

# Opinion | Donald Trump's Multi-Pronged Attack on the Internet

[www.nytimes.com/2017/04/17/opinion/donald-trumps-multi-pronged-attack-on-the-internet.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/17/opinion/donald-trumps-multi-pronged-attack-on-the-internet.html)

Crawford:

If there's one thing that brings Americans together, it's **our hatred** of the giant companies that sell us high-speed data services. Consumers routinely give Comcast, Charter (now Spectrum), Verizon, CenturyLink and AT&T basement-level scores for customer satisfaction. ...



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Everyone doesn't hate their ISPs, which also compete with each other. Verizon and AT&T both scored high in various independent [consumer satisfaction surveys](#) of ISPs.

Crawford:

By and large, we don't: **These five companies account for over 80 percent of wired subscriptions and have almost total power in their territories.** According to the Federal Communications Commission, nearly 75 percent of Americans have at most one choice for high-speed data.



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Most Americans ([98 percent](#)) also have high-speed access through wireless broadband. And don't forget, the four national wireless carriers will also soon start rolling out [next-generation 5G services](#).

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Actually 38 percent of Americans have the choice of at least two wired high-speed internet providers, if you define high-speed the way the FCC does [here](#). That figure goes up to 44 percent if you live in an urban area.

Crawford:

It's about to get worse: President Trump's F.C.C., under the leadership of its [fiercely deregulatory](#) chairman, Ajit Pai, wants to let these companies become even more powerful by letting them do whatever they want and allowing them to merge with one another.



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FCC Chairman Ajit Pai has said he wants to eliminate rules and red tape that make it harder for providers to ensure all Americans - especially in rural areas - have access to high-speed service. (See: [gigabit opportunity zones](#).)

Crawford:

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The FCC doesn't let companies do anything they want. When it comes to industry consolidation, another agency might have something to say about that. (See [Justice Department](#) )

Crawford:

Mr. Pai has already pushed Congress to erase rules that would have constrained these companies from using and selling our sensitive online information. And he is getting ready to wipe out the classification of high-speed data services as a utility — even though, without this legal label, the F.C.C.'s authority to require these five companies to trea...



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Consumers didn't lose any privacy protections because those rules never went into effect. For more, see [here](#) and [here](#). The heads of the FTC and FCC have also pledged to work together on privacy protections.

Crawford:

...panies from using and selling our sensitive online information. And he is getting ready to wipe out the classification of high-speed data services as a utility — even though, without this legal label, the F.C.C.'s authority to require these five companies to treat their customers fairly will be fatally undermined.



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Companies have an obligation to treat customers fairly under both state and federal laws – as well as the law of common sense. For more than a decade, internet traffic growth exploded after the FCC deregulated internet lines and didn't try to regulate ISPs like an electricity or a gas company.

Crawford:

Perhaps the most immediate concern is the commission's so-called net neutrality rule, which treats internet providers as utilities and requires them to handle all data the same. The Big Five would love to get rid of this oversight, in part because they have become big players in providing content themselves, and Mr. Pai has put dismantling this structure at the top of his agenda.



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ISPs support net neutrality rules. They agree that consumers deserve no blocking, no throttling and more transparency. What ISPs don't like are regulations designed for old rotary telephone lines.

Crawford:

...rule, which treats internet providers as utilities and requires them to handle all data the same. The Big Five would love to get rid of this oversight, in part because they have become big players in **providing content themselves**, and Mr. Pai has put dismantling this structure at the top of his agenda.



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CenturyLink does not own media content.

Crawford:

There's nothing particularly complex about net neutrality. Try this thought experiment: **Would you want five companies owning every road in America and deciding who gets to travel where, at what price and speed?** Taken further, should Verizon be able to require that the "internet of things" include only its things?



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That sounds awful. We wouldn't like that either. Good thing that's not actually happening and couldn't actually happen. The internet doesn't work like that. (Also see: [antitrust](#).)

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Why would Verizon want to limit its customers' use of the Internet of Things? Customers could simply switch to one of the other three wireless carriers that offer service nationally. The universe of IoT devices is already big and only getting bigger.

Crawford:

Combining untrammelled power over distribution with must-have content gives a network operator both the incentive and the ability to use its network to benefit itself, whether or not its actions are good for the public. This has been true of communications networks from the telegraph forward, and we're seeing this same pattern play out with high-speed internet access.



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Is there any such thing as must-have content anymore? (See: [ESPN](#))

Crawford:

And the big picture is an even bigger problem. Other countries — South Korea, Sweden, **even China** — have made the widespread adoption of universal, inexpensive, high-speed data transmission a priority. They believe such access is necessary for their competitive positions on the global stage and un...



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China may have widespread adoption of broadband, but the people there hardly have **unfettered access** to the internet.

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Crawford:

And the big picture is an even bigger problem. Other countries — South Korea, Sweden, even China — have made the widespread adoption of universal, inexpensive, **high-speed data transmission a priority**. They believe such access is necessary for their competitive positions on the global stage and understand that markets, if left to their own devices, won't deliver this benefit to all citizens.



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The U.S. has made this a priority, too. See [here](#) [here](#) and [here](#).

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Having utility-style internet regulation isn't the panacea it's made out to be. See [here](#) and [here](#).

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Crawford:

The one bright light in this dismal story is the power of local authorities to encourage the construction of the communications equivalent of a street grid: fiber-optic networks running to every home and business. Hundreds of local governments, fed up with the existing network providers, have done exactly that.



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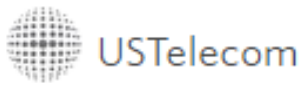
On the other side, some communities have discovered that it's hard to profitably build and operate high-speed internet networks. (See: [Google](#)). When municipal networks fail, taxpayers can be [on the hook](#).

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Crawford:

According to a recent Pew Research Center survey, most Americans approve of this kind of local government effort. But the halls of state legislatures swarm with telecom lobbyists, and, amazingly, about 20 states already bar municipalities from making this choice. Not surprisingly, Mr. Pai has vigorously opposed federal proposals to block those state laws.

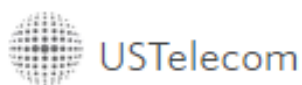


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Telecom companies support private-public partnerships to build broadband networks into areas which don't currently have service. Since municipalities control key elements for network building, such as rights of way or utility poles, there have been concerns they could have a competitive and financial advantage over private companies which have invested millions to get high-speed service to homes and businesses. When it comes to muni-broadband, we support regulatory parity.

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So did the [Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals](#).

Crawford:

We have always relied on private providers to sell basic telecommunications services, but they have historically been subject to public obligations and the watchful eye of a regulator looking ahead for abuses of power. No one could possibly think it is reasonable to leave a few companies operating in the centrally important, highly concentrated internet-access industry, free to do whatever they want. We dislike theses...



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Regulators (and lawmakers) usually focus on fixing problems that are hurting Americans or policies that are in the public interest. Crawford suggests they should look to fix problems that aren't currently there but could theoretically happen someday.

Crawford:

... regulator looking ahead for abuses of power. No one could possibly think it is reasonable to leave a few companies operating in the centrally important, highly concentrated internet-access industry, free to do whatever they want. We dislike these companies for good reasons.



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We believe that all Americans should have access to high-speed internet service. ISPs aren't arguing there should be no rules. They just don't think Title II regulation is the best path forward to ensure the future of our open, dynamic and growing internet.