

Who Is Tom Wheeler And Why Is He Killing The Internet?

by [Rebecca Fishbein](#) in [News](#) on Apr 25, 2014 1:13 pm



President Barack Obama speaks while former telecom industry lobbyist and current FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler (R) roars with laughter at the White House last year. (Getty)

Now that net neutrality is [drooping at death's door](#), we're long overdue for a closer look at Tom Wheeler, who is currently the FCC chairman, before he was [a lobbyist for cellphone and cable companies](#). Here are some things to know:

- Wheeler, who was nominated by President Obama last May, lobbied Congress [to deregulate the cable industry](#) in the early 1980s.
- As the head of the Cellular Telecommunications & Internet Association from 1992 to 2004, he oversaw a number of efforts to keep the wireless industry from being hampered

with too many annoying FCC regulations.

- He also spent a number of years heading new technology start-ups, including the first company that offered [high speed data delivery](#) for home computers.
- He was inducted into the [Wireless Hall of Fame](#) (REAL THING) in 2003, and the [Cable Hall of Fame](#) (ALSO A REAL THING) in 2009. Nirvana and Lorde [did not perform at either ceremony](#).
- He's been described as a "sharp shooter" who will stick to his guns, for better or for worse. "I think that he stepped on the toes of just about every sector of industry on one thing or another," Andy Schwartzman, a public-interest advocate and law professor at Georgetown University, [told the Wall Street Journal](#). "His greatest asset is that he is comfortable in his own skin, and is not looking for his next job."
- Before getting appointed as chairman, he spent nearly a decade working as a managing director at [Core Capital Partners](#), a venture-capital firm that invests in small technology companies.
- He once [voiced support for a merger](#) between AT&T and T-Mobile, which was thankfully shot down by the Department of Justice.

Does it seem fishy that Obama picked someone who pushed industry deregulation to head the federal agency that regulates said industry? It does, doesn't it. When he was nominated, an insider told Reuters that, "All of the senators in the Commerce Committee know Tom as a lobbyist who funnels funds to them, not as a stand-up guy from a regulatory agency who is able to take heat." But it's probably worth pointing out that Wheeler managed to [drum up about \\$700,000 in campaign contributions](#) to both of Obama's presidential runs.

Rewriting rules regulating net neutrality has been on the FCC's agenda for a while now, and in January, the agency was given an opportunity to address it when a federal appeals court ruled that ISPs [could charge online companies more](#) to stream their content faster. Lobbyists for Big Cable and Communication started pushing the FCC to loosen [its hand on Internet regulation](#), and their efforts appear to have worked. This week, the FCC announced it will permit broadband companies to charge sites for premium pipeline service, effectively [creating an Internet fast-lane for the fat cat corporations](#), and leaving smaller sites that can't pay in the dust.

Wheeler has [argued this proposed ruling](#) doesn't violate the "Open Internet" laws that have kept the World Wide Web flowing so freely over the past few decades, and that broadband companies would be closely monitored to prevent "harmful conduct." [Right!](#)

The man who appointed Wheeler, by the way, once argued that he was a strong supporter of net neutrality. From [an Obama campaign speech in 2007](#): "What you've been seeing is some lobbying that says that the servers and the various portals through which you're getting information over the Internet should be able to be gatekeepers and to charge different rates to

different Web sites.... And that I think destroys one of the best things about the Internet—which is that there is this incredible equality there."

[Yeah, okay.](#)