

now. He and I worked together to formulate, with our colleges, Washington State University and Oregon, literally just the app economy.

I think about the applications we saw 7 years ago. Some of them were for hiking trails, some of them were for solutions for our law enforcement to have better information, and some of them were just pure business applications. I think about how much we have grown that app economy in the last 7 to 10 years and how much it will be impacted by an internet that is not an open internet and universal in giving people access to service. I say this because those new startups know more than anybody else that if they are not the big behemoth in the market and they are a new interest competing against an existing business or if they have a new idea and they don't have the clout to have fast internet speeds, they are not going to reach consumers; they are not going to reach their clients; and they are not going to have a business model that is successful.

So I thank Senator WYDEN for his leadership for decades on these important issues. I thank my colleague Senator MARKEY for organizing us this morning to say one thing loud and clear: After 1 year, we already know what is happening on the internet. One thing the Senate can do is protect consumers from big cable companies from overcharging them. That is why we are out here to say that we should have a vote to protect consumers, to protect companies that produce 20 percent of our economy over 377,000 jobs in my State. I guarantee you I will be here this morning to articulate why an internet service needs to be protected. We know we have to fight back against companies that want to gouge consumers or suppress competition.

It has been 1 year since the FCC decided to turn back protections for the internet. We are here today because we know we have already seen the inklings of what is more to come—companies that are doing things such as slowing down speeds or charging consumers more. We know more than 20 million people stood up and told the FCC they want strong internet protections, and they do not want to see large-scale companies overcharging or gouging them.

I don't even know how we can talk about getting broadband service if there are not going to be strong rules on the internet that protect consumers from being overcharged. The truth is, we know today that the internet is a great economy for us. It is helping us to research. It is helping us in life-saving healthcare. We had one of the FCC administrators out in the Northwest looking at healthcare applications, and they are phenomenal for helping everything from PTSD to looking at ways to deliver just-in-time healthcare for those who are in remote parts of our State.

We know the internet is a great equalizer. It is helping people from dif-

ferent backgrounds participate in the economy, and it is helping with economic empowerment, but innovative businesses in every small town and every city need to have an internet that is going to give them access to create jobs and move their local economies forward. Today, in the United States, three cable companies—just three cable companies—have control of internet access for 70 percent of Americans, and 80 percent of rural Americans still only have one choice for high-speed broadband for their homes and businesses. We are not likely to get competition where the consumer can just say: You are artificially slowing me down and charging me too much; I am just going to the competition. That is not likely to happen. That is why we need a strong FCC approach to protecting an open internet and saying they shouldn't block, throttle, and manipulate internet access. Without these protections, Big Cable can move faster in charging more. So I ask my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to say it is time to hold these companies accountable and put consumers ahead of these big cable profits.

I can guarantee that the American people know better. Literally, it doesn't matter what political affiliation you have, the majority of Americans all oppose repealing protections that make for an open internet. They know it is time for us to protect consumers and that this is only going to get more complex as our economy depends more and more on an open internet.

As my colleague from Oregon has said, the Trump FCC has given a green light to companies, basically, to keep doing whatever they want and to continue to take more out of consumers' pockets.

Today, on the Senate floor, we have an opportunity. My colleague from Massachusetts, who has been as much a great leader on these issues and has been working to protect an open internet for decades, has an opportunity to say where we stand in protecting the American consumer. Just last year, a bipartisan majority in the U.S. Senate—49 Democrats and 3 Republicans—joined together to overturn the FCC's repealing of internet protections. We were here together to say we want the internet protected.

Now the House of Representatives has done its job. It has basically protected the internet and taken an initiative. It is time for Leader MCCONNELL to put the big cable companies on notice and to allow debate on the Senate floor and hold them accountable so we can say we want an open internet, and this type of practice should be fought against.

I hope our colleagues will be given the opportunity for this debate, to look at why it is so important to protect consumers, the innovation economy, and a free and open internet.

