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The Skanner Newspaper, established in October 1975, is a weekly publication, published every Wednesday by IMM Publications Inc.

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The Skanner is a member of the National Newspaper Publishers Association and West Coast Black Publishers Association.

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Opinion

Why We Need Net Neutrality

When it comes to the Trump administration's record of hurting students in low-income schools, its senseless decision to pull the plug last year on net neutrality ranks among its most destructive.

Those students have far less access to broadband, and killing net neutrality marks a devastating setback for those children and their access to equal educational opportunities.

“Net neutrality is the principle that once you’ve paid your bill, you get to go where you want, how you want, on the Internet

Compounding the cruelty is the fact that Ajit Pai, the Trump-appointed chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, was wrong when he forecast that the death of net neutrality would



Ron Wyden
U.S. Senator
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unleash a wave of capital investment by Big Cable in its broadband network.

In fact, reports reveal that Comcast, Charter and Verizon all reduced capital expenditures in 2018.

Pai’s poor prediction only adds to the significant collateral damage wrought by Trump’s scheme to kill net neutrality, which provided pillars of protection for Americans on the internet.

Net neutrality is the principle that once you’ve paid your bill, you get to go where you want, how you want, on the Internet. In other words, your phone or cable company should not get the power to favor which Internet content a person can get access to by creating paid fast lanes online.

The ripples from this reversal are broad.

Children in poorer schools in Oregon, and nationwide, lose out when their libraries do not have the same internet speeds as libraries in wealthier schools. A start-up small

business in Portland may lack the resources to afford the top-notch Internet speeds it needs to grow its operation.

And families can now be charged more for their Netflix and Hulu subscriptions, music services on Spotify, and video game downloads on Steam, Xbox and Playstation.

“Children in poorer schools in Oregon, and nationwide, lose out when their libraries do not have the same internet speeds as libraries in wealthier schools

It didn’t have to be this way for net neutrality. And it doesn’t need to stay this way either.

The Senate last year passed a bipartisan resolution to overturn Trump’s anti-net

neutrality rule. But that bit of common-sense consumer protection died in the then-Republican House.

Now that my fellow Democrats are controlling the House, net neutrality advocates are in a much better position to correct the imbalances and pass good national net neutrality laws. (Happily, Oregonians and our representatives in Salem have already blazed that trail at the state level by enacting strong net neutrality protections into state law.)

As the first senator who introduced net neutrality legislation in the Senate more than a decade ago, I am proud to stand on the front lines of this year’s national fight for a solution that puts real enforceable net neutrality rules back on the books.

Everybody understands consumers must pay a fee to get access to the internet. But Big Cable shouldn’t get to rig the internet for the benefit only of those who can afford to pay more.

Instead, the question at the heart of the upcoming debate is, once consumers pay that fee, should they be allowed to go on the internet where they want, when they want, and how they want?

I believe the answer to that question is “Yes.”

There’s An Uprising Going on in the Sudan!

Over the last fifteen years, what we have mainly heard about the Sudan — what had been the largest nation-state in Africa — revolved around the secessionist movement in what is now known as the South Sudan, and the genocide being carried out by the Sudanese government against the people of the Darfur region in the western part of the country. We have heard stories of horror and murder, refugees, and systematic repression. Now we hear of revolution.

The Sudan was created by British colonialism as an amalgamation of regions that had had little to do with one another. After independence, the government—based in Khartoum—tended to be dominated by Arabized tribal groups from the northern part of the country. I use the term “Arabized” because their original ethnicity ranged, but over time they came to adopt the language and culture of Arabs.

Regional resentment exploded in two major wars in the southern part of the country, which ultimately led to the split-off of the South



Bill Fletcher Jr.
The Global African

Sudan. Separately, a combination of desert expansion and political opportunism drove the genocidal activities supported and orchestrated by the Khartoum government

“The Sudan was created by British colonialism as an amalgamation of regions that had had little to do with one another

against the people of the Darfur region.

Despite the fact that the people of Darfur are mainly Muslim, the Khartoum govern-

ment and their allies in the region have treated them as aliens and waged something that is equivalent to a race war against the population, something highly ironic since both populations are African.

In the midst of all of this, a deteriorating economic situation led to peaceful, popular protests against the Khartoum government, a government led by Omar Al-Bashir.

Al-Bashir gained power through a coup and has been solidly in control, despite international pressure, warrants for his arrest, and continuous turbulence in the country. He has received outside support, including from several Arab states but also economic arrangements from other countries. His hold on the Sudanese military has remained strong.

Yet the people revolted and their numbers increased over time. And these revolts, which began as protests against economic conditions and the rising price of fuel, exploded into larger demands against the government and, ultimately, demands for the resignation of Al-Bashir (and the dismantling of his dictator-

ship).

Al-Bashir has indicated little interest in living out his life in exiled retirement and has, instead, repressed the protests. The government has killed some protesters while others have been arrested and tortured. Yet the protests continued and grew. Labor unions have played a significant role and professional associations have taken the lead.

One of the most noteworthy features of this moment has been the fact that Al-Bashir’s efforts to play the Sudanese “race card” have failed miserably, at least so far. He suggested that if his government fell, the Darfurians would take over, a less than subtle appeal to Arab bias against the people of that region. Interestingly, that appears to have had little impact. Instead the protesters have replied to Al-Bashir: “We are all from Darfur!”

Bill Fletcher, Jr. is the former president of TransAfrica Forum. Follow him on Twitter, Facebook and www.billfletcherjr.com. He is the author of the new mystery *The Man Who Fell From the Sky*.