



TALKING POINTS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF “NET NEUTRALITY”

Background: “Net neutrality” is the term used to describe the concept of keeping the Internet open to all lawful content, information, applications, and equipment. There is increasing concern that the owners of the local broadband connections (usually either the cable or telephone company) may block or discriminate against certain Internet users or applications in order to give an advantage to their own services. While the owners of the local network have a legitimate right to manage traffic on their network to prevent congestion, viruses, and so forth, they should not be able to block or degrade traffic based on the identity of the user or the type of application solely to favor their interests.

Legislation is under review in Congress that would ensure that the Internet remains open. The following are some proposed points to make to legislators and their staff as Congress considers this issue.

Message Points

1. Net neutrality is fundamentally important to allowing universities fulfill their educational mission. Universities’ goal is to deliver high-quality multimedia instructional material to as many students as possible, including off-campus students and those in rural areas. The widespread availability of open, affordable broadband communications makes distance learning more accessible and effective.
2. Universities’ Internet research laboratories could be undermined if the Internet is not open to innovation and experimentation. Universities are developing next-generation Internet technologies that will drive the Internet economy. If Internet service providers are allowed to inhibit or degrade these research activities, the United States could lose its leadership role in the creation of Internet-based technologies.
3. The rapid innovation that brought us e-mail, the World Wide Web, interactive online services, and e-commerce depends on an Internet that provides reliable and effective transport for all types of traffic. This critical innovation at the edges of the network will be stifled if network providers are allowed to block or degrade traffic in the middle.
4. The Internet was designed to be open and available to everyone, which is why it has been so powerful and successful. The Internet was not intended to be under the control of any one party; its value is that it can facilitate

communications and the free flow of information around the world. "Tollbooths and gatekeepers are the exact opposite of what the Internet is all about," said Michael J. Copps, a Democratic commissioner at the [Federal Communications Commission](#). "Down that route consumers can count on paying more and getting less — less content, fewer services and reduced innovation."

5. Cable and telephone companies have the ability and incentive to skew Internet use toward their own services. They are supposed to be transparent carriers of broadband services, as noted by Vint Cerf in a letter to Congressmen Joe Barton and John Dingell on November 8, 2005: "Telephone companies cannot tell consumers who they can call; network operators should not dictate what people can do online." Recently, however,
 - a. a telephone company blocked its broadband customers from using VoIP telephone service because it could take revenue away from the company's phone services;
 - b. a cable company ordered consumers working from home to stop using their broadband connection to log into their employer's virtual private network and tried to sell them a higher-priced alternative service;
 - c. an Internet provider in Canada blocked access to a Web site run by the labor union involved in a dispute with the ISP; and
 - d. the CEO of SBC told *Business Week* that companies such as Google, Yahoo, and Vonage would not be permitted to connect to SBC broadband customers without additional compensation to SBC.
6. Cable and telephone companies have a legitimate right to manage their networks to prevent congestion, viruses, or other illegal uses. This right to manage the network, however, should be narrow and should not allow the cable and phone companies to pick and choose among certain users or applications.
7. Congress should adopt a strong principle that ensures that the Internet is open to all lawful uses and should establish strong penalties to enforce this principle.