

Keep the Internet Open

The FCC has announced plans to roll back policies on net neutrality, [and its new head has indicated he has no plan to stop soon](#).

The internet is a public good, and I believe access should be a basic right. We've seen such great innovation in software because the internet has been a level playing field. People have been able to succeed by merit, not the regulatory weight of incumbency.

It seems best to keep it regulated like a common carrier. [1] Doing this allows the government to ensure a level playing field, impose privacy regulations, and subsidize access for people who can't afford it.

But this idea is under attack, and I'm surprised the tech community isn't speaking out more forcefully. Although many leading tech companies are now the incumbents, I hope we'll all remember that openness helped them achieve their great success. It could be disastrous for future startups if this were to change--openness is what made the recent wave of innovation happen.

We need to make our voices heard. We won this fight once before, and we can win it again. I really hope an activist or tech leader will step up and organize this fight (and I'm happy to help!). It's important for our future.

[1] There's an argument that Internet Service Providers should be able to charge a metered rate based on usage. I'm not sure whether I agree with this, but in principle it seems ok. That's how we pay for public utilities.

What's clearly not OK is taking it further--charging different services different rates based on their relationships with ISPs. You wouldn't accept

your electric company charging you different rates depending on the manufacturer of each of your appliances.

Emailed comment from Alan Kay:

Yes -- in fact, the original notion about all this was to be in the same spirit as the 1936 Electrical and Telephone Federal Act which was specifically aimed at rural areas that the utilities didn't want to spend money to reach, so the fed mandated "power and phone" as a kind of universal right. This has also been a theme of the EFF. The basic impulse was also one of the drivers behind Carnegie's huge support of the free library system in the US (the whole story there is interesting, including some of the high minded stipulations in the Carnegie bequests, which I've on occasion tried to get the Internet communities to buy off on).

Every Carnegie library had to have two special rooms -- one just for children, and the other *where people could be taught to read*. Part of the Carnegie money for the libraries supported the reading teachers and sessions. Carnegie was an immigrant and child laborer who could read a little. One of his earliest bosses would open his home library to his workers on Saturdays. Carnegie used this to raise himself up, and never forgot how it happened. (He was also one of the few truly rich people ever who said he was going to give it all away to benefit the civilization around him, and actually did it.)

P.S. I wanted to put the above comment on your blog but there was no button to allow this ...