



*Department of Communications*

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February 14, 2011

Dear Senators and Members of the House of Representatives:

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (“USCCB”) is committed to the concept that the Internet continue as it has developed, that is, as an open Internet. The Internet is an indispensable medium for Catholics – and others with principled values – to convey views on matters of public concern and religious teachings.<sup>1</sup> USCCB is concerned that Congress is contemplating eliminating the Federal Communications Commission’s authority to regulate how the companies controlling the infrastructure connecting people to the Internet will offer those connections. Without the FCC, the public has no effective recourse against those companies’ interference with accessibility to content, and there will be uncertainty about how and whether those companies can block, speed up or slow down Internet content. Since public interest, noncommercial (including religious) programming is a low priority for broadcasters and cable companies, the Internet is one of the few mediums available to churches and religious groups to communicate their messages and the values fundamental to the fabric of our communities.

Without protections to prohibit Internet providers from tampering with content delivery on the Internet, the fundamental attributes of the Internet, in which users have unfettered access to content and capacity to provide content to others, are jeopardized. Those protections have particular importance for individuals and organizations committed to religious principles who must rely on the Internet to convey information on matters of faith and on the services they provide to the public. The Internet was constructed as a unique medium without the editorial control functions of broadcast television, radio or cable television. The Internet is open to any speaker, commercial or noncommercial, whether or not the speech is connected financially to the company providing Internet access or whether it is popular or prophetic<sup>2</sup>. These characteristics make the Internet

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<sup>1</sup> Pope John Paul II, in one of his last public statements, recognized the value of the Internet for religion; “[n]ew technologies, in particular, create further opportunities for communication understood as a service to the pastoral government and organization of the Christian community. On clear example today is how the Internet not only provides resources for more information but habituates person to interactive communication.” (Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II, The Rapid Development to Those Responsible for Communications, Jan. 24, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> By supporting the goal of continuing the Internet as it has developed, that is, an “open” Internet, USCCB also supports the rights of parents to protect their children from pornography. The means of protecting children from such material is available to parents

critical to noncommercial religious speakers. Just as importantly, the Internet is increasingly the preferred method for the disenfranchised and vulnerable – the poor that the Church professes a fundamental preference toward – to access services, including educational and vocational opportunities to improve their lives and their children’s lives. It is immoral for for-profit organizations to banish these individuals and the institutions who serve them to a second-class status on the Internet.

His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, has warned against the

“distortion that occur[s] when the media industry becomes self-serving or solely profit-driven, losing the sense of accountability to the common good .... As a public service, social communication requires a spirit of cooperation and co-responsibility with vigorous accountability of the use of public resources and the performance of roles of public trust ..., including recourse to regulatory standards and other measures or structures designed to affect this goal.”

(Message of the Holy Father Benedict XVI for the 40<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day, The Media: A Network for Communication, Communion and Cooperation, Jan. 24, 2006).

Lastly, Pope Benedict XVI, recently stated, “Believers who bear witness to their most profound convictions greatly help prevent the web from becoming an instrument which ... allows those who are powerful to monopolize the opinions of others.” (Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the 45<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day, January 24, 2011).

USCCB urges Congress not to use the Congressional Review Act to overturn the FCC’s open Internet rules.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Helen Osman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Helen Osman  
Secretary of Communications

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without ceding it to companies providing Internet access, but removing the FCC’s authority over how companies provide Internet access creates uncertainty regarding these issues as well.