

INTERNET RULES: FCC should stay out

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The Federal Communications Commission once again has the Internet in its sights. And once again, the FCC needs to be stopped.

Julius Genachowski, FCC chairman, has announced that the commission will take up a new strategy for regulating the Internet at its Dec. 21 meeting. New or not, the FCC is pushing what is known as "net neutrality," rules that forbid Internet service providers from blocking lawful content.

The fear this regulation seeks to find off is that ISPs that are also content providers might seek an advantage for their own material by blocking material from other content providers, thus blocking the freedom of the Internet.

If this were indeed a problem, then it might be time for the FCC to step in. But it isn't and most likely won't ever become one. Consumers like open access and if that access becomes less open, it is far more than likely that consumers would simply switch ISPs. It is how the free-market works.

But the biggest concern is that the FCC technically doesn't have the statutory authority to regulate the Internet in this way. A federal appeals court confirmed that ruling in April. Congress also stymied a previous attempt by the FCC to gain more control over the Internet.

The current proposal by the FCC is certainly less invasive than previous attempts. But if approved, it would be the crack in the door the FCC has been seeking to control what is and should be a free enterprise. Just one crack could easily lead to rate regulation, detailed mandates and perhaps even censorship. And certainly would lead to drawn-out court battles that could deter further development of the full potential of the Internet.

The FCC should drop this proposal. Once again.