

reason. Our Republican colleagues, by trying to appease these very wealthy people—a small number of greedy people—are writing their political doom, in my opinion.

The longer this bill sits behind closed doors, the worse it is getting. It is not improving things for the middle class. It is making them worse. Instead of learning from their mistakes, instead of heeding one of the lessons of the election last night, Republicans are doubling down on helping the wealthy and powerful and doing nothing for, if not harming, the middle class.

In 2010 on the floor of the Senate, Leader MCCONNELL said:

We need to move in a new direction—a dramatically new direction. That is the message of Virginia. That is the message of New Jersey. That is the message of Massachusetts.

You could replace Massachusetts with Alabama and say the exact same thing today. In sum, on process, on policy, and on politics, pausing this tax bill and going back to the drawing board is the right thing for Republicans to do. I hope, for the sake of this country, they will do just that.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. CANTWELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NET NEUTRALITY

Ms. CANTWELL. Madam President, today we are closing in on a critical decision that will have a lasting impact on the innovation-driven economy of the United States. The Chairman of the FCC has decided to repeal a critical consumer protection known as net neutrality. This is a wrongheaded move. It is misguided. It is being driven by big cable interests that want to continue to gouge consumers and charge them more, making sure that consumers either pay or have their internet lines slowed down.

This decision turns the success of what has been an essential 21st-century innovation over to those in big corporations, instead of making sure that Main Street innovators continue to do what they do best. I don't think the American people want cable companies to be the gatekeeper on the internet. They want to have the FCC continue to play a role in making sure that an open internet is there for all, so that small businesses, entrepreneurs, and innovators can continue to build on the success of communicating with their consumers and their business partners without having artificially slowed-down lines.

Who would this impact if the FCC moves forward?

You could say that seniors would be impacted with regard to receiving their telehealth medicine and that students would be impacted in the slowing down

of their education. Families who access educational tools for their children could also see charges, and the open highway that has been so important in making sure that new internet businesses are started could be impacted.

The No. 1 reason we have to fight this decision—making sure that we do everything we can to stop the FCC from implementing this rule and giving consumers the protection of net neutrality—is that it will harm our internet economy. Last summer we had a townhall meeting about this, where I heard from many of my constituents. I then sent in many business cases to Chairman Pai so that he would understand why this impacts us so much.

Let's make sure that we understand what is happening. The FCC had rules that had prevented companies from throttling, or blocking, and it had paved the way for many great successes. In the United States, we have Fortune 500 companies and a tech industry that is responsible for 7 percent of our Nation's GDP and 6.9 million jobs in the United States of America.

Why would you change the rules now? Why would you leave after having made sure critical protections were in place and, instead, replace them with the ability for certain companies—cable, specifically—to wreak havoc on this economy?

Thirteen percent of Washington State's economy depends on a healthy internet sector. The internet economy for our State supports 250,000 jobs, and at a time when the Nation has not had enough wage growth, these tech jobs have been a bedrock for the middle class.

Chairman Pai is clearly not focused on the 250,000 jobs and the 13 percent of our State's economy. Just this past weekend, I and my colleague, Congresswoman DELBENE, met with many of these small businesses. Their message was loud and clear: Please stop Chairman Pai from ruining the internet by taking away key protections that make sure our businesses run successfully.

Chairman Pai is abdicating his role. He is abandoning the consumers whom he has sworn an oath to serve, and he is turning his back on innovators. He has really changed the direction for us and our innovation economy. I know that he thinks this is a light touch, but I guarantee you that it is a "no touch" regulation. What we need is to make sure that these companies do not artificially charge consumers, small businesses, and Main Street more for what they already are doing now and doing successfully. Obviously, an open internet rule and the rules that we are living under now have fueled an innovation economy. Every business plan of every startup relies on the company's ability to be able to contact its consumers.

With this much of our economy at stake, let's not continue to make mistakes. Let's continue to fight here in the Senate and make sure that we stop

Chairman Pai and the FCC from having the resources to implement this rule. It is so important now that we continue to fight for small businesses, for Main Street entrepreneurs, and for the innovation economy.

We deserve to have an open internet. As the small businesses and innovators just said to me this past weekend in Seattle, this is really like siding with the big companies and saying that they are going to make all of the decisions, that they are the ones that are going to be in control. They are not going to be for competition, and they are not going to be for this level of innovation. They are going to slow down what is one of the best parts of our economy.

