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Senate sends net neutrality bill to Governor for signature

HB 4155 seeks to protect the free speech rights of Oregonians

SALEM – The Oregon Senate voted to send a bill addressing Internet neutrality – perhaps one of the biggest free speech issues of our time – to Gov. Kate Brown for her signature.

HB 4155 – which passed the Senate on a 21-7 vote today – prohibits public bodies from contracting with broadband Internet access service providers that engage in paid prioritization, blocks lawful content or applications, or disadvantages lawful Internet content.

“This bill says that government entities – cities, counties and state agencies – cannot enter into a new contract with an Internet provider that does not subscribe to net neutrality and that they will practice net neutrality as they offer their services,” said Sen. Lee Beyer, D-Springfield, who carried the bill on the Senate floor. “It puts Oregon in a position with most of the other states to put pressure on Congress to do the right thing about net neutrality. We are looking to join seven states that already have enacted net neutrality, in addition to 26 other states currently considering net neutrality legislation. I think this is what most Oregonians want, to make sure they are not restricted in their ability to download a movie, play a game or do business on the Internet.”

The bill, which has more than 25 sponsors, requires state and local government agencies to only purchase broadband access from Internet providers in full compliance with net neutrality provisions. That means transparency in network management practices, full access to all websites and equal traffic speeds. The legislation puts the Public Utility Commission in position to determine whether or not state contractors are meeting net neutrality requirements.

Net neutrality protections, instituted by the Federal Communications Commission in 2015, provided consumers with assurances that Internet content would not be discriminated against, and that the flow of data would not be slowed. In November 2017, the FCC voted to undo the essential net neutrality provisions for consumers in Oregon and across the nation.

The state-level action is a strong message to the federal government that Oregon and other states want to see net neutrality enforced at the federal level.

The bill now goes to Gov. Kate Brown for her signature.

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