

FCC Leaders, Policy Analysts and Internet Scholars Debate Implications of Net Neutrality on Communities of Color

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Washington, DC – The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies convened a panel of technology, innovation, and economic development experts to explore the potential of open Internet principles to create jobs for and incentivize innovation among minorities and low income Americans. Federal Communications Commission Chairman Julius Genachowski delivered opening remarks at the *Open Internet, Innovation and Economic Development* forum, held on Wednesday, March 3, at the National Press Club.

“If you’re looking for a job today, you need to be online. You can’t get a first-rate education without broadband. You can’t effectively control your health care without broadband,” Chairman Genachowski stated. He was followed by Commission Members Michael Copps, Mignon Clyburn, and former Commission Chairman Michael Powell.

The concept of an open Internet and the rules governing network neutrality generally hold that those who operate access networks should place no restrictions on content, websites or platforms that can be accessed or used by Internet subscribers. Proponents of open Internet principles often differ over how much network traffic regulation should be allowed to ensure quality of service while still promoting innovation.

“An open Internet provides the widest possible encouragement of business activity without prejudice and without having to ask for permission,” said Susan Crawford, a professor at the University of Michigan Law School and former Special Assistant to the White House for Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy. “The open Internet is the greatest gift, especially to small businesses, minorities and low income Americans. Why would we give big companies the opportunity to risk these benefits?”

While panelists agreed that an open Internet was essential for spurring economic development and innovation, former FCC Chairman Powell cautioned that rules governing net neutrality may increase costs to consumers. “Regulators must be careful with disallowing certain business models,” Powell said, “Government intervening might result in changing the nature of the market itself, regardless of its intentions.”

Panelists like David Sutphen, co-chair of the Internet Innovation Alliance, asked that government focus on adoption first, especially among minorities and lower-income groups. “The National Broadband Plan is most important,” said Sutphen. “If we could get everyone who has been worried about open Internet principles focused on the digital literacy and value proposition gap, we’d go a long way towards solving the problem.”

The FCC will deliver a National Broadband Plan to Congress on March 17, aimed at assuring that all Americans have access to broadband.

Other panelists that supported net neutrality suggested that regulations are needed to ensure that more minorities will be able to create and consume content that will accelerate their use of the Internet.

In her closing remarks, Dr. Nicol Turner-Lee, Vice President and Director of the Media and Technology Institute, summarized the intent of the panel: "While many of our panelists agree that the concept of an open Internet should be an aspiration for our future Internet, all of them shared that we must proceed with caution to ensure that we don't deepen the digital and innovation divides that already exist."

The agenda for the forum centered around two key questions and included a dynamic panel of experts and thought leaders from a wide range of disciplines. The two panel topics and discussants were:

Panel One: *"How Can Open Internet Principles Impact Innovation Amongst Those Who Have Not Yet Adopted Broadband?"*

Sylvia Aguilera, Hispanic Technology and Telecommunications Partnership Susan Crawford, University of Michigan Law School William Lehr, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Craig Settles, Successful.com David Sutphen, Internet Innovation Alliance Christopher Yoo, University of Pennsylvania Law School

Panel Two: *"What Are the Economic Aspects of Open Internet Principles and How Should They Inform Policies Affecting Underserved Communities?"*

Michael Powell, Former FCC Chairman and Co-Chair, Broadband for America Robert Atkinson, Information Technology and Innovation Foundation Joseph S. Miller, Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies Simon Rosenberg, NDN Catherine Sandoval, Santa Clara Law School

The Media and Technology Policy Forum is part of an ongoing effort by the Joint Center to study, advise, and advocate for the development of public policy that ensures minorities and low income Americans are positioned to realize the full potential of the Internet. On February 25, the Joint Center released a groundbreaking report on National Minority Broadband Adoption. The report and a Webcast of the Open Internet forum are available at www.jointcenter.org.

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