

Net Neutrality

On April 6, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ruled in *Comcast v. FCC* that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) lacks the authority to require broadband providers to give equal treatment to all Internet traffic flowing over their networks. Or, in other words, Network (Net) Neutrality principles could not be enforced by FCC, in this case.

Individuals, like librarians, who work in the information trenches every day inherently understand why instilling these principles is critical to the future of the Internet; however, it is often challenging to communicate the importance of this highly complex issue to those who are unfamiliar with the concept. Yet, it is an issue that affects the day-to-day life of anyone who goes online.

“Simply” defined, Net Neutrality is a set of principles that would protect the free flow of information on the Internet by prohibiting manipulations of the speed at which information is transmitted to users.

Net Neutrality would also ensure that all types of content would receive equal treatment and that Internet Service Providers (ISP) would not be able to select which content was transmitted over their services. ALA believes the Internet faces major threats as a result of deregulation and has voiced support for FCC’s efforts to maintain an open Internet by codifying the principles of Network Neutrality, which ALA told the commission in a letter sent on March 1.

To view the letter, go to www.arl.org/bm~doc/ed-library-nn-principles-letter.pdf.

The outcome of the recent court case raises questions about FCC’s ability to protect the future of a free and open Internet. According to Corey Williams, associate director of the ALA’s Office of Government Relations, a future without Net Neutrality

could potentially become a world in which entertainment content would be routed in the information superhighway “fast lane,” bypassing education or other types of content—all unbeknownst to users.

Immediate reactions to the case by members of FCC and Congress indicate that both bodies believe that they have a stake in the matter. While some commissioners say the issue should be handled solely by FCC, other commissioners say it should be addressed by Congress.

Likewise, some members of Congress say FCC has the authority to enforce Net Neutrality; others in Congress say it falls under legislative jurisdiction.

Thus, ALA anticipates both regulatory and legislative activity in the coming months. Not surprisingly, Network Neutrality is one of the top ACRL Legislative Agenda items for 2010 (www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/issues/washingtonwatch/10agenda.cfm).

The ALA Washington Office will continue working closely with ACRL in planning and implementing strategic efforts to keep libraries fully engaged in this issue on the federal level. *zt*

Net Neutrality part of ACRL’s 2010 Legislative Agenda

Each year, the ACRL Government Relations Committee, in consultation with the ACRL Board of Directors and staff, formulates an ACRL Legislative Agenda. Drafted with input from member leaders, the legislative agenda is prioritized and includes objectives for legislative action at the national level on issues that may affect the welfare of academic and research libraries.

The recently adopted 2010 ACRL Legislative Agenda focuses on eight priorities and is online at www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/issues/washingtonwatch/10agenda.cfm.

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