

Attachment—Additional Questions for the Record
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Hearing on
“Preserving an Open Internet for Consumers, Small Businesses, and Free Speech”
February 7, 2019

Ms. Ruth Livier, Actress, Writer, and UCLA Doctoral Student

The Honorable Jerry McNerney (D-CA)

- 1. In your written testimony you note different ways in which net neutrality empowers you as an entertainment professional, as a first-time activist, and a student researcher.**
 - a. Can you please outline some additional examples of how net neutrality protections have been important in your work and experience?**

Response: To achieve a more robust understanding of net neutrality’s impacts on our society, it is important to understand how it is operationalized at local and individual levels. Discussions about net neutrality tend to center around corporate concerns, so I am very grateful for your question, Mr. McNerney, because it focuses our attention on the effects of net neutrality on human beings. Thank you.

In the closing of my Feb. 7th testimony, I briefly listed some of the ways in which net neutrality protections impact human beings in real ways every single day: They affect our ability to participate in society, to make a living, to connect with our loved-ones, to earn an education, and to collaborate in pushing back against social inequities. As someone who comes from a low-income family, I have witnessed how mobility and money management—and by this, I mean making every penny count—are also impacted by net neutrality. A democratic digital environment should be a basic human right in our 21st century world because it is a basic human need.

Following, are some scenarios that illustrate how, from my experience, net neutrality protections come into play in our daily lives:

Many folks juggle multiple jobs just to stay afloat and, also, have the desire to expand their opportunities in life. If you are a single parent, work a fulltime, and are also trying to get yourself through school, having high-speed access to an open internet and tech literacy are essential. You should be able to access the web to do research, to choose from online schooling options, to access course materials and, via education, broaden your life-choices. And, you should be able to do this in the U.S. without it being a further financial burden and without you accessing an ISP-controlled internet where corporations decide what you can access and how you should engage with the internet. We should not be further burdened with an unjust, inadequate, corporate

controlled, and costly, digital space. Additionally, for those of us who live on a tight budget, price comparisons in an open online environment are crucial. An open internet is a basic human need and it should be protected for the sake of humans in situations like these.

For those who work and, also, want to start a small business on the side. Having access to an equal playing field is key. They need a digital environment with net neutrality protections to ensure that they are entering a democratic and truly competitive arena. If you are, for example, an independent fashion designer, creating a website, uploading your fashion line, finding customers, and marketing your business online are indispensable to your small business. Net neutrality is needed to ensure your startup has a fair chance to compete.

For low-income communities it is difficult and expensive to visit family and love-ones who don't live nearby. They should have access to a neutral internet that helps to bridge some of these geographical and mobility issues. For immigrant communities who have family members in other countries, technology may be crucial for their ability to stay in touch with their loved ones. This is also true of folks with disabilities. A protected neutral internet may be critical for them. AT&T's facetime blocking, which hurt deaf communities, is one clear example of the egregious abuse of power wielded by corporations that prioritize profits over the well-being of humans.¹ What else are these ISPs willing to do for profits?

For independent filmmakers, writers, actors, and other artists a neutral internet is essential if you want to create content to showcase your work and/or access job opportunities. When I created my web series, I was able to do a lot of my work with the editor via the neutral internet. This was very helpful because it kept costs down especially because it saved on travel costs and travel time. It also allowed me to work with a very talented editor who happened to live in a different city. We were able to upload the web series and folks were able to download and watch it at no extra cost – to either of us—we were not unjustly charged for 'fast-lanes'. This was key. The low-barriers to entry of the neutral internet were the only way we were able to complete production, distribute our content, and to find worldwide audiences. We, the public, are no longer just consumers, we are also producers of content and products, and creators of job opportunities.

These are some brief examples of how net neutrality protections have had significant impact on our lives. To be clear access is not enough. There is some digital divide rhetoric that is tainted by corporate interests. It is a false binary; a false-choice discourse fueled by ISPs. The democratizing potential of technology can only truly be realized in a digital environment that is protected from being hijacked by corporate interests. Digital democracy can only flourish if we assure that the well-being of human-beings are prioritized over profit margins.

Thank you.

¹ Jon Brodtkin, "AT&T Wants You to Forget That It Blocked FaceTime over Cellular in 2012," Ars Technica, December 1, 2017, <https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2017/12/att-says-it-never-blocked-apps-fails-to-mention-how-it-blocked-facetime/>.