

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

“crippling effect” a repeal of net neutrality rules would have on rural businesses.

I ask unanimous consent that a copy of this letter be printed in the RECORD at the conclusion of my remarks.

Chairman Pai would hear from libraries, which for some rural communities are the only way to access the internet.

As Vermont’s State librarian, Martha Reid, told me: “All Americans—including the most disenfranchised citizens, those who would have no way to access the Internet without the library—need to be able to use Internet resources on an equal footing.”

Chairman Pai would also hear from independent content creators whose voices are too often not heard on traditional media. As actress, writer, and producer Ruth Livier told me: “In the unprecedented world of an open, non-discriminatory Internet, no longer did low-budgets and no connections mean there was no way in. Never again could we be disregarded by anyone who essentially asks, ‘Who are you to have your story be told?’”

These are the voices being ignored. They are the people, the Americans, who stand to lose the most in the Chairman Pai’s misguided plan.

This is not about partisanship. Republicans and Democrats alike, in my State and every other State, benefit from the power of an open Internet, and equally stand to be harmed if the rules of the road ensuring its openness go away.

I know there are some people with a lot of money who want to do away with net neutrality. They are even filing fake comments with the FCC saying they want to repeal these protections. One of those comments came to my attention. It had my name and my home address on it. Most people, when they saw it, just laughed, because they knew it was fake.

None of us should support a process that willfully dismisses the voices of our constituents. I hope that all Senators will join me in calling on the FCC to abandon this reckless vote to repeal net neutrality.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

DECEMBER 13, 2017.

The Hon. AJIT PAI,
Chairman, Federal Communications Commission, Washington, DC.

DEAR FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI: We are a group of businesses from Northern New England with strong ties to the rural and agricultural business community. We are writing today out of deep concern about the FCC’s proposal to roll back the current net neutrality rules based on Title II of the Communications Act. We urge you to maintain the existing rules instead.

As members of the business community in this region, we regularly witness how small rural businesses, including the farms and cooperatives that many of us source from, already struggle with limited access to broadband and limited options for Internet service providers. The repeal of net neutrality would compound the challenges faced

by these businesses, adding cost and creating a competitive disadvantage to running a successful business in rural America.

Uninhibited access to the internet is already a fundamental necessity for operating a successful business in rural areas. Looking to the future, this is only going to become more important. In our work with farmers in this region, we see how this particular group of businesses is increasingly reliant on the internet for access to technical information and support, and for access to information about markets.

The changes proposed by the FCC would remove the only existing legal foundation strong enough to ensure net neutrality protections are enforceable: Title II of the Communications Act, as implemented in the agency’s 2015 Open Internet Order.

Under this change, internet providers would gain new powers to steer businesses and customers one way or another. For example, Internet access providers could charge new fees for prioritized access to customers. While big companies and farms might be able to afford a pay-to-play prioritized ‘fast lane’ to users, small and medium sized businesses cannot; at the very least, such new fees would put them at a distinct disadvantage with larger competitors. Internet access providers could also charge rural businesses new fees for access to websites and services. They could favor certain businesses by slowing down traffic or exempting competitors’ traffic from users’ data caps. They could also block websites and apps outright. This would create immense uncertainty for companies in every sector of the economy who rely on open, unencumbered connectivity as a key enabler for their business and productivity. It could also greatly limit or bias farmers’ access to products, services, and information they need to run their business.

Ultimately, repealing net neutrality will have a crippling effect on rural economies, further restricting access to the internet for rural businesses at a point in time where we need to expand and speed this access instead. We urge you to maintain strong net neutrality rules and focus on advancing policies that foster fair competition.

Sincerely,

STONYFIELD,
Londonderry, New
Hampshire.

KING ARTHUR FLOUR,
Norwich, Vermont.

FOODSTATE,
Londonderry, New
Hampshire.

BOLOCO, HANOVER, NEW
HAMPSHIRE.

GRANDY OATS,
Hiram, Maine.

CABOT CREAMERY

COOPERATIVE,
Waitsfield, Vermont.

BEN AND JERRY’S,
South Burlington,
Vermont.

MAINE GRAINS,
Skowhegan, Maine.

cc: Sen. Susan Collins, Sen. Angus King, Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, Sen. Margaret Hassan, Sen. Patrick Leahy, Sen. Bernie Sanders, Rep. Chellie Pingree, Rep. Bruce Poliquin, Rep. Ann McLane Kuster, Rep. Carol Shea-Porter, Rep. Peter Welch.

