

January 14, 2010

Chairman Julius Genachowski
Commissioner Michael J. Copps
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn
Commissioner Meredith Attwell Baker
Commissioner Robert M. McDowell

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Preserving the Open Internet, GN Docket No. 09-191

Dear Chairman Genachowski & FCC Commissioners,

We, the undersigned, urge you to stand with us in support of Network Neutrality, the principle that protects choice of content and equal opportunity on the Internet. As women's rights advocates, we recognize the Internet's power as a means of social change, and we know that it's because of Network Neutrality that the Internet has helped us to advance equality for women.

Right now, Washington is in the midst of a critical debate over whether the Internet will continue to serve as a fundamental tool of engagement. In this debate, the Federal Communications Commission can be a strong voice on behalf of an open and neutral Internet, where everyone can play a part in our democracy.

Opponents have suggested that a Network Neutrality rule would give the government the power to "become the Web's traffic cop, shutting down free speech on the Internet." Nothing could be further from the truth. Without rules to prevent discrimination online, Internet service providers would be free to choose whose voices are more important and whose views will be heard. Network Neutrality promotes the widest possible dissemination of speech.

In contrast to mainstream media, where women's voices and perspectives are seldom heard, the Internet serves as a rich source of content by and for women. It's also the only open platform where women can express their own views and post their own material without permission from media gatekeepers. This ability to self-publish turns the mainstream media model, with its scarcity of women owners and women's viewpoints, on its head. Network Neutrality will ensure that women will continue to have a voice on the Internet.

It's a mistake to assume that the Internet is already a space where free speech is protected and ensured. Under current law, or the lack thereof, Internet service providers can block Web sites, content, services or applications they don't like. And they have, most notably when Comcast secretly interfered with users' ability to access popular video, photo and music-sharing applications; when AT&T censored a political speech by the band Pearl Jam's lead singer; and when Verizon blocked text messages between a pro-choice organization and its members.

And we are seeing more troubling behavior in the marketplace. Internet service providers have stated their intention to deploy discriminatory "deep packet inspection"

technology that would allow them to monitor and control the Internet. This dangerous technology would give network providers unprecedented power over Internet users, and it presents a serious threat to online privacy.

The FCC must take action now to affirmatively safeguard the free flow of information on the Web before it's too late.

Sincerely,

Association for Women's Rights in Development

Feminist Majority

Feminist Peace Network

Free Press

International Museum of Women

Media Equity Collaborative

MomsRising

National Organization for Women

SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective

What About Our Daughters?

Women, Action & the Media (WAM!)

Women's Action for New Directions

Women's Media Center

Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press

Women Who Tech