

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 8, 2017

The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street Southwest
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

We are extremely concerned by your recently announced proposal to roll back critical consumer protections by dismantling the Federal Communications Commission's current net neutrality rules. This announcement comes mere weeks after President Trump and Congressional Republicans eliminated key online privacy protections for Americans. A free and open Internet is vital to ensuring a level playing field. By preventing Internet Service Providers (ISPs) from discriminating and blocking content, net neutrality helps provide the opportunity for every voice to be heard and every business, no matter how small or new, to thrive.

Net neutrality is particularly important to women, as it affords women-owned businesses and startups an even playing field when competing with more established brands and content. Between 2007 and 2016, while the total number of firms increased by 9 percent, the number of women-owned firms increased by 45 percent – meaning that over this period the number of women-owned firms grew at a rate fully five times the national average.¹ This growth mirrors the emergence of the Internet as a platform for economic growth. The online sales platform, Etsy, is another example of how women thrive under a free and open Internet. Under the current net neutrality regime, Etsy has empowered sellers in every state across the country, 87 percent of whom are women.²

An open Internet is also vital to providing a platform for elevating voices that are underrepresented or marginalized in traditional media, an experience many women in media know well. When turned away by traditional media outlets, many female creators have found a home and an audience for their stories on the open Internet. The vast array of online media platforms enabled by net neutrality give creators permission-less access to viewers, providing autonomy for women of every color and creed to tell rich, compelling stories in their own voices.

In addition, an open Internet has allowed women to organize and create positive change in their communities. This is exemplified by the National Women's March, which took place in January of this year. Hundreds of thousands of people participated in this March in the United States, as well as abroad, and the movement was largely generated through online activism. The Internet is a powerful tool for civic engagement, as well as a means for economic and social mobility. We cannot overstate the importance of a free and open Internet to our nation's economy, innovators, entrepreneurs, and consumers – including women and girls.

¹ <http://www.womenable.com/70/the-state-of-women-owned-businesses-in-the-u.s.-2016>

² https://extfiles.etsy.com/advocacy/Etsy_US_2017_SellerCensus.pdf

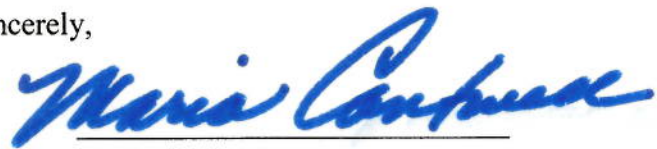
The net neutrality protections you seek to undo were adopted after a lengthy notice and comment period in which a record-setting 4 million people participated. These rules have withstood legal challenges, and despite claims from net neutrality opponents, investments in broadband have remained at record highs. We hope that you will listen to our constituents who oppose changing the free and open Internet to a “pay-to-play” system with Internet fast lanes and slow lanes. Rather than rolling back protections that help provide an essential platform to creators and innovators, we urge you to instead focus on finding ways to bring more American consumers online with faster and better quality broadband.

As champions of women and girls, the families they support, and their economic opportunities, we will continue to fight for Internet freedom and online fairness. Thank you for your immediate attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



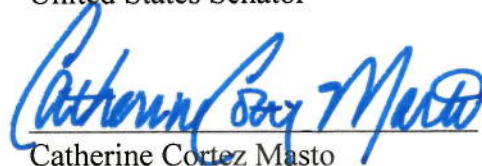
Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



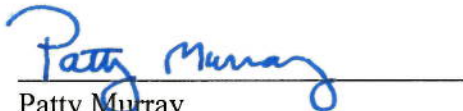
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Patty Murray
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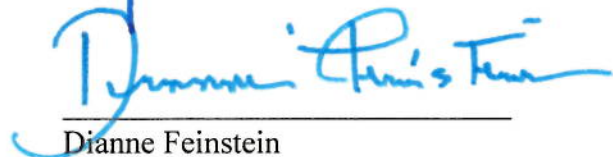
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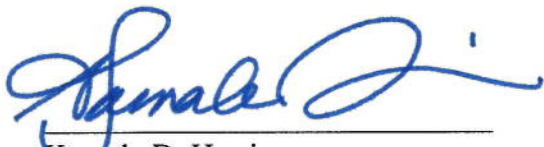
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