



Native Public Media on the Federal Communication Commission's Repeal of Net Neutrality

The FCC released the draft of three orders which it is expected to adopt at its December 14, 2017 meeting. Taken together, the orders reclassify Internet services as "information" rather than "telecommunications" services and eliminate current prohibitions on "blocking," "throttling" (slowing down) and "paid prioritization" (faster delivery of content for higher prices).

Here is why Native Public Media opposes the orders.

The attack on Net Neutrality is an attack on the rights of all Americans to free and open access to the Internet. The rollback of Net Neutrality threatens core American values like freedom of expression and association including our right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. NPM agrees that Internet rights are civil rights.

- Like the gutting of the Lifeline program, the Net Neutrality orders will undermine efforts to obtain equal access to broadband facilities that Tribal members so desperately need. By defining Internet services as an optional luxury (mere "information") rather than a basic necessity, the orders fail to recognize that Internet access is a public utility service, like electricity. Internet access is now essential to get an education, find a job, and keep communities alive. Unless constrained by regulation, powerful telecommunications companies, acting only in their own economic self-interests, will have no incentive to ensure equal Internet access to low-income, vulnerable citizens. The FCC orders grant these corporations the ability to control who will have access to the Internet, and at what price.
- The orders will deepen the digital divide. The orders are founded on the mistaken belief that unrestrained capitalism will motivate the innovation and investment needed to narrow the digital divide. This has not been true for Indian Country.
- Americans will be entitled only to as much free speech they can afford. Many years ago, the FCC reserved broadcast spectrum for noncommercial use. This reserved spectrum has made it possible for Tribes, nonprofits and religious organizations to have a place in broadcast media. No spectrum is set aside for noncommercial Internet use. With the elimination of Net Neutrality, the Internet will be controlled purely by commercial interests. Corporations will be free to do what they like so long as they are "transparent" in informing consumers how much it will cost.
- The orders assume that all consumers have meaningful choices when purchasing Internet access. That certainly is not true for many Tribal consumers who often lack even the most basic access.
- The orders ignore the diverse voices of millions of people who called for the FCC to protect the current rules and keep the Internet free and open.