

June 23, 2017

Congressman Don Beyer
U.S. House of Representatives
1119 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Beyer,

As the Executive Director of the non-profit organization [Free Our Internet](#), I'm writing concerning the town hall meeting that you are hosting in Arlington, VA on June 26th regarding "net neutrality." According to your press announcement of the event, former FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler and former FCC General Counsel Jonathan Sallet will be your guest speakers at the meeting.

As I'm sure you're aware, soon after leaving the FCC, Mr. Sallet joined one of Silicon Valley's largest lobbying and outside law firms Steptoe and Johnson as a partner. The law firm has received millions in lobbying fees from some of Silicon Valley's largest companies including Facebook, Netflix, Amazon and Google and their trade association, the Internet Association. Many of the firm's partners and lawyers have worked almost exclusively on legal and lobbying matters directly related to significant policy matters affecting these companies, including:

- Markham Erickson: Mr. Erickson currently represents Netflix on regulatory matters before the FCC including the net neutrality, video and broadband matters.¹ Mr. Erickson also has a long history of working on behalf of Google, both as a partner at the Holch & Erickson (later McGuinness & Holch) law firm and later as the Executive Director of the Google-created Open Internet Coalition. In addition, Mr. Erickson served as the general counsel of the Internet Association – a trade association founded by Google, Facebook, Amazon and eBay in 2012.²
- William Abrams: Mