Net neutrality is the idea that there is an open, gateless internet for all users – there are no special treatments given to those who pay extra and no penalties to those who cannot pay this premium. One can turn on their computer, load up their preferred browser, and go to whichever site they want; news, sports, social media, shopping, and researching are all free option with net neutrality. With net neutrality gone, the user will have to pay different packaged premiums to access one or the other. Sports and shopping may not be in the same package and so unless they pay extra, they will not be able to access them. What will be covered is the history of net neutrality, issues that have arisen, crimes committed by major tech companies, the future of net neutrality, and what can be done to preserve net neutrality along with the best processes of doing so.

In 1996, the Telecommunication Act was implemented as an amendment to the Telecommunication Act of 1934 and was signed by former president Bill Clinton. This implemented the internet into the act, and in return revised a few other things (S.652). This was then amended in 2006, which now claims that companies must “support universal service…in rural, insular, and high-cost areas” (H.R.5252, Title II). Meaning that according to FCC’s (Federal Communication Commission) Telecommunication Act of 2006 Title II: ISPs (Internet Service Providers, such as Comcast, AT&T, and Verizon) cannot throttle (slow down) internet access to anyone and they must support universal service. Issues rose when ISPs began to not follow Title II rules. Later down the road, in 2015, there was support in the Senate for net neutrality to be abolished and to return to Title I, which did not specify if ISPs can throttle based on preferences. This was shut down and many thought that would be end of it. However, FCC chairman, Ajit Pai, appointed in January of 2017 by President Donald Trump believes that the attempt in 2015 should not be the end of the discussion. In context about a revisit to internet regulation; Pai’s thoughts on net neutrality is that he aims to “fire up the weed whacker and remove those rules” (NPR), and return to the more lenient rules with less government over watch of the internet of Title I. On December 14th, 2017 the FCC will vote whether to ab1olish net neutrality.

There have been reports of Verizon being caught throttling Netflix streaming. When streaming there is what is known as Mbps (megabits per second), which is a measurement of download and upload speed. There was one Verizon customer paying for 75 Mbps service, when the user was reportedly only seeing Netflix streaming at 375 Kbps (kilobits per second). Frustrated, the user switched to a VPN (virtual private network), this allowed him a roundabout way to access internet from a different server. Once the user switched, the reported 3 Mbps, the maximum Netflix streams at (ExtremeTech). This was a clear, criminal violation of the FCC’s Title II, prohibiting throttling to anyone and does not support universal service. Comcast was caught throttling in 2007 and 2008; they were caught throttling a website called BitTorrent, a site for torrents (a type of file, often associated with illegal downloads). Federal regulators voted 3-2 on August 15th, 2008 that the throttling of BitTorrent virtual traffic was illegal (CNET). While illegal downloads are not recommended or an upstanding thing to do, it is not Comcast’s responsibility or legal obligation to throttle internet speeds to any website. No fine was faced for Comcast, the punishment they received was a cease and desist, disclose the details of how they throttled to the FCC, submit a compliance plan on how it will stop these illegal practices, and disclose to customers that the new practices will be put in place (CNET). This is not much of a punishment for such a giant company. It can hardly be considered a slap on the wrist – at most it is a finger wag and a “hey, stop that” for being voted in direct violation of Title II. Angry customers did later take class-action lawsuits against them for being in violation of their terms and conditions, but that is between the company and its users. Another example of deliberate throttling was AT&T throttling FaceTime to users of AT&T’s mobile data on a previous Apple iOS. When confronted about the issue that stood, they claim that the FCC ruling is for installed apps to the phone that carriers cannot throttle. Many claim that this was why AT&T had had FaceTime preinstalled on all their phones. AT&T claims that it did throttle FaceTime so that its other services can also be used. While inherently, there is no issue with wanting to provide service for all the services it offers; if so many people are using FaceTime, it needs to either build more infrastructure or open more virtual roadways to allow more data to flow freely despite the heavy bandwidth of FaceTime usage. Throttling is not the legal or correct way to go about it.