I hope that our colleagues will join the fight and stop the FCC, in any manner possible, from implementing what is, literally, a very, very anti-competitive strategy and one that is very, very focused on big corporations, instead of the innovation economy of the future.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. MARKEY. Madam President, I thank all of my colleagues, led by Senator CANTWELL, for joining me on the floor this afternoon.

We are speaking on behalf of millions of our constituents and of the tens of millions of Americans who support a free and open internet. I am proud to come to the floor to discuss an issue of national importance to both our economy and our democracy—net neutrality.

Now, a lot of people have recently stopped and asked me: What exactly is net neutrality?

The technical answer is that network neutrality, or net neutrality, is the principle that internet service providers—you know their names: Verizon, AT&T, Charter, Comcast—cannot discriminate against content providers, against websites. They are the people to whom you pay by check each month and who make sure that you have broadband service. You know who they are. The simpler explanation is this: No one owns the internet. Everyone can use the internet. Anyone can improve the internet.

Yet that will not be the case if the Trump administration and Ajit Pai, the Chairman, and Republicans have their way. They want to get rid of the Federal Communications Commission's net neutrality rules so that the ISPs, the internet service providers, can indiscriminately charge more for internet fast lanes, slow down websites, block websites, make it harder—and, maybe, even impossible—for inventors, entrepreneurs, and small businesses—the lifeblood of the American economy—to connect to the internet.

That is why we are here this afternoon on the floor, and it is why supporters of a free and open internet are vigorously opposed to this politically craven attempt to weaken the principle of net neutrality that has allowed the internet to flourish.

Tomorrow the Federal Communications Commission is voting on a proposal that will cut at the very heart of a free and open internet. They are voting to roll back net neutrality protections and send a love letter to the big broadband companies that stand to make huge profits without these rules.

So what are Chairman Pai and his broadband buddies really trying to do?

The first thing they will do is to gut the rule against blocking. What does that mean? It means that an internet service provider could block any website it wants. That includes a website of a competing service or a website with a contrary political view—whatever they want.

Second, Chairman Pai would gut the rule against throttling. What does that mean? It means that the internet service provider could slow down any website it wants.

Third, Chairman Pai would gut the rule that bans paid prioritization. What does that mean? It means that the internet service provider could charge websites for an internet fast lane, meaning that those websites could load more quickly, while the websites that could not afford the internet's "E-ZPass" would be stuck on a gravel path and take more time to load, frustrating consumers with long buffering times.

Fourth, Chairman Pai would gut the forward-looking general conduct rule. What does that mean? The general conduct rule protects consumers from harms such as data caps and other discriminatory behavior that ISPs will think of in the coming months or years ahead.

Fifth, Chairman Pai would create an unregulated interconnection market. What does that mean? It means that the Federal Communications Commission would lose authority to oversee places at which ISPs connect to the internet and extract fees.

Finally, Chairman Pai wants to prevent States and localities from adopting their own net neutrality protections.

What will be the replacement for these enforceable net neutrality rules today? What will replace them? Absolutely nothing. Chairman Pai will leave it to the internet service providers to, simply, regulate themselves in this unpoliced internet "Wild West."

Chairman Pai claims that the Federal Trade Commission—not the Federal Communications Commission, which is the Commission of expertise over telecommunications—somehow provides a sufficient backstop to bad behavior by the ISPs, but that is simply not true.

Under the Federal Trade Commission, the big broadband barons would establish their own net neutrality policies. That is like letting the bullies develop their own playground rules. If the ISP wants to block websites, slow down competitors' websites, and charge innovators and entrepreneurs to reach their customers, they will be free to do

so. That is because the Federal Trade Commission can only step in if a broadband provider violates its own net neutrality policies—that is, the policy created by the broadband company itself. Yet, if an internet service provider has a written policy that charges websites for internet fast lanes, there is nothing the Federal Trade Commission can do about it.

That is ridiculous, and it is wrong. Allowing the broadband industry to set its own net neutrality protections is like letting the fox guard the henhouse.

OK, so the Federal Trade Commission oversight will not work. Chairman Pai claims that he has another solution. It is called transparency. He argues that, if ISPs are transparent about their net neutrality practices, consumers and businesses can simply choose to use a broadband provider with the net neutrality practices that best suit them. But what good is transparency when most Americans have little or no choice for high-speed broadband access?

Consider this that 62 percent of Americans have only one choice for high-speed, fixed broadband. That is right. Nearly two-thirds of the country have only one choice from whom they can purchase broadband. That means, if a household's only choice for high-speed broadband is not transparent about its plans to set up internet fast and slow lanes, the consumer has two choices—one, to accept the internet service provider's terms or, two, to live without the internet. That is a false choice. People do not want to live without the internet in the 21st century.