Mr. LEAHY. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Madam President, I rise to join with the Senator from Vermont in opposition to the FCC’s planned vote to end net neutrality protections.

Tomorrow, as he noted, the FCC will hold a vote on Chairman Pai’s plan to eliminate net neutrality. These rules have kept the internet free and open, and in a day where a lot of things aren’t working, this was something that was actually working. People were able to access the internet, people in my State who maybe didn’t have a lot of resources. Kids were able to access the internet to do their homework. It was working. If the FCC votes to abandon net neutrality, it will put internet service providers, not consumers, in charge of determining the future of the internet.

Net neutrality holds internet service providers—big mega-internet service providers—accountable for providing the internet access consumers expect while protecting innovation and competition. It is the bedrock of a fast, free, and open internet.

Net neutrality has allowed the internet to become one of the great American success stories, transforming not only how we communicate with our friends and our family but the way we do business, how consumers buy goods, and how we educate our kids. These protections have worked. We have rural kids who couldn’t access classes before who are able to get these classes on the internet. We have small businesses that are able to advertise their services in a way that no one would have known that they existed. One of my favorite ones is a company called Weave Got Maille, and they are doing chain jewelry. It is just a group of about 10, 15 employees up there who started with nothing but one chain. Then they were able to come up with a cool nickname, and then they were able to advertise on the internet directly to consumers. Now they are one of the biggest employers in the town right on the Canadian border.

These internet protections that have allowed small businesses to blossom have allowed consumers to access the internet like everyone else. They have worked, but with the FCC’s vote tomorrow, the internet may soon be changing.

Earlier this year, when Chairman Pai announced his proposal to eliminate net neutrality protections, Americans took the opportunity to make their voices heard during the public comment hearing, and the proposal received a record 23 million comments. While many of these comments are written by consumers worried about the future of the internet, there is reason to be concerned about that process. Approximately 1 million fraudulent comments were filed with the FCC, and an additional half a million comments were filed with Russian email addresses. Sound familiar? I think so.

I think everyone in this Chamber knows Russia has been trying to influence our democracy in every way they can—from hacking to putting out propaganda, to now trying to insert itself into a comment process for our free and open internet, something that has

been the hallmark of American society, something they don't have in Russia. Just think, an additional half a million comments were filed from Russian email addresses. This is troubling because, in America, the public comment process matters. It is one of the few opportunities Americans have to weigh in directly with the FCC. That is why I joined several of my colleagues in calling on Chairman Pai to delay the vote until the FCC fully investigated these fake and foreign comments. Despite our calls, the FCC is still moving ahead with its vote. Despite 23 million comments, they are still moving ahead with their vote.

Under Chairman Pai's plan, the FCC gives internet service providers the ability to significantly change consumers' experience online. Internet service providers may soon be able to block, slow, and prioritize web traffic for their own financial gain, not for the average citizens' gain but for their gain. This means, internet service providers could begin sorting online traffic into fast or slow lanes and charging consumers extra for high-speed broadband. They would also be able to slow consumers' connections once they have hit a certain data limit or if they are viewing content from a competitor, and internet service providers may even block content they don't want their subscribers to access. So much for an open internet.

The only protections maintained under the proposed order are requirements for service providers to disclose their internet traffic policies. However, for consumers with only one choice for internet service, like many in my State and like many in rural areas, there is no real opportunity to comparison shop or find a new provider if they are unhappy with their service. This means that even though consumers may be aware that their internet service provider is blocking or slowing their connection, they actually don't have a choice so what does that information matter to them anyway? This proposal will harm consumers, particularly in rural areas. It will limit competition, and it will hurt small business, entrepreneurship, and innovation.

What I have seen around this place is that everyone is talking about rural broadband. They want to expand broadband. I want to expand broadband. Well, you can expand broadband all you want, but it is not going to matter if people aren't able to afford to access it.

A truly open internet encourages economic growth and provides opportunities for businesses to reach new markets, drive innovation, and create jobs. Small businesses remain engines of job creation, and net neutrality levels the playing field, allowing small companies to compete with more established brands. That is what America is about—allowing more innovation and small companies to come up and compete.