Comcast, Verizon, and AT&T; these three main service providers have all been caught throttling. With the repeal of net neutrality, born in the Obama era, these companies would have direct control over which sites the people have access to and how fast it goes for them. Those who can afford it will have the “fast lane” and those who are impoverished will not be able afford this and will spent a considerable amount more time waiting for sites to load, if they can even afford to see that site. The ability to share ideas with those in your community and all around the world is in danger. There are a few different options one has to attempt to stop Pai from repealing net neutrality this upcoming December 14th.

The options include: calling your state congressional district representative, emailing them, writing a letter, and protesting. The most popular method as of late has been calling one’s state representative. Activating to the representatives will allow them to voice their opinion to those higher, reaching Ajit Pai and his cohorts. Calling is important because it can show one’s tone of voice and the frustration in it about the topic at hand, namely net neutrality. If you by some miracle get a hold of your representative, you and the representative can hold a conversation about the topic and both have light shed on the situation and what both parties can do have their voices heard. The negative of calling is that the representative may not have time in their busy schedule to talk with the caller. Even if they do, often the caller gets transferred to one of the representative’s representative who will note the caller’s concern and hopefully pass it along to the state representative. The other option is email, which is the one that I chose. Emails are direct and instant. In an email and in my example that I wrote, it is important to address the formality of the situation by addressing the reader accordingly. It is also important to keep it short, professional, and included proper grammar. I unfortunately do not have the time in my schedule to go to my district representative’s (Reichert) office and attempt to speak with him or someone in his place – which would be my personally preferred method. The disadvantages of email are my concern and the one I fear is that it was either ignored or filtered out. District representatives are likely flooded with opinions on net neutrality and so to avoid the hassle, representatives may just filter out key words. Another option would be a hand-written letter (which still exists!); this option can be fun for both parties as they are rare these days. Per their rarity, it is more likely to be more personal and possibly get attention due to its rarity. The down side is that hand-written letters are very slow. The other option is a bit more intense than the others and that is to protest. Not to be confused with rioting, protesting attracts the most attention to both the representative and the public. While this is something that can be done alone, it is more affective with a group of others with some signs. Some major incentives to do this could be that, again, it is very noticeable. It also can show the tone and emotion of those protesting and just how frustrated the people are about the situation. There are some downsides, however; such as the negative connotation associated with protests, a common example of an often heard phras is “don’t they have jobs to be at?”, which suggests that people who actively voice their opinion are losers – which is far from the truth.

These ISP companies are corrupt and are not providing the service they are legally bound to serve. They will skirt the law and screw the people they serve for money. They have proven that they are not to be trusted to serve the public and the law and will not stop reaching for the next dollar. To put these companies in control of the internet would be an offense to international communication and to how hard so many have worked to get their sites where they are. It would be an offense to the mom and pop shops who paid to have their site seen by the community whose community will not pay the extra amount to visit their site. It no longer is about protecting the silly cat videos, it is about protecting the free speech web.

Hruska, Joel. “Verizon Caught Throttling Netflix Traffic Even after Its Pays for More Bandwidth.” ExtremeTech, 20 July 2014.

McCullagh, Declan. “FCC Formally Rules Comcast's Throttling of BitTorrent Was Illegal.” CNET, 1 Aug. 2008.

Selyukh, Alina. “Trump's Telecom Chief Is Ajit Pai, Critic Of Net Neutrality Rules.” NPR, NPR, 23 Jan. 2017.

United States, Congress, Cong. Senate, Senate - Commerce, Science, and Transportation, and Larry Presler. 104ADAD. 104th Congress, 23rd session, bill S.652.

United States, Congress, Cong. Senate, Senate - Commerce, Science, and Transportation, and Joe Barton. 109ADAD. 109th Congress, 355th session, bill H.R.5252.