Net neutrality in trouble with vote looming in near future

Brianne Hendricks
Brianne.Hendricks87@gmail.com

The Internet. The last great untamable wild. A magical library of information and the haunted funeral home of the strange. Where some of us live our lives, and others find nothing but pain. The internet shapes our generation, giving us unfettered access to anything and everything we could want. It is, largely, because of something called “net neutrality.”

Net Neutrality, in the most general terms, means equal access to everything on the internet, meaning Spotify, Hulu and Netflix all use the same “lanes” of access. The latest episode of American Horror Story on Netflix, in theory, has the same access to loading as the latest episode of Game of Thrones on HBO GO. Neither should be slowed for the other to take priority, etc. It’s how the Internet is currently run; no one company has preferable treatment over the other, as the wild of the Internet should be. Through protections, all internet companies are required to allow equal access.

You may be thinking, wasn’t this decided already? Didn’t we already fight for net neutrality? Yes. Yes, we did. The most recent protections were placed in 2015, when the latest Obama-era protections were initiated. These protections classified the internet as more of a utility. Which, let’s face it, the internet has become something almost required to function in today’s world, especially since it is based on taxpayer-funded research, using taxpayer-funded infrastructure. Under these protections the internet is largely preserved.

This brings us to the near future. On Dec. 14 the wild equality of the internet will be threatened by the FCC. Under its current proposed plan, the FCC’s chairman, Ajit Pai, seeks to tear down the protections in place. Under this guise of “removing unnecessary regulations,” Ajit Pai, a former lawyer for Verizon, has opened the door for large internet companies to discriminate against free speech as they see fit, including even what content is available to their customers. Say Comcast doesn’t appreciate an article criticizing them? They could block their customers from seeing the material, or slow down it’s access to the point of unavailability. AT&T thinks Netflix should pay them more money? They could hold Netflix’ speeds ransom until Netflix pays AT&T more, leading to higher costs for us, the consumers.

Of course, these major companies promise they will take their new found power responsibly. Still, given that at the very least Comcast has received flack in the past for taking advantage of their customers, this prospect shouldn’t give us much comfort. Nor does it give comfort to Airbnb, Google, Amazon, Dropbox, Facebook, Microsoft, Netflix, Twitter, Snapchat and Spotify, who have all voiced opposition for this new plan.

Still unconvinced? Without protections for the access of internet, we could eventually be looking at the same sort of terrible consumer structure that Portugal now has. Want to access Skype? That’s five dollars. Want to use Facebook Messenger? Another five dollars. Netflix? Fork over that five, without getting into the complicated ideas such as “HD” and “4K!”

You get the unfortunate picture.

So what can we do about it? Start by going to BattleForTheNet.com, then get to writing those letters, or calling your representatives in Congress. Together we can keep the internet as it should be, equal access for all, not just companies that can bully their way to the top.