

**REMARKS OF  
COMMISSIONER JESSICA ROSENWORCEL  
“INTERNET FREEDOM NOW:  
THE FUTURE OF CIVIL RIGHTS DEPENDS ON NET NEUTRALITY”  
WASHINGTON, DC  
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Good afternoon. Thank you to Congressman Ellison, Congressman Khanna, and my colleague Commissioner Clyburn for your eloquent call to action. It is an intimidating honor to follow you here today.

I adore that you’ve called this gathering “Internet Freedom Now.” After all, it was more than half a century ago that Martin Luther King, Jr. stood only a few blocks from here and spoke of “the fierce urgency of now.” He was talking, of course, about civil rights.

I don’t know about you, but I feel a lot of fierce urgency these days. I feel that there are things that urgently need attention, that urgently need a voice, that urgently need a ruckus. I think net neutrality is one of those things.

Here’s why: Our Internet economy is the envy of the world. And what produced this dynamic engine of civic and commercial opportunity is a foundation of openness.

That openness is revolutionary. It means creating without permission, building community beyond geography, organizing without physical constraints, consuming content you want when and where you want it, and cultivating ideas not just around the corner but around the world.

I believe it is essential that we sustain this foundation of openness—and that is why I support net neutrality.

It took ten years of policymaking and three trips to court, but the Commission found a home for net neutrality in the Communications Act. Last year, in a 184-page opinion, the agency’s net neutrality policies were clearly and unequivocally upheld.

If only the story ended here.

Even though our net neutrality policies are now legally viable and wildly popular, the leadership at the Commission wants to revisit Internet openness. It has started a proceeding that tears at the foundation of net neutrality. It has proposed cutting the rules we have and instead offering our broadband providers the power to favor sites, content, and ideas; the power to discriminate with our traffic; and the power to become censors and gatekeepers for all that is online.

That’s troubling. Because I’m not ready to roll back the priorities we fought for. I’m not ready to give up on Internet openness. I’m not ready to retire the connectivity that has made so much online activism possible.

If you want an example, look no further than what happened during the last 14 days with the #MeToo movement. A decade ago, activist Tarana Burke created #MeToo to communicate with young women of color who survived sexual assault, so they would know they were not alone. Two weeks ago, it went viral as women and men used the hashtag to raise awareness about sexual assault and harassment.

But it did more than just raise awareness. It ignited a national dialogue to support survivors and to hold those responsible accountable. Women and men from all walks of life posted their experiences online. We heard from actresses and actors, Senators, work colleagues, school classmates, friends, and family members. Many of them were sharing their stories for the first time—taking comfort from a broader community who let them know that they are not alone, that the sear and shame of these experiences is more common than we think, and the need to fix what brought them about greater than ever.

By last week the #MeToo movement was everywhere. It reached 85 countries and resulted in postings, commentary, investigations—and real change.

This is the civil rights promise of our new digital square. Rolling back net neutrality will curb that square. It will provide our broadband providers with the power to decide what voices we amplify, which sites we visit, what connections we make, and what communities we create.

We can't let that happen.

I feel some fierce urgency about this—and I bet you do, too. Because if you believe, as I do, that the future belongs to the connected—then I hope you will lend your voice to this issue. It merits a fight, it deserves a ruckus, it needs all that you've got. So bring it—and help me show my colleagues just how important net neutrality is.

Thank you.