

The network neutrality issue continued to break heavily, and passionately, along party lines in the House Energy & Commerce Committee even as Republican leaders were trying to collect bipartisan support.

While two Democrats have signed on to the effort to block the FCC's new network neutrality regs, the Democrats making opening statements in a full-committee markup on the resolution of disapproval hammered it hard.

The division continued to be over jobs and the economy, or at least that is how both sides were framing it. Republicans said the FCC's new regs would stifle innovation and investment and were regulatory overreach. Democrats said the resolution would stifle innovation and investment and were a Congressional power play, though one that would not make it to law in any event.

Rep. Ed Markey (D-Mass.) put it the harshest and, as usual, with the most memorable rhetoric.

With opening statements being heard Monday on both the EPA greenhouse gas regulation-targeted Energy Tax Prevention Act and the resolution (House Joint Resolution 37). Markey linked the two in his statement.

"There's a method to the Majority's legislative madness [in considering the two bills together], said Markey. "For the GOP, March Madness this afternoon is designed to make both the polluters and the broadband barons the big winners at the expense of our environment, our health, our economy and American consumers. In other words, today, House Republicans will take up legislation that would destroy the World Wide Web. And they'll also bring up a bill that will help destroy the WHOLE WIDE WORLD itself," he said. "They'll take aim at Google Earth - and set their sights on "Mother Earth." Janie Schakowski (D-Ill.) said the network neutrality resolution "undermines public safety and wellbeing." Some Democrats argue that blocking the FCC's net neutrality regs and preventing their reimposition in similar form would hamper the FCC's efforts to create an interoperable broadband public safety network. Republicans says the FCC would still have the authority to do that.

Rep. Lee Terry (R-Neb.), vice chair of the Communications Subcommittee, said that the net was open and thriving and that the resolution would keep it that way. He urged all the members to support it, but took no shots at the FCC.

But Republicans had some strong rhetoric of their own. Rep. Marsha Blackburn said the FCC's network neutrality rules a "fairness doctrine" for the Internet and "out-of-control overreach by a federal agency."

Like Markey, Committee Chairman Fred Upton (R-Mich.) also tied the two together. "Just as we must stop the EPA from pursuing its runaway regulatory agenda," he said. "We must also put a check on the Federal Communications Commission, which is similarly attempting to commandeer our Internet with unprecedented new regulations."

Rep. Phil Gingrey (R-Ga.) also suggested there was a link between the two bills. He said they were both designed to prevent federal agencies from damaging the economy. He also said it was time to "rein in the FCC under current leadership."

Rep. Mike Pompeo (R-Kan.) called the regulations the "height of arrogance" and the resolution an opportunity to restrain job-destroying agencies.

The hearing ended after those opening statements and will reconvene for a vote on both bills Tuesday morning (March 15) at 10 a.m.

The resolution passed subcommittee 15-8 last week on a straight party vote, but with three Dems choosing not to vote either way. Even if it passes the House, its chances of passing the Senate are slim to none, a point for committee Chairman Henry Waxman made in the meeting. "Instead of wasting precious legislative time on another partisan bill that is not going to become law," Waxman said, "we should be looking for areas in which we can accomplish something."

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