

June 16, 2015

The Honorable Harold Rogers
Chairman
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey
Ranking Member
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Appropriations

We, the undersigned public interest groups, civil rights and social justice organizations, tech companies, startups, innovators and investors call on you to remove from the Financial Services appropriations bill Sections 628-630 of that legislation, which threaten implementation of the Federal Communications Commission's Open Internet Order. The FCC's Feb. 26 decision to adopt strong Net Neutrality rules came out of a year-long rulemaking process that garnered unprecedented public participation and support. We are deeply concerned that the FCC's public process would be undermined by these appropriations measures, threatening our First Amendment rights and the Internet economy.

The Internet has quickly become one of our nation's most successful platforms for innovation, economic growth, political participation, and job creation — precisely because the principle of Net Neutrality has been part of the Internet's architecture since its inception. With this principle in place, people and communities historically ignored or underserved by the media can organize and speak in their own voices online. And innovators and small business can bring services to market without seeking permission from or paying extra tolls to broadband providers.

This foundational principle is under attack by a handful of monopoly-minded cable, telephone, and wireless providers that provide us with broadband Internet access. These providers have clearly shown that absent Net Neutrality rules, they would prioritize their own interests and set the terms for what individual users and Internet companies can see, say, and create online.¹ To ensure that the Internet remains a free and open platform, the FCC adopted its latest Net Neutrality principles within the agency's authority and on the basis of existing federal law.

The FCC's rules protect consumers and businesses alike against unreasonable and restrictive gatekeeping practices by broadband Internet access service providers. The Communications Act requires the FCC to prevent such harmful practices, emphasizing the duty of such access providers to offer service on nondiscriminatory terms. The Open Internet Order places these fundamental protections for our dynamic Internet economy and online marketplace of ideas back on a solid legal foundation.

The FCC received a record number of public comments urging the agency to protect Net Neutrality in this way. Comments from a wide variety of interests—including venture capitalists, entrepreneurs, educators, and activists—all explained the fundamental importance of the open Internet to their daily lives. This isn't a liberal or conservative issue. In a recent poll, 81% of likely 2016 voters, including both Democrats and Republicans, agreed with the principles of Net Neutrality.¹¹

In short, the FCC's Net Neutrality proceeding was one of the most open and robust policy debates in the agency's history. Ultimately the agency came down on the right side of this debate, crafting rules to protect individual Internet users and businesses across the country. The agency moved to restore the law and protect Internet users' rights—the rights to free speech and communications that your constituents need and demand.

We ask that you remove in their entirety Sections 628-630 of the Financial Services appropriations bill currently under consideration by your committee. These sections would gut the Open Internet Order, leaving the American people and economy vulnerable to blocking, discrimination, and other unreasonable practices of gatekeeper broadband providers. These measures, buried in a spending bill that is 150 pages long, constitute a direct rebuke to the millions of people that asked for strong Net Neutrality rules. By eliminating the FCC's ability to protect Net Neutrality, this appropriations bill would have a chilling effect on our First Amendment rights and our economy.

We urge this committee not to undermine the work of the FCC and the will of the American people. We request that you remove this language and not vote to include these sections in the Appropriations bill before you.

Respectfully,

18MillionRising
Access
American Civil Liberties Union
American Library Association
Appalshop
Association of Free Community Papers
Association of Research Libraries
Center for Media Justice
ColorOfChange.org
Common Cause
Community Papers of Florida
Community Papers of Michigan
Community Papers of Ohio and West Virginia
Consumers Union
CREDO Mobile
Daily Kos
Demand Progress
Electronic Frontier Foundation
Esperanza Peace and Justice Center
Etsy
Faithful Internet
Fight for the Future
Free Community Papers of New England
Free Community Papers of New York

Free Press Action Fund
Future of Music Coalition
Generation Justice
Global Action Project
Greenlining Institute
Institute for Intellectual Property and Social Justice
Just Foreign Policy
Keen IO
Line Break Media
Martinez Street Women's Center
Media Action Center
Media Alliance
Media Action Grassroots Network
Media Mobilizing Project
Mid-Atlantic Community Papers Association
Midwest Free Community Papers
MoveOn.org Civic Action
National Hispanic Media Coalition
Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition
Open Technology Institute at New America
OpenMedia
Popular Resistance
Presente.org
Public Knowledge
RootsAction.org
Savvy System Designs
Southeastern Advertising Publishers' Association
Southwestern Association of Community Publications
Texas Community Newspaper Association
The Utility Reform Network (TURN)
Urbana Champaign Independent Media Center
Voices for Racial Justice
Waite House
Wisconsin Community Papers
Women Action & the Media (WAM!)
Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press
Women's Media Center
Working Narratives
Writers Guild of America, West
Writers Guild of America, EAST

cc: Members of the House Committee on Appropriations

ⁱ See, e.g., Michael Weinberg, "But for These Rules . . .," Public Knowledge (Sept. 10, 2013), <https://www.publicknowledge.org/news-blog/blogs/these-rules>; Timothy Karr, "Verizon's Plan to Break the Internet," Huffington Post (Sept. 18, 2013), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/timothy-karr/verizons-plan-to-break-th_b_3946907.html.

ⁱⁱ *Freedman Consulting, LLC*, Polling conducted March 30–April 2, 2015.