Chairman Pai claims that internet service providers actually support net neutrality but just not the open internet order under which we are living today. That is like saying that you support democracy but not the Constitution. It is like saying that you like math but you hate numbers. It makes no sense.

The broadband barons have been fighting for years, both at the Federal Communications Commission and in the courts, to block net neutrality rules. It is crystal clear, and it has been for years. The broadband companies are deeply opposed to net neutrality because they want to drive up their profits by setting up internet fast and slow lanes and charge consumers more for less. It is a simple formula.

Chairman Pai also claims that broadband investment has been discouraged by the open internet order. That is false. Investment in our broadband infrastructure is stronger than ever, and with the deployment of 5G technologies on the horizon, we can expect this strong investment to continue. Broadband investment in the aggregate has increased in the 2 years since the FCC passed the open internet order. Beyond just measuring dollars spent, broadband speeds also increased after the 2015 order, meaning the ISPs

have been improving the services they offer to their consumers. Consider this: In 2016 almost half of the venture capital funds invested in this country went toward internet-specific and software companies. That is \$25 billion worth of investments.

We have hit the sweet spot. Investment in broadband and wireless technologies is high, job creation is high, and venture capital investment in online startups is high. Chairman Pai threatens to disrupt this appropriate balance and squash innovation online. It is clear that Americans do not want what the FCC is proposing. It seems as though the only supporter of this plan is the broadband industry.

If Chairman Pai and his Republican colleagues turn a deaf ear to millions of Americans standing up to net neutrality and approve their plan tomorrow, we will continue this fight elsewhere. When the Obama-era rules were challenged by the internet service providers in 2015, I led a congressional amicus brief with Congresswoman ESHOO in support of the rules. Congresswoman ESHOO and I plan to do it again this time and lead an amicus brief in defense of net neutrality. I also intend to file a Congressional Review Act, or CRA, resolution of disapproval with a number of my colleagues so that the U.S. Senate can vote to undo Chairman Pai's proposal and restore the 2015 open internet order.

The Trump administration is waging an all-out assault on our core protections: DACA, the Affordable Care Act, the Paris climate accord, and the Clean Power Plan. Now Trump's Federal Communications Commission has put net neutrality in its sights.

For all of those who rely upon the free and open internet, whether it is for commerce, education, healthcare or entertainment, I urge you to join me in this fight to create a firestorm of opposition to this assault on net neutrality. This is a fundamental attack on the openness of the internet that must be beaten, and we must now form an army of ordinary Americans as the voices that will fight the special interests and lobbyists in this city who want to shut down net neutrality forever.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Madam President, there are a handful of innovations over the years that have redefined the United States and the entire world. The cotton gin, railroads, electricity, and the automobile are just a few examples. However, without question, broadband internet is one of the defining innovations of our time. Broadband internet connects both rural and urban communities to vital services such as telemedicine, educational resources, and international commerce. In fact, broadband internet is absolutely essential for communications in the modern era. It lets us keep in touch with our loved ones no matter where they live,

and it has boosted productivity across every single industry. Perhaps most importantly, broadband internet revolutionized our economy and has led to millions of new jobs.

The ability to instantly reach consumers wherever they live has allowed American small businesses and startups to compete with large global corporations in a way that would have been simply unimaginable just a couple of decades ago.

Michigan is home to over 850,000 small businesses and a growing number of startups. The new ideas and creative solutions they generate put America on the cutting edge of a global and interconnected economy. Michigan small businesses are able to compete and innovate because of the free and open structure of the internet, but, unfortunately, these opportunities are at risk.

Tomorrow the FCC will vote to eliminate current net neutrality protections that stop large corporations from stifling small businesses and harming the American people. I think the facts are very straightforward, and the FCC is wrong. They should stop what they are doing and keep the current protections in place.

The current rules that I have consistently supported prevent internet service providers from blocking, slowing, or prioritizing web traffic for their own financial gain at the expense of small businesses and every day internet users. The FCC's actions to roll back these protections could usher in a new era of a two-tiered internet—one for the large corporations that can pay for the fast lane and a slow lane for the rest of us. This will allow internet service providers and multinational corporations to compete unfairly against startups, slowing down their traffic and playing gatekeeper to potential customers.

Let me be clear. Repealing net neutrality is anti-innovation, repealing net neutrality is anti-competition, and repealing net neutrality is anti-consumer.

The FCC should not consider this proposal tomorrow to degrade internet service, especially during a time when over 20 million households in rural America, including far too many in my home State of Michigan, still lack access to high-speed broadband internet.

