

FCC's repeal of net neutrality protections not done deal, could well end up in court

The Federal Communications Commission's repeal of net neutrality protections was to become effective in late April. That doesn't mean the matter is settled, however. It's very likely the issue could end up being decided in court, or by legislation.

Ajit Pai, FCC chairman, framed net neutrality repeal as getting the government to "stop micromanaging the internet."

The telecom industry supported the repeal, claiming regulations threatened broadband investments and innovation. Technology companies and consumer advocacy groups have protested the repeal, arguing it could end the internet.

Net neutrality rules were approved by the FCC in 2015. The intention was to keep the internet open and fair.

Under the rules, internet service providers are required to treat all online content the same. They can't deliberately

speed up or slow down traffic from specific websites or apps, nor can they put their own content at an advantage over rivals.

To take a classic example, this means an ISP can't just choose to slow down a service like Netflix to make its own streaming video service more competitive, nor can it try to squeeze a content provider to pay more money to be part of a so-called internet fast lane.

As Michael Cheah, general counsel at video site Vimeo, told CNN Money: the point of the rules is "allowing consumers to pick the winners and losers and not having the cable companies make those decisions for them."

Both sides agree the internet is increasingly central to our lives. Any change to how it's regulated is a hot button issue.

"Everyone uses the internet and everyone uses tech platforms," Michelle Connolly, a former FCC official who supports Pai, told CNN

Money. "So issues that are coming up right now, people are seeing from a very personal perspective."

The FCC is disposing of rules barring internet providers from blocking or slowing down access to online content. The FCC would also eliminate a rule barring providers from prioritizing their own content. In the absence of a firm ban on these actions, providers will be required to publicly disclose any instance of blocking, throttling or paid prioritization. It will then be evaluated based on whether or not the activity is anti-competitive.

As part of this shift, oversight of internet protections will shift from the FCC to the Federal Trade Commission.

Maureen K. Ohlhausen, the acting head of the FTC, said that the agency is "committed to ensuring that Internet service providers live up to the promises they make to consumers."

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- Repeal of net neutrality was to have gone into effect in late April. However, the matter may not be settled.
- Putting a halt to micromanaging of the Internet was primary aim of repeal.
- Telecom industry generally supported net neutrality regulations repeal.
- With the Internet increasingly central to everyday life, changes in how it is regulated become hot button issues.
- Original intent of rules was to keep the Internet open and fair.
- Oversight of internet protections will shift from the FCC to the Federal Trade Commission.



With tax time just past, beware of phone IRS scams

Telephone scams from fake numbers seem to come in never ending cycles. With tax season recently completed, residents should be alert to potential IRS scams where callers claim individuals owe back taxes that must be paid immediately.

Callers pose as employees of the IRS, and prey upon people's inclination to do the right thing when in doubt.

Area law enforcement advises to never put cash on iTunes cards or other types of gift cards to pay back taxes, settle debts, pay bills, or pay for merchandise, and don't wire money, provide your debit or credit card information, or provide personal information to an unverified source.

Be aware, the IRS does

not call to demand payment of back taxes over the phone. In the unhappy event that you owe taxes, the IRS will send a letter. If in doubt, you can call the IRS at 1-800-829-1040. Any attempted scam involving the IRS can be reported to the Federal Trade Commission at www.ic3.org.

Similarly, Xcel Energy sends a letter in the U.S. Mail prior to power being shut off, and offers a number of ways for paying bills. You should be suspicious if a caller claiming to represent the utility asks for payment with pre-paid debit cards or Green Dot cards. Customers can check their account with Xcel or report a scam by calling the Xcel Business Solutions Center at 1-800-481-4700.

Area law enforcement reports that scammers rep-

resenting themselves as Microsoft representatives may call or email attempting to dupe people into installing software that can capture vital data such as banking names and passwords, or they may even try to gain access to an individual's computer remotely. Some scammers

have tried to obtain credit card information, hoping to bill unsuspecting customers for fake services.

Computer users are reminded not to call any numbers that come up as error messages on their PC. Microsoft will never contact you over technical support.

Protect your passwords

Are your passwords secure? It's a serious matter to consider.

There's widespread use of websites for banking, shopping, sharing photos, accessing medical records and lots more personal information. All of those websites we use come with a long and sometimes confusing list of passwords to access them.

The Pew Research Cen-

ter released a report in January that showed that 39% of adults online admit they have a hard time keeping track of all of their passwords. It's an understandable problem when passwords have proliferated so much.

Many Internet users confronted with the problem of keeping track resort to using common words for their passwords--or the same password for several accounts. It's a mistake that could put personal information at risk.

Here are some tips for managing your passwords from ConnectSafely.org, a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating users of connected technology about safety, privacy, and security:

- Make the password at least eight characters long.
- Don't use just one password.
- Create passwords that are easy to remember but hard for others to guess
- Include numbers, capital letters, and symbols.
- Consider using a password manager.

MORE

Awesome

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CAN MAKE THE INTERNET
EVEN MORE AWESOME!**

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