Unfortunately, for small businesses and startups across the country, the net neutrality repeal will mean new barriers when competing online. Without unrestricted access to the internet, entrepreneurs may be forced to pay for equal footing to compete online rather than focus on expanding their business. Small businesses unable to pay for access to faster internet service may soon find themselves struggling to compete from the slow lane, not the fast lane. This proposal will hurt the very people creating jobs and keeping our economy competitive.

As a strong supporter of a free and open internet, it is clear that repealing net neutrality is a step in the wrong direction. We are facing an increasingly global and interconnected economy, and it is critical that the internet remain a hub of entrepreneurship, creativity, and fair competition.

The fight to protect net neutrality is far from over, and we need to keep the pressure on. We have seen merger after merger after merger. We have seen consolidated businesses, bigger and bigger and bigger. So now what is the next step here? To limit net neutrality to make it harder for the small guys, for the ones who are trying to get into the market to compete. It is not just an isolated philosophy; it is actually part of a larger philosophy, which means that smaller companies, that individuals are going to have a hard time getting into the market and getting free access like the big guys.

That is why we ask Chairman Pai to reconsider this vote on Thursday and to come up with a new policy that doesn't hurt the people of America.

It is no surprise today that the poll I saw said the vast majority of Americans don't favor getting rid of net neutrality, and in fact it showed the vast majority of Republicans don't favor getting rid of net neutrality. So we ask Chairman Pai, who was appointed chairman by a Republican President, to reconsider this decision.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TILLIS). The Senator from Massachusetts.

REPUBLICAN TAX BILL

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, we are in the middle of a historically important debate here in Washington. Republicans have hatched a partisan proposal behind closed doors that would shovel a trillion dollars in tax giveaways to giant corporations and the wealthy while undermining the healthcare and raising taxes for millions of middle-class families. If it passes, it could affect the lives of every single American for an entire generation.

Now, last night, the people of Alabama elected a new Senator to represent them here in Washington. So now Republicans who control the Senate face a choice. Will they allow Senator-elect Doug Jones to take his seat among his colleagues before a final vote on their tax plan?

We actually know something about that kind of choice in my home State of Massachusetts. On January 19, 2010, Massachusetts elected a new Senator to represent them here in Washington. The result was just as shocking to Democrats as last night's result was to Republicans. It also came when we were in the middle of another historically important policy debate here in Washington—healthcare. A lot of people thought Democrats should ram through the final version of their bill in Congress before Brown could be seated.

Now, I could stand here and read you quote after quote after quote from Republicans, who now control the Senate, talking about how unfair that would be, how corrupt that would be, and how anti-democratic that would be. I could go on and on about how today's Senate majority leader, MITCH MCCONNELL, said this would be gamesmanship, but I am going to talk about what Democrats actually did.

Democrats rejected the idea of ramming through the bill before Brown could take his seat in the Senate. Almost immediately, Jim Webb, a Democratic Senator from Virginia, called for a suspension of any healthcare vote until after Brown arrived. The day after the Massachusetts election, the Senate majority leader, Harry Reid, said publicly: "We're going to wait until the new Senator arrives until we do anything more on health care."

Massachusetts Democratic Senator John Kerry held a joint press conference with Republican Scott Brown that same week, where he said:

Seating Scott Brown as expeditiously as possible is important. We want to respect the election results. And nobody wants to delay this process.

President Obama, whose entire healthcare agenda was on the line, said this:

Here's one thing I know and I just want to make sure that this is off the table: The Senate certainly shouldn't try to jam anything through until Scott Brown is seated. People in Massachusetts spoke. He's got to be part of that process.

Now, this wasn't an easy decision. Waiting for Brown slowed down the adoption of healthcare for 2 additional months. More importantly, it meant Democrats lost their filibuster-proof majority and, as a consequence, the final bill couldn't achieve nearly as much as Democrats had hoped for, but we did it anyway.

We did it because democracy matters, even when it means it might slow down a President's agenda. Democracy matters, even when a Senate seat held for decades by a liberal lion is taken over by a conservative. Democracy matters, especially when it is inconvenient.

If we are honest, we know that there hasn't been a lot of democracy around this tax bill. This is a bill that was written and rewritten in the dead of night, behind closed doors. It is filled with errors and unintended consequences. It is animated by a rotten