

March 1, 2011

The Honorable Fred Upton, Chairman
The Honorable Henry Waxman, Ranking Member
Committee on Energy & Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Greg Walden, Chairman
The Honorable Anna Eshoo, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Communications,
Technology & the Internet
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Upton, Ranking Member Waxman, Chairman Walden, and Ranking Member Eshoo:

As the world watches how the Internet has fueled pro-democratic uprisings across the Middle East, we, as leaders and communicators representing many diverse religious traditions, write to share our strong support for Internet freedom here at home. Specifically, we support the Federal Communication Commission's Open Internet rules and urge you to oppose any attempt to repeal these rules through the Congressional Review Act. These rules are important for underserved communities as well as the faith community.

The Internet is a critical tool for nonprofits and other institutions nationwide. In particular, institutional networks such as health care providers and institutions of higher learning, as well as social service agencies and community organizations use the Internet for communication, organizing, and learning. The Internet is an increasingly important tool that helps needy persons access the education and services they need to improve their lives and the lives of their families. In these difficult economic times, the Internet is an essential tool for those seeking to get back on their feet.

Not only are the open Internet rules important for those the faith community serves, it is important for the religious community itself. As the National Council of Churches Communications Commission recently stated, Internet communication is "vital" to faith groups to enable them to communicate with members, share religious and spiritual teachings, promote activities on-line, and engage people—particularly younger persons—in their ministries. As the resolution noted, "Faith communities have experienced uneven access to and coverage by mainstream media, and wish to keep open the opportunity to create their own material describing their faith traditions." Without robust open Internet protections, our essential connection to our members and the general public could be impaired. Communication is an essential element of religious freedom: we fear the day might come when religious individuals and institutions would have no recourse if we were prevented from sharing a forceful message or a call to activism using the Internet.

We are particularly concerned about the way Congress has chosen to address this issue. Members of Congress have already initiated action under the Congressional Review Act to eliminate all open Internet protections. Even for legislators who might not agree with every aspect of the FCC's new rules, the proposed use of the Review Act is extreme.

After many months of public hearings and reviewing thousands of public comments, the FCC last December sought to strike a balance between the needs of Internet providers and the general public. The agency's compromise rules were designed to guard against the most severe forms of abuse. The result

was a set of regulations that competing parties in the industry and public sector were able to support. A number of the new rules are critical to ensuring that all citizens can gain access to high speed Internet. Among other things, the new disclosure rules will make it easier for low-income families to choose an Internet provider at a price they can afford.

In addition to new policies, the rules adopted in December reestablished a number of non-controversial common-sense FCC policies, including protecting the right of an Internet user to access any lawful Internet content. *If the Review Act is used to void the FCC regulations, not only would it restrict the FCC's ability to protect Internet users in the future, it would also dismantle even these limited and essential protections put in place during the Bush Administration.*

We hope that the House and Senate will reject the use of the Congressional Review Act to overturn these important rules. We hope that Congress will instead work to preserve openness online, and to ensure that all people, particularly people of faith, are able to take full advantage of the power of the Internet.

Sincerely,

Andrea Cano
Chair, United Church of Christ, OC Inc.

Stated Clerk
Office of the General Assembly, PC(USA)

Rev. Robert Chase
Founding Director, Intersections International

Dr. Riess Potterveld
President, Pacific School of Religion

Jodi L. Deike
Director of Grassroots Advocacy and
Communication
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Rev. Eric C. Shafer
Senior Vice President, Odyssey Networks

Rev. J. Bennett Guess
United Church of Christ, Publishing, Identity,
and Communication

Mr. Nick Stuart
President & CEO, Odyssey Networks

Rev. Dr. Ken Brooker Langston
Director, Disciples Justice Action Network

Dr. Sayyid M. Syeed,
National Director, Office for Interfaith &
Community Alliances
Islamic Society of North America

Reverend Peter B. Panagore
First Radio Parish Church of America

Jerry Van Marter
Director, Presbyterian News Service,
Presbyterian Church
Chair, Communications Commission, National
Council of Churches

Wesley M. "Pat" Pattillo
Associate General Secretary for Justice &
Advocacy and Communication
National Council of Churches USA
Gradye Parsons

Linda Walter
Director, The AMS Agency
Seventh-day Adventist Church

**Resolution on Network Neutrality and Internet Freedom
by the Communication Commission, National Council of Churches USA**

Whereas, the people of our communities of faith rely heavily on the Internet as a means to communicate, share experiences, and build community;

Whereas, many of our faith communities, which also are nonprofit organizations with relatively small budgets, rely on the Internet as a public platform for free speech, equal opportunity, outreach to their members, and ministry and social service to local communities in need,

Whereas, faith communities have experienced uneven access to and coverage by the mainstream media, and wish to keep open the opportunity to create their own material describing their faith and traditions.

Whereas, as faith communicators, we see every day the vital connection between a free and fair communications system and the achievement of important social justice goals;

Whereas, if vital net neutrality protections are not assured by the FCC, large for-profit companies providing Internet services may have a commercial incentive to favor their own content over others and as a result could limit the activity and equal access of members of faith communities and other non-commercial organizations online;

Whereas, we believe the only way to carry out this mandate is for the FCC to ensure that the National Broadband Plan guarantee network neutrality applicable to all types of technology used by citizens to access Internet communications services, both wired and wireless, and equally applicable to the Internet services provided by telecommunications providers, cable providers, wireless mobile Internet access providers, and any other type of technological access to Internet services;

Whereas, network neutrality principles will allow the full diversity of voices to flourish and will be the principle that will make broadband access a meaningful self-empowerment tool driving achievement of these broad social goals;

Therefore, we jointly urge the Federal Communications Commission to take any and all action to adopt network neutrality, including reclassification of broadband services as a telecommunications service, as a fundamental and necessary part of the framework for all forms of broadband Internet service that will protect the freedom of every individual and group to see and hear and send any information they desire.

<http://www.ncccusa.org/news/101018netneutrality.html>

Since its founding in 1950, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA has been the leading force for ecumenical cooperation among Christians in the United States. The NCC's 36 member faith groups -- from a wide spectrum of Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, Evangelical, historic African American and Living Peace churches -- include 45 million persons in more than 100,000 local congregations in communities across the nation. NCC News contact: Philip E. Jenks, 212-870-2228 (office), 646-853-4212 (cell), pjenks@ncccusa.org