

The House took its first step toward overturning net neutrality rules after a marathon debate about the economic impact of the FCC regulations on Wednesday.

The Energy and Commerce telecom subcommittee voted to repeal the rules in a 15-8 party line vote.

"We have an open and thriving Internet thanks to our historical hands-off approach. The Internet works pretty well; it's the government that doesn't," said subcommittee Chairman Greg Walden (R-Ore.).

Republicans emphasized that they believe the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) exceeded its authority when it passed net neutrality regulations in December. They said the rules are unnecessary and will deter investment in broadband infrastructure.

Democrats issued an unwavering defense of the regulations, which they said provide certainty in the marketplace and are necessary to protect Internet openness.

"What this [anti-net neutrality] resolution will accomplish is clear -- it will stop consumers from having the basic protections of transparency and a choice in the applications and services available to them on the Internet," said Communications ranking member Rep. Anna Eshoo (Calif.).

Eshoo argued that the House has been infected with an anti-regulatory "virus" that is compelling it to attack even sensible and balanced rules.

Rep. Lee Terry (R-Neb.), vice chairman of the subcommittee, responded that "it isn't the flu. We're doing what the Constitution states we should be doing."

The Democrats quibbled with the GOP process, which uses the Congressional Review Act to "disapprove" of the rules. If the majority in both chambers approve the repeal, and Obama signs it, net neutrality would be eliminated from the books and the FCC would not be able to create similar rules.

Obama is likely to veto the repeal resolution if it were to clear the Senate, as he supported the FCC's action.

Rep. Edward Markey (D-Mass.) called the procedure "a momentous occasion for this committee" because CRA disapproval is so rarely invoked.

Net neutrality regulations also face a court challenge from Verizon and MetroPCS. Rep. John

Dingell (D-Mich.) indicated during the hearing that the court is the proper venue for repeal.

The Senate isn't expected to take up the issue until summer.

