

## **“Net Neutrality” A Bad Deal; Dominant Users Should Pay More So More Non-Users Can Afford Internet**

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From Dr. Art Thomas, senior manager of leadership at the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education, which champions the interests of America's historically and predominantly black colleges and universities:

Google is working fast to scan all the books in libraries across the nation and put them online, where anyone can search them easily by keyword.

Referring to scope of the project, Google executive Marissa Mayer recently called it the company's "moon shot." Indeed, there is no better example of the amazing way that knowledge is moving online and within reach of anyone who can afford an Internet connection.

Unfortunately, that doesn't mean everyone. Today, nearly 90 percent of homes have access to broadband Internet, but only 42 percent subscribe to broadband services at home. The statistics for minorities are starker: Only 14 percent of African Americans - and only 13 percent of Hispanics - subscribe to broadband Internet services. That means future generations of minorities are being left behind, missing out on an online experience that will be crucial to their future educational, occupational and social success.

But well-meaning activists are now pushing for regulations on the Internet that would actually raise the price of broadband access, effectively pulling the high-speed plug on minority and low-income youth. They are pushing for "net neutrality" legislation, which would block broadband service providers from charging large Internet companies like Google for carrying things like high-quality video into users' homes.

The activists believe these laws will protect freedom of speech on the Web. But freedom of speech is not what's at stake. This is about money. If they win, the losers will be minority and low-income youth.

Large Internet companies like Google and Yahoo make lots of money by sending millions of users huge amounts of information - many times the amount that you or I could send in a lifetime of e-mail. They pay to hook up to the Internet just like anyone, but they're ultimately making money through your Internet connection, because every time you look at a Google search page, you glance over several small advertisements.

Your “eyeballs” bring in billions in revenue for the search giant. So Google pays to hook up to the Internet on its end, but doesn’t pay to maintain or upgrade the network that delivers its information - and advertisements -- to everyday users, which is how the company makes its money.

Today’s Internet users usually see nothing wrong with this. Google pays and so do we, fair is fair. But a voice is being silenced - those who are offline. If Google paid its fair share for the information superhighway it uses to reach its customers, not only would everyone now online have to pay less, but more people could afford to subscribe to broadband Internet.

Imagine the benefit for democratic debate online if we included wider segments of society in the broadband bonanza. Never before in our history would minority and low-income people have a more powerful tool to educate and express themselves. Good kids in bad neighborhoods could find a world they only dreamed of waiting for them at the click of a mouse, with test preparation and college applications all online.

Net neutrality laws would block this reality, by freezing the Internet’s development at present conditions. If companies like Google that have benefited the most from the Internet’s riches were to pay their fair share, it could open up a wealth of opportunity for minority and low-income communities, putting the world and all its knowledge at their fingertips. That would be a moon shot worthy of celebration.