Tomorrow there is an FCC hearing before the Senate Commerce Com-

mittee, and I hope we will be able to ask these important questions about why cable companies are continuing to gouge consumers in many areas.

I thank the Presiding Officer, and I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I think Senator CANTWELL and Senator WYDEN have done an excellent job in laying out the parameters of the problems that exist if we do not have net neutrality enshrined as the law of the land.

We believe the principles of non-discrimination—the principles that ensure that the internet is open and accessible to the smallest voices as well as the largest voices. We need laws to protect the smallest voices. We need protections to ensure that they are going to be heard, that they can innovate, that they can take their entrepreneurial zeal, their insights into the additional changes that can be made in this longstanding—now a 20-year history of dynamic changes that have taken place in the online commercial world and that they will be able to innovate.

They should not have to get permission to innovate. They should not have to get permission to be able to change the way in which people communicate in our country. We shouldn't have to hire lawyers to negotiate with the lawyers of the biggest companies in the United States in order to ensure that investors aren't going to lose all their money as the small company gets tipped upside down and has all of their resources absolutely devastated by anticompetitive activity. That is what this is all about—democracy and capitalism, entrepreneurial spirit, the ability to innovate, the ability to be able to go to the marketplace.

In order for capitalism to work, it has to have a conscience. Capitalism without a conscience allows for unfettered large corporations to take advantage of small companies, startups, and individuals in our society. It has to have a conscience. Net neutrality is the conscience for the online world we live in. It ensures that there is fairness, openness, and it ensures that the apertures that are there cannot be narrowed just because of the corporate agenda of an individual huge company.

That is the essence of this whole debate. It is something we believe is at the heart of what this 21st century platform of commerce should include. It will be, in a lot of ways, the defining issue of whether this entire era is one that is characterized by fairness or one that is characterized by monopolistic or duopoly practices.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 1644

Mr. President, on behalf of Senator CANTWELL and Senator WYDEN and myself, I ask unanimous consent, as in legislative session, that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 74, H.R. 1644, a bill to restore the open internet order

of the Federal Communications Commission; that the bill be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, reserving the right to object—

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I don't think the answer to the question is going to be a surprise to my friend from Massachusetts. I will only say this, and I will try to do it briefly. I have been amazed, over the last 1½ years and even longer, at the intense, overblown rhetoric about this issue of net neutrality and the hyperbole we have heard on the floor of the Senate and elsewhere.

About 1½ years ago, the FCC voted on the Restoring Internet Freedom Order. It went into effect. It repealed what most of us considered a heavy-handed approach based on a law that took effect back in 1934.

When the FCC implemented this new restoring internet freedom order back a year and a half ago, I was just astounded by what was being said by my friends on the left. One Senator warned that this was practically the end of Netflix, YouTube, and Amazon. Another cautioned:

They want to get rid of the Federal Communications Commission's net neutrality rules so that . . . 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.

One tweet from my friends on the Democratic side said: "If we don't save net neutrality, you'll get the internet one word at a time." That quote got three Pinocchios from even the Washington Post.

These things never happened. As a matter of fact, people on the other side of the issue who actually have taken the position of the Senator from Massachusetts have admitted that ISPs are delivering on consumers' expectations. They are not throttling websites.

As a matter of fact, here is what has happened since the FCC order went into effect a year and a half ago: Broadband providers large and small have deployed fiber networks to 5.9 million new homes—the largest number ever recorded. More Americans are connected at higher speeds than ever before. Capital expenditures have rebounded from the slump they suffered when the internet was subjected to title II.

This should surprise no one because the internet has thrived during Democratic and Republican administrations and during Democratic majorities on the FCC and Republican majorities on the FCC when we have taken the light-touch regulatory approach.

