

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS
BUDGET
ENVIRONMENT AND
PUBLIC WORKS
FOREIGN RELATIONS

February 13, 2018

Dear Chair Williamson, Vice-Chair McLane, Vice-Chair Rayfield, and Members of the Oregon House Committee on Rules:

I would like to thank the committee for taking up this critical issue that affects Oregonians across the state.

In December 2017, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) dismantled the rules governing net neutrality. As you know, net neutrality rules ensure that Internet Service Providers (ISPs) offer equal access to all web content and don't unfairly and arbitrarily block data or websites. By removing these rules, the FCC would allow big corporations to place restrictions on internet access and undermine the independent nature of the internet, stifle innovation, and put individuals and small businesses at an unfair disadvantage.

For example, low-income families may be forced into a "slow lane" based on their inability to pay for a "fast lane" prioritization that affluent households can buy. Students will have to consume information online not from the best outlet, but the one that pays ISPs the most. Consumers may have limited or no access to applications that are essential to their communication based on their ISPs' own preferences and business deals. Start-ups could have their websites load slower than those of their corporate competitors, rendering online business start-ups unable to compete.

As a matter of fact, we've already seen this play out and it did not end well. In fact, net neutrality rules were needed to tackle these problems in the first place. Corporations should not be allowed to put people in "fast lanes" and "slow lanes." Consumers should have access to the internet on the same terms as large institutions, and small technology entrepreneurs should be able to compete on a level playing field with large technology and telecommunication companies.

The FCC's actions are unacceptable. We should have federal net neutrality rules to protect democracy. However, in the absence of federal rules, I applaud Oregon's effort to step in where the federal government has left a gap. I encourage the State of Oregon to pursue its own legislative options to help ensure the idea of net neutrality is restored for internet users.

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I support Oregon House Majority Leader Jennifer Williamson's efforts to create state-level net neutrality protections in our great state and hope to see this important legislation working its way through Salem, and be signed into law, if the Oregon legislature so decides.

All my best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jeffrey A. Merkley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a distinct "M".

Jeffrey A. Merkley
U.S. Senator for Oregon