The FCC has a lot of work to do to close the digital divide, and repealing net neutrality is taking our country backward, not forward. If the internet doesn't work for growing small businesses and startups, our economy will be hurt for generations to come. High-speed broadband and net neutrality in the 21st century is every bit as vital as electricity was in the 20th century. All Americans deserve access, regardless of their income or their ZIP Code.

We accomplished the goal of bringing electricity to every household in this country in the last century, even in the most rural areas, by making it a national priority. We need to make access

to broadband internet with strong net neutrality protections a national priority today.

By preserving net neutrality, we put students, artists, advocates, entrepreneurs, and other visionaries, who could be inventing the future and creating the next big thing, ahead of a handful of multinational corporations.

The FCC should call off this dangerous vote and, instead, work to ensure that the internet remains a hub of entrepreneurship, creativity, and competition.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM

Madam President, over 2 months ago I stood here in this Chamber, urging my colleagues to pass legislation that will prevent kids enrolled in the Children's Health Insurance Program from losing their healthcare. The Children's Health Insurance Program, or CHIP, provides healthcare coverage to over 100,000 children in my home State of Michigan and more than 9 million children nationwide.

I recall welcoming the news that Senate Finance Committee Chairman HATCH and Ranking Member WYDEN had reached a bipartisan agreement to extend the healthcare benefits for these children. They worked together and went through regular order. The Finance Committee held a hearing and a markup on the bill in October.

We all know that regular order has become a very rare event in the Senate today, and I appreciate the bipartisan effort to have a Senate vote on a bill that is absolutely critical to our Nation's children. I certainly expected that this bipartisan bill would come to the floor and pass with broad bipartisan support, thus bringing relief to families across the Nation who are worried about whether their children will continue to have healthcare in 2018. Unfortunately, in the months since those good-faith efforts, we still have not seen a vote on this important legislation. This is inexcusable. We must take action now.

States are already beginning to notify families that their children's healthcare plans may be canceled if Congress does not act. States such as Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, and others have announced that they may run out of funds within weeks. In my home State of Michigan, I have heard from parents who are worried about whether their children will still be able to see their pediatrician next year. I have also heard from pediatricians who take care of these children how children will be hurt if their healthcare is taken away.

It would be unconscionable to rip healthcare services away from children during the most formative years of their lives. It would be unconscionable to put new roadblocks up for families whose children need physicals and vaccines before they can go to school. It would be unconscionable to increase healthcare costs for working families who are just trying to keep their children healthy and give them the opportunity to prosper.

This is not a partisan issue. In 1997, President Bill Clinton worked with a Republican majority both in the Senate and in the House of Representatives to successfully pass the Children's Health Insurance Program into law. That legislation passed with 85 votes in the Senate because providing needed health services to children should never be a partisan issue.

The CHIP program has been reauthorized on a bipartisan basis since its inception because it is effective. CHIP is working for our Nation's children, and we should be too.

I urge my colleagues across the aisle to call for a vote on this legislation to extend CHIP and pass it without delay. Let's do what is right for our country's children and families and pass this bipartisan legislation now.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

NET NEUTRALITY

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, this week, the Federal Communications Commission—FCC—is preparing to give a giant, early Christmas present to a few, deep-pocketed telecom companies, as it prepares to repeal critical net neutrality protections. Net neutrality is the simple principle that the internet should be kept free and open by preventing the corporations who control the connections to selectively throttle or block certain content, especially that of competitors.

Repealing net neutrality rules will benefit just a few powerful corporations—and it will do so at the expense of small businesses, consumers, and hard-working Americans, whose persistent and passionate voices on this issue have been completely ignored by the FCC's Republican majority.

Despite calling for public hearings when the current net neutrality protections were developed, Chairman Pai has failed to heed his own advice now that he is in charge of the FCC.

It seems the only people he listens to are those with deep enough pockets to afford high-powered lobbyists. If you are a concerned citizen or small business owner, your voice doesn't matter to this FCC. As someone who held public hearings on this issue in 2014, I can tell you that there is widespread and overwhelming support for net neutrality just about everywhere except at the FCC itself.

If the Chairman took the time to listen, as I did, he would hear from small business owners like Cabot Orton at the Vermont Country Store, who told me, "We're not asking for special treatment, incentives, or subsidies. All the small business community asks is simply to preserve and protect Internet commerce as it exists today, which has served all businesses remarkably well."

Just today, we received a letter from businesses in Northern New England, including Vermont's own Ben & Jerry's, Cabot Creamery Cooperative, and King Arthur Flour, discussing the