



Network Neutrality

Preserving an open Internet will have far-reaching implications for consumers, online service providers, broadband network operators, and ultimately the nation's global competitiveness. To ensure the Internet remains open, Congress should pass network neutrality legislation that (1) preserves the ability of consumers to access and use lawful Internet sites, content, services, applications, and devices of their choice and (2) ensures that network operators will not unfairly or inequitably interfere with the ability of online service providers to deliver their products to consumers over the network operators' local facilities.

Microsoft approaches this issue as a provider of Internet applications, content, services, and devices that enable consumers to make use of broadband networks, as well as a partner to broadband providers who will be offering increasingly innovative video services. Given this perspective, we believe it is important for broadband network operators to continue to develop high-capacity networks, and we support legislative provisions that reduce regulatory barriers to entering the video distribution business and rationalize the regulation of existing providers. These provisions will send the right signal to the network operators to invest in the next-generation pipes that will distribute video and Internet content.

At the same time, it is vital that Congress preserve an environment in which companies at the "edge" of the Internet can continue to develop and make available innovative new content, services, applications, and devices. Consumers who demand and benefit from such innovations are able to access and use these products and services without interference. The Internet has been an engine for growth and innovation because the capability of the Internet was made available to all persons without favor. Preserving the ability of consumers to reach any Internet offering, and the ability of a new service provider operating at the "edge" to reach any consumer without seeking permission, will provide the right incentives for Internet companies to continue to invest, innovate, and compete in the marketplace – to the benefit of everyone. Failure to preserve this environment puts at risk the United States' global leadership in Internet-related businesses.

To preserve the openness of the Internet, legislation must do more than the House Commerce Committee's COPE bill. That bill seeks to preserve consumers' ability to access the Internet content, applications, services and devices of their choosing. However, it does not ensure the Internet will remain open and innovative, because it fails to address the potential for broadband providers to use their control of Internet access "pipes" to indirectly frustrate content and service providers' ability to bring their innovations directly to consumers.

A balanced, comprehensive, and thoughtful approach to the current network neutrality debate is possible. Microsoft looks forward to working with Congress and other stakeholders to achieve that goal. The right balance will protect and promote investments in broadband infrastructure, encourage the development of innovative Internet products, and ensure the delivery of adequate and affordable services to end-users.

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