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# We Don't Need New Gatekeepers: How Repealing Net Neutrality Hurts Women

SENATOR KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND, JESSICA ROSENWORCEL  
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PHOTOGRAPHED BY ROCKIE NOLAN.

*If you use the Internet, you could be impacted by this major policy debate.*

*Kirsten Gillibrand is a U.S. Senator from New York and Jessica Rosenworcel is a member of the U.S. Federal Communications Commission. The views expressed are their own.*

We are at a critical moment for net neutrality. This week, the Federal Communications Commission will vote on a proposal to wipe out rules that ensure the Internet is open to millions of us who use it every day.

Make no mistake, this is frightening news. Net neutrality makes it possible for all of us to go where we want and do what we want online. It means no matter who you are or where you live, you can connect, create, and seek content on the Internet without having to ask permission from your broadband provider. But if the FCC eliminates net neutrality, it will hand your broadband provider the power to block websites, slow down services, and censor content online. It will give them the go ahead to divide the Internet into fast and slow lanes, where you pay a premium just to access services you get for free today.

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For women, the rollback of net neutrality will hit especially hard. That's because women nationwide are using the power of the Internet to organize, share stories, and build businesses in droves. Consider that while one third of businesses in this country are owned by women, nearly 90 percent of sellers on the online marketplace [Etsy](#) are female. Many of these women work from home and most of them use this kind of platform to sell their wares for the first time. That's precisely the kind of opportunity the open Internet makes possible and it's what has led Etsy to say that it "would not exist without net neutrality."

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The impact of the open Internet on women-owned businesses, however, is bigger than just web-based marketplaces. Online businesses have exploded because it is now possible for anyone with goods or services to market them both around the corner and around the country. Across the economy, the number of women-owned businesses grew by 45 percent during the period from 2007 to 2016. During that same period, the total number of firms grew by only nine percent. It's apparent that women are driving the new digital economy—and net neutrality helps put them in control.

Just as net neutrality ensures that women have new opportunities to participate in commercial life, it also ensures that our voices get heard. Small online moments can quickly become movements. Connectivity can take activism viral, cause democratic ideas to spread, and new voices to emerge and change civic dialogue. At the start of this year, 4 million women and men came together to build a march and a movement. This effort made history—and it no doubt grew so large and so powerful because of the open Internet. No broadband provider has the power to shut this conversation off or redirect its energies elsewhere—but it would be much easier for them to try if net neutrality goes away.

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**WOMEN DON'T NEED NEW GATEKEEPERS ONLINE—OR ELSEWHERE.**

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Ten years ago, activist Tarana Burke created the #MeToo movement to communicate with young women of color who survived sexual assault, so they would know they were not alone. In the last few weeks, it has been everywhere 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 movement to support survivors and hold perpetrators accountable. So many people shared their stories for the first time and found a receptive community online. They amplified their own voices in a way the open Internet makes uniquely possible.