

Obama says new rules should keep 'open internet'

WASHINGTON DC, US: US President Barack Obama has voiced support for "free and open internet" rules that would ensure that no service is stuck in a "slow lane" without paying a fee...



In a statement issued yesterday, Obama said he wants the independent Federal Communications Commission to "implement the strongest possible rules to protect net neutrality," a principle that bars broadband providers from blocking or throttling certain services.

Obama's comment comes amid heated debate among online industry sectors as the FCC seeks to draft new rules to replace those struck down this year by a US appeals court, which said the agency lacked authority to regulate Internet service firms as it does telephone carriers.

"'Net neutrality' has been built into the fabric of the Internet since its creation - but it is also a principle that we cannot take for granted," Obama said in a statement.

"We cannot allow internet service providers to restrict the best access or to pick winners and losers in the online marketplace for services and ideas."

Obama said that while the FCC is an independent agency, he wants the regulatory body to maintain key principles of net neutrality.

He said the rules should ensure "no block" of any legal content, to ensure that an Internet firm does not block one service such as Netflix to promote a rival one.

No slow lane

Another key principle endorsed by Obama would prohibit "paid prioritisation" that would allow one service to get into a faster lane by paying extra.

"No service should be stuck in a 'slow lane' because it does not pay a fee," Obama said.

"That kind of gate keeping would undermine the level playing field essential to the internet's growth. So, as I have before, I am asking for an explicit ban on paid prioritisation and any other restriction that has a similar effect."

Obama also said he wants the rules to bar any "throttling" or slowing of content at the discretion of the service provider.

He also said he wants the same rules to apply to mobile broadband, which was not included in the earlier regulations.

To accomplish this, Obama said the rules should reclassify consumer broadband service as a public utility - a move that has been fiercely opposed by the companies that would be affected.

Obama's statement places him squarely in the camp of many consumer activists and online services and against industry sectors involved in Internet delivery.

The FCC is redrafting its rules after the court decision struck down its regulations in a case brought by US broadband giant Verizon.

Verizon and its allies have argued that the FCC lacks authority to interfere with their business, and that Congress never decided these companies were regulated utilities or "common carriers."

Others say that overturning the rule could give a handful of companies that dominate broadband the ability to control services, and limit innovative online services.

Gene Kimmelman, president of the consumer activist group Public Knowledge, hailed Obama's statement.

"Today the Obama Administration expanded its leadership to promote an open Internet by supporting the strongest tools to prevent blocking or throttling of Internet traffic, and by also supporting the strongest tools to deter fast lanes and prioritised traffic on the public's most essential communications platform of the 21st century," he said in a statement.

Source: AFP, via I-Net Bridge

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