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All Americans Deserve Equal Rights Online

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It is said that 'the road to hell is paved with good intentions.' Nowhere can we find a more perfect modern example for this sentiment than in the cacophony of disparate calls by state and local regulators across the country each seeking to impose their own brand of 'net neutrality' regulations on consumers' internet experience.

Nearly 230 years ago this month, our country first ratified the Articles of Confederation, making Congress the sole governing body of our new national government. Eight years later came the U.S. Constitution, granting the federal government jurisdiction over commerce that moves across state lines. Next came the Bill of Rights, laying out basic inalienable rights.

The document, of course, was imperfect. And, thanks to the sacrifice of those who came before us, women's suffrage, civil rights and more were fought for and won at the national level. More progress remains necessary. But today, these principles help define who we are as a nation.

As the digital world of 1s and 0s becomes more and more central to our daily lives, there is near universal agreement in this country that all Americans should be connected to the opportunities of the internet and every American should have equal protections governing their online experience.

No one will get the years of time back that's been spent on a "net neutrality" debate long on circular, heated rhetoric and painfully short on honest, constructive dialogue. But there can be no question that the intensity the debate sparked among consumers was driven by the deeply held belief that an open internet is central to our civil society.

If we truly believe—as I do—that all Americans deserve an open internet, then we should fight together at the federal level for permanent, evenhanded protections that apply across the entire internet.

Protections should be no different for consumers in Minnesota or Iowa than they are in California or Florida. Equally true, consumers deserve consistent safeguards across the online world, whether engaging with Facebook, Goggle, AT&T or Comcast.

Policymakers at all levels of government should be praised for wanting to do everything they can to encourage innovation and broadband-centric opportunities in their communities. And, there are plenty of constructive actions they can take, chief among them encouraging the deployment and expansion of next-generation networks. Yet nothing could be more counter to the collective cause than everyone—no matter how well meaning—writing their own set of rules for how the global internet should operate in their neck of the woods.

For almost the entirety of the internet's history, there has been strong bipartisan consensus that this was a powerful and unique tool for our country and its place in the world—one that has thrived under a light-touch, federal regulatory framework, while being championed as a formidable tool of consumer empowerment, economic growth and U.S. competitiveness. That's why FCC chairmen from Tom Wheeler to Ajit Pai included state preemption language in their orders to avoid a piecemeal, patchwork approach to the future of our internet.

This is a moment to stand up for these principles and their importance to our economy and for the innovation it's making possible in virtually every aspect of our lives today.

Broadband providers have worked hard over the past 20 years to deploy ever more sophisticated, faster and higher-capacity networks, and uphold net neutrality protections for all. To continue this important work, there is no question we will aggressively challenge state or municipal attempts to fracture the federal regulatory structure that made all this progress possible.

We also will continue to work with Congress to enact one consistent set of national and permanent consumer protections. All Americans deserve equal rights online. Standing up for them means not merely saying no to state-level regulation, but *hell* no to the idea of dismantling what must be a united and connected future.

