

Internet Politics

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From its inception in the 1960s (and wide use since the 1980s), the Internet was been designed and implemented to treat all user traffic---email, file transport, even voice and video---equally, without regard to contents or volume. It is a concept called *net neutrality*. As a consequence, the Internet has been apolitical, treating the traffic of both liberals and conservatives without regard to their ideologies.

Unfortunately, Washington's high-level politicians do not leave "well enough" alone. Since the 1960s, "well enough" for the Internet to be a technological wonder, almost effortless and nearly free to use.

Since the time of the Internet's creation, companies have lobbied Congress to make it less equal, principally to allow Internet providers (such Google, AOL, Amazon, and Verizon) to charge users based on volume and/or type of traffic. As well, to allow these providers to choke or throttle traffic that they deem contrary to their operations.

When the Republicans control legislation, rules and laws are usually passed to reduce net neutrality and let the marketplace dictate or regulate the Internet. When the Democrats are at the helm, they restore net neutrality, with the result of some applications "hogging" the capacity (called bandwidth) of the Internet.

For example, a video session uses much more bandwidth than the exchange of email. Sandvine.com, a research firm, reports (as of 2022) that Netflix consumes almost ten percent of Internet global downstream traffic (from Netflix to its viewers). And only six companies use 57 percent of all Internet traffic (Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Apple, Amazon, and Netflix).

Given these facts, Republicans claim the practice of net neutrality is inherently unfair and anti-competitive, not the American way. Democrats assert net neutrality is essential to America's egalitarian foundations, and vital for users who cannot afford to pay fees for Internet usage.

It bears repeating that the Internet is almost free, with nominal monthly fees paid to certain Internet providers, such as AOL and MSN. There may be additional fees for video streaming and other user-choice services.

Back and forth it goes, as the Internet becomes increasingly politicized.

This writer marvels at how the Internet providers manage to keep their software and hardware systems attuned to the changing rules for services and fees to their users.

How you or I stand on the important issue of net neutrality likely depends on our political inclinations. Whatever they may be, let your Congressional representatives know what they are. Don't give them the freedom to ignore you in deference to lobbyists and other special interest groups.

Net Neutrality is too important to be left to the politicians.