

# PROTECT THE NEUTRALITY OF THE INTERNET

By Carol Richards

When I learned that the League of Women Voters of Southeastern Connecticut would be considering the issue of Net Neutrality, I felt confused and baffled. Is this about computers and the Internet? If so, what's the problem? If there is a problem, how much more important could it be than the urgency of such issues as immigration or health care reform that also have been considered by the League?

I came of age in the era of shorthand and manual typewriters. Like many in my generation, I felt overwhelmed and threatened by computer technology. When I could avoid it no longer, I swallowed my fears and admitted the computer into my life. In the process of learning to use the Internet, I realized I had discovered a miracle. Anything that puts the entire Library of Congress at my fingertips can be nothing less.

Part of this miracle has been the Internet's great service to democracy. By its openness and equal access, it is a neutral medium. Internet users have had complete control of the content they view and the applications they use.

Like most users I have taken net neutrality for granted. I've assumed I'll always be able to access any website I want, whenever I want, at the fastest speed I want.

Sadly, net neutrality is threatened. As a consequence of a 2005 decision by the Federal Communications Commission, big cable and telephone companies may be able to decide which websites, services and applications can go fast or go slow. Content providers who can't or won't pay fees (tolls) could see their sites slowed to a snail's pace, while big corporate payers could have their sites on the fast track of the information superhighway.

Everyone should be reminded that billions of taxpayers' dollars have been used to invent the Internet and run wires on public rights of way and through the airwaves when using wi-fi.

Speaking on the importance of Internet neutrality, Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the World Wide Web, said, according to a Google website on the subject, "The neutral communications medium is essential to our society. It is the basis of a fair competitive market economy. It is the basis of democracy, by which a community should decide what to do. It is the basis

of science, by which humankind should decide what is true. Let us protect the neutrality of the net."

There is still time for the public to protect net neutrality. The U.S. Congress is in the midst of considering new telecommunications laws. The U.S. House of Representatives passed its telecommunications bill, H.R.5252, in May, but without adequate net neutrality protections.

The fight continues as national proposals are shaped into a comprehensive legislation that would keep the net neutral. Call or write your state and congressional leaders and let them know the net needs to remain neutral.

For more information, check out the Internet Freedom Preservation Act on the Internet and go to the following helpful websites: [www.freepress.net](http://www.freepress.net) and [SavetheInternet.com](http://SavetheInternet.com).

*Carol Richards is the secretary of the League of Women Voters of Southeastern Connecticut. Irene Finkelstein, the local League's vice-president, contributed to this column. The League is a non-partisan political organization that is open to men and women and encourages active participation in government.*

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