators in their pocket.”

This cartel needs to be broken up; a handful of mega-corporations should not control the communications of hundreds of millions of people. [The New York Times editorial board wrote recently](#) that these monopoly-corporations exist in large part because of public support, “the viability of those networks are based on decades of public investments in the Internet, the companies' use of public rights of way and, in the case of some companies, a long government-sanctioned monopoly over telephone service.” They need to be required to act in the public interest first.

By reclassifying the Internet as a telecommunications service, the FCC will be able to regulate it in the public interest. We would like to take it farther and make the Internet a public service by law. Taxpayers developed the technology that has become central to communication in 2014. By allowing corporate domination of this public utility, we are giving them power to minimize our Freedom of Speech in the Internet age.

[Chris Ziegler writing for the Verge](#) hones in on this:

“The government is too afraid to say it, but the internet is a utility. The data that flows to your home is just like water and electricity: it's not a luxury or an option in 2014. The FCC's original Open Internet rules failed precisely because it was too timid to say that out loud and instead erected rules on a sketchy legal sinkhole that was destined to fail.”

In fact there [are community broadband networks](#) already that treat the Internet as a public utility rather than a private profit center. This approach puts the public interest first and

recognizes the Internet as a public good.

[MuniNetworks](#) has a map showing progress being made toward the Internet as a public utility that includes nearly 400 communities:

- 89 communities with a publicly owned FTTH network reaching most or all of the community.
- 74 communities with a publicly owned cable network reaching most or all of the community.
- Over 180 communities with some publicly owned fiber service available to parts of the community.
- Over 40 communities in 13 states with a publicly owned network offering at least 1 Gigabit services

There is a growing movement to municipalize ownership over the things that are public goods such as energy, water and the Internet. This needs to be made into national Internet policy.

Now Is the Time

[Josh Levy a campaign director at Free Press writes](#) that this is the time to launch the biggest campaign the FCC has ever seen. He describes how the Internet has become central to our lives:

“... the Internet is an amazing thing. It’s a crucial driver of [free speech](#), innovation, education, economic growth, creativity and so much more. We wake up with it in the morning. We’re on it all day long. And it’s the last place we go before we finally say good night.”

Now that we know the FCC Chair is doing the work of his Internet industry colleagues, the people have to step up and become a firewall against the virus Wheeler wants to release that will threaten to infect the Internet with corporatism and the wealth-based discrimination that it creates.

People are activated, sending hundreds of thousands of emails and petitions and making thousands of phone calls to the FCC. We’ve begun to see [elected officials criticizing](#) Wheeler’s proposal. The media, like The New York Times, is opposing the proposal. The Times wrote: “The Internet has been a boon to the economy and to free speech because it is not divided into tiers and is open to everybody in the same way.”

We have to keep building the opposition to an escalating crescendo for the Commission’s May 15 vote. This is a defining moment for communication and Freedom of Speech in the 21st Century. It is up to each of us – reading this on the Internet right now – to get involved. As long-time Internet freedom advocate [Harold Feld wrote](#):

“There’s a lesson here. YOU CAN’T OUTSOURCE CITIZENSHIP. You can’t let ‘the tech companies’ or even ‘the consumer advocates’ or anyone speak for you. Citizenship carries responsibilities that go beyond the ritual of voting every two

years. But when citizens wake up and speak up, and speak to each other, they find — to their surprise — they are strong. They find they have power.”

We have the power to create the Internet we want for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Let’s embrace our power. This is our opportunity.

*If you want to get involved in escalating actions in Washington, DC beginning Wednesday, May 7<sup>th</sup> contact us at [info@PopularResistance.org](mailto:info@PopularResistance.org).*

*This article is produced by [Popular Resistance](#) in conjunction with [AlterNet](#). It is a weekly review of the activities of the resistance movement. [Sign up for the daily news digest of Popular Resistance, here.](#)*

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