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Viewpoint

Telecom giants threaten Net neutrality

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The world may be about to change again.

The Internet has brought millions of people together, taught a new generation about their world and become an international marketplace.

But now, owners of the wires the Internet flows through are angry. They don't make as much money as Google, Yahoo and other companies that provide actual content.

So, phone and cable companies have begun to stir. They don't want a marketplace of ideas. They don't want the innovative, idea-rich laboratory of speech, media, religion and thought that we know today. They want money.

Imagine reading your local paper, then reading the Chicago Tribune. Your local paper may load slowly while the Tribune does so crisply and quickly.

This is what will happen if Congress destroys a concept called network neutrality, also known as the First Amendment of the Internet. Large telecommunications companies would decide which Web sites you get to see at full speed, and which ones come to you in slow-motion.

What will drive their decision? Who pays them the most money.

Companies will have to pay to arrive at top speed. If they don't pay, they may not even get the chance to appear on your desktop.

Multinational corporations will send their Web sites at top speed, while small companies will suffer.

If you do not speak up now, if you do not threaten their jobs, your legislators will be paid off by telecommunications lobbyists. Large phone companies such as AT&T are spending a million dollars a week.

Many legislators, who also receive campaign contributions from telecommunications companies, do not support legislation keeping the Internet free.

So, who supports Net neutrality?

Such organizations as National Religious Broadcasters, Gun Owners of America, Christian Coalition, American Civil Liberties Union, Free Press and [Moveon.org](#). Groups from the left and the right know that free speech and the incredible innovation provided by the Internet are critical to our nation's progress.

As our world gets smaller and more confusing, we must decide whether to be satisfied with the filtered, spoon-fed news of the day or whether we will even have the opportunity to learn about the issues of tomorrow.

We must, as a nation, seek out the facts that intimately affect our lives, and network neutrality is one of those. This is not about the war on international terrorism; it isn't about the price we pay Arab nations for a barrel of oil; it isn't even about whether we give amnesty to illegal immigrants.

This is the touchstone of our nation, the freedom to express thoughts, ideas and visions.

Telecommunications companies deserve the chance to make money for their services, and they do so comfortably. But they must not be allowed to decide what we read, what we watch and what we learn and care about.

That is the decision of the market alone, based on free choices made by informed citizens, not those who seek to corner it.

Freedom is the concept behind Net neutrality.

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