

# The FCC's net neutrality ruling: a cheat sheet

By [Joe Pompeo](#)

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The Federal Communications Commission on Tuesday passed a controversial set of regulations for governing the concept of net neutrality. Net neutrality advocates aim to prevent Internet providers from restricting access to websites and applications, in the name of ensuring equal online access. Here's a brief guide to the ruling.

**The details:** The FCC regulations bar Internet companies from blocking websites that offer services that compete with their own. The guidelines also prevent Internet providers from playing "favorites" by "[dividing delivery of Internet content into fast and slow lanes](#)." (To translate that goal into terms more familiar to consumers, it means that Comcast cannot make Netflix video stream slower than it should.) The FCC will also prohibit wireless Internet providers, such as AT&T and Verizon, from blocking websites, "but not from blocking applications or services [unless those applications directly compete with providers' voice and video products, like Skype](#)." The rules also "let broadband providers for the first time [charge more to companies that want faster service](#) for delivery of games, videos or other services."

**The milestone:** This marks the first time the federal government has been formally granted the authority to regulate Internet traffic.

**The architect:** The proposal was put forth by FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski, who said in a [statement](#) Tuesday morning: "Today, for the first time, we are adopting rules to preserve basic Internet values ... Given the importance of an open Internet to our economic future, given the potentially irreversible nature of some harmful practices, and given the competition issues among broadband providers, it is essential that the FCC fulfill its historic role as a cop on the



beat to ensure the vitality of our communications networks and to empower and protect consumers of those networks."

**The debate:** The FCC vote was split 3-2. Some Republican lawmakers are attacking the new rules — which are set to go into effect in early 2011, and will likely face legal and legislative challenges — [arguing they could discourage investment](#) in broadband networks and are unnecessary because slow traffic hasn't been an issue consumers have complained about. Net neutrality advocates on the left, meanwhile, say the regulations don't go far enough, and that they include loopholes that fall well short of advancing their ideal of an equal and open Web.

**The opinions:** As soon as the FCC announced the new rules, critics from the left, right and center all weighed in. Below is a sampling of the initial reactions:

"The good news is that the Federal Communications Commission has the power to issue regulations that protect net neutrality. The bad news is that draft regulations written by FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski don't do that at all. They're worse than nothing." —[Sen. Al Franken \(D-Minn.\)](#).

"The [U.S. government's censorious reaction](#) to *l'affaire WikiLeaks* should serve as counsel to people who would subject Internet service providers to even greater federal regulation. Regulated ISPs will be more compliant with government speech controls ... federal regulation of the Internet is a bad idea." —[Jim Harper of the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank](#).

"Milton Friedman had it right. Business is no friend of free markets, the Federal Communication Commission's ['net neutrality' ruling is more evidence of this](#). What the FCC should have done is called it a year, went on holiday and left the Internet alone." —[James Pethokoukis, Reuters BreakingViews columnist](#)

"Yes, it's a step forward — but hardly more than an incremental step beyond the Internet Policy Statement adopted by the previous Republican FCC. After such an enormous build up and tumultuous process, it is unsurprising that supporters of an open Internet are bitterly disappointed — particularly given the uncertainty over how the rules will be enforced." —[Harold Feld, legal director of Public Knowledge, a digital culture lobby](#)

"The Internet is an invaluable resource. It should be left alone." —[Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell \(R-Ky.\)](#)

"It's going to deter the bad behavior that I think was coming closer and closer." --[Media mogul Barry Diller](#)

(Screen grab of Sen. Franken testifying on net neutrality from YouTube via [UptakeVideo](#))

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