

URGENT: Free Speech and a Free Internet are Under Attack

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Internet Defenders Urge Mass Revolt to Fight FCC's "Scorched-Earth" Attack on Net Neutrality

"The FCC under Pai is handing over the internet to a few humongous gatekeepers who see the rest of us as products to be delivered to advertisers, not as citizens needing communications that serve democracy's needs."

Open internet advocates have [warned](#) that "we're running out of time" to save the web from [corporate control](#) and called on Americans to make their representatives' phones "ring off the hook" Tuesday after FCC chairman Ajit Pai unveiled his long-awaited [plan](#) to scrap net neutrality that critics slammed as "naked corporatism" designed to give a major gift to the telecom industry at the expense of the public.

"The reckless wrecking ball strikes again," former FCC commissioner and current special adviser at Common Cause Michael Copps said in a statement. "FCC Chairman Ajit Pai's scorched-earth plan for net neutrality displays callous disregard for both process and substance. The chairman's plan to do away with net neutrality will be a disaster for consumers and yet another handout for big business."

Matt Wood, policy director at Free Press, said Pai's plan "makes no sense" for a variety of key reasons.

"It ignores the will of people from across the political spectrum who overwhelmingly support these protections. It ignores the law and the courts, which have repeatedly upheld the 2015 Title II rules. And it ignores the vibrancy of the internet marketplace following adoption of that 2015 order, with incontrovertible economic data showing that both investment in networks and online innovation are flourishing under the very same rules Pai wants to destroy," Wood said.

Framed by Pai and its corporate backers as a push to "restore internet freedom," the plan outlined Tuesday would do precisely the opposite, say critics, by allowing massive telecom companies to block or throttle online content and charge more for services.

"Internet rights are civil rights," Jay Stanley, a senior policy analyst at the American Civil Liberties Union, declared in a [statement](#) on Tuesday. "Gutting net neutrality will have a devastating effect on free speech online. Without it, gateway corporations like Comcast, Verizon, and AT&T will have too much power to mess with the free flow of information."

The praise Pai's plan quickly attracted from major corporations appeared to vindicate critics' concerns that the Republican-controlled FCC is working to deliver a massive "handout to big business." In a statement on Tuesday, Verizon said it is "very encouraged" by the proposed return to "light-touch" regulation—disregarding the fact that opinion polls have clearly and [consistently shown](#) that American consumers favor net neutrality.

But if Pai's announcement on Tuesday is any evidence, he gives public opinion very little weight. As Devin Coldewey of Tech Crunch [notes](#), Pai "made no mention of the inconvenient and embarrassing

fact that his proposal had attracted historic attention, garnering over 22 million comments—the majority of which opposed it."

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— Michael Copps, Common Cause

If Pai's proposals are approved—the FCC is expected to vote on December 14—companies like Verizon and AT&T will be given extremely broad leeway to charge consumers more for internet access, products, and services while facing less oversight.

In addition to reversing the classification of the internet as a public utility, Pai's plan would strip the FCC of enforcement power and effectively rely on what critics have derided as an "[honor system](#)," under which [corporations will be responsible](#) for transparently reporting their practices.

"Relying more heavily on Internet providers' own promises on net neutrality is a departure from the current rules, which lay out clear, federal bans against selectively blocking or slowing websites, as well as speeding up websites that agree to pay the providers a fee," observes the Washington Post's Brian Fung.

Copps of Common Cause [concluded](#) that contrary to Pai's lofty rhetoric about "restoring internet freedom," the newly unveiled proposals would spell the end of the open internet.

"There can be no truly open internet without net neutrality," Copps said in a statement on Tuesday. "To believe otherwise is to be captive to special interest power brokers or to an old and discredited ideology that thinks monopoly and not government oversight best serves the nation. In this case, I think it's both. The FCC under Pai is handing over the internet to a few humongous gatekeepers who see the rest of us as products to be delivered to advertisers, not as citizens needing communications that serve democracy's needs."

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