The issue seems to be title II regulation of rates. I would simply say to my

brothers and sisters on the other side of the aisle that we can pass a law tomorrow afternoon providing Americans with all the protection they want from blocking, throttling, and preventing paid prioritization. What we will not do and what this President will not sign is legislation authorizing the Federal Government to set internet rates in the old 1934 Bell System of title II regulations. For that reason, I do object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, despite the Republican objections today, Senator CANTWELL, Senator WYDEN, and I, and tens of millions of people across this country will not stop fighting until net neutrality is fully restored. Whether in the Halls of Congress or in the courts of our country, this is going to be a fight that is fought until it is finally won.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, this Congress, I have the great privilege of cochairing the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control with the senior Senator from California, DIANNE FEINSTEIN. As more families across the country lose their loved ones to the scourge of opioids, the work of this caucus could not be more important.

Today, people in our country are more likely to die from an opioid overdose than a car crash, but that hasn't always been the case. Our country's opioid abuse epidemic began in the 1990s when pharmaceutical companies promoted aggressive pain management, assuring the medical community that patients would not become addicted to these drugs. As a result, doctors began to prescribe more and more of them. We know what happened next. In the decades since, we have faced a steady increase in opioid abuse and have undertaken aggressive efforts to address this epidemic.

There has been a concerted effort across the country to attack overprescribing of opioids in the hope of preventing more people from becoming addicted. But that alone cannot be our sole focus. Of the more than 70,000 overdose deaths in America in 2017, more than half were the result of heroin and synthetic opioids, not prescription drugs.

The more we step up our efforts to limit prescription opioid diversion, the higher the demand for other illicit drugs, many of which are funneled into our communities by criminal organizations operating across international borders. These groups run sophisticated drug trafficking operations, moving vast amounts of cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin, fentanyl, and other illegal drugs through Central America and Mexico and into the United States. With Customs and Border Protection personnel spread thin because of the current humanitarian

and security crisis at the border, these criminal organizations have no problem exploiting the security gaps.

I can say confidently that without coordinated government response, the problem is going to get worse and worse, which means more and more Americans will die as a result of drug overdoses.

In the past, this caucus has examined everything from prescription drug abuse, to the expansion of fentanyl, to trafficking across our southern border. As these and other hearings have illustrated, there is no single contributor to this crisis and no silver bullet.

The opioid epidemic is called a crisis for a reason: It is pervasive and all-encompassing. We can't look at the problem through a soda straw, focusing only on how the drugs get here or how to more effectively treat those who are already addicted. We need to take a more holistic approach that focuses on reducing supply by reducing demand and eliminating the myriad of factors that fueled this fire.

The International Narcotics Control Caucus will hold a hearing this afternoon to examine how the U.S. Government can expand our international efforts against drug abuse and narcotics trafficking and take the first step toward developing a comprehensive strategy.

Our first witness will be the Secretary of State, Secretary Pompeo, whose Department works across the U.S. Government and with our partners around the world to combat this transnational crime. We look forward to hearing from him, as well as other experts on the second panel about the growing epidemic and what Congress must do, working in a bipartisan effort, to address it.

As I said earlier, our whole-of-government strategy must focus on supply and demand. Last Congress, we passed landmark legislation to combat the opioid crisis, which President Trump called "the single largest bill to combat a drug crisis in the history of the country." Through the collaboration of 70 bipartisan proposals in the Senate, this law aims to not only stem the tide of drugs coming across the border but to offer some support and hope to those suffering from drug addiction. It was a major bipartisan accomplishment and one that I hope we can continue to build on in this Congress because a great deal of work remains to be done.

Beyond supply and demand, we need to take aim at the criminal organizations that traffic drugs and engage in a whole host of criminal activity. As others have pointed out, these criminal organizations are commodity-agnostic—they will engage in human trafficking, migrant smuggling, money laundering, counterfeit goods, public corruption, and the list goes on and on. What they are really about is making money. They don't care anything for the migrants or the people affected by their crimes. The real kicker here is that while these criminal organizations are