

@Twitter: Net Neutrality For Thee, But Not For We

“Net Neutrality” is back in the news. On May 16, the US Senate voted 52-47 to undo the Federal Communication Commission’s undoing of the previous FCC’s doing of ... yes, it’s complicated. There are really only three important things to know:

First, Net Neutrality as implemented by the FCC in 2015 was a bad solution to a non-existent problem — a corporate welfare program for Big Data at one end and an Internet censorship enabling act at the other, pitched to the public as the fix for an Internet that wasn’t broken.

Secondly, when Net Neutrality ended in 2017, something else didn’t end — the world. The Internet continued (and continues) to hum right along, with or without Net Neutrality.

Thirdly, the Senate vote is a tale told by politicians, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. Repeal of the repeal of Net Neutrality won’t pass the US House of Representatives, and if it did President Trump wouldn’t sign it. It’s just grandstanding.

In other news, it seems that one of Net Neutrality’s big supporters — Twitter — doesn’t really support Net Neutrality. Or, rather, it supports Net Neutrality for everyone else, just not for itself.

Back in 2015, in a blog post titled “Why Twitter faves #NetNeutrality,” Twitter manager William Carty wrote: “[T]he Internet provides an almost frictionless experience for an individual to communicate with the world ... We need clear, enforceable, legally sustainable rules to ensure that the Internet remains open and continues to give everyone the power to create and share ideas and information instantly, without barriers. This is the heart of Twitter.”

Pretty standard Net Neutrality dogma: “Free and Open Internet.” No “fast lanes” for some people’s data while everyone else gets pushed into the “slow lane.”

But on May 16, Twitter announced, you guessed it, a fast lane for itself and a slow lane for third party apps. *The Verge* reports on coming changes to the company’s API which “prevent new tweets from streaming into an app in real time” and “delay some push notifications.”

Companies that use lots of bandwidth love the idea of Net Neutrality because it’s a subsidy.

Under Net Neutrality, Internet Service Providers aren’t allowed to charge bandwidth hogs extra for providing more, bigger, faster pipes for their data to travel down. Big Data doesn’t want to have to charge their advertisers (Twitter) or subscribers (Netflix) more to cover the

costs of those pipes. Net Neutrality shifts those costs, by law, to Big Telecom. In other words, to your cable bill.

When it comes to their own apps, though, this “no fast lane, no slow lane” stuff goes out the window in a hot second. They want to cash the corporate welfare checks, not write the corporate welfare checks.

But it’s in the best interest of regular users to do away with the corporate welfare checks altogether. Let’s just pay an extra buck or two for our Netflix accounts instead of trying to shift parts of our bandwidth bills to the little old lady next door who checks her email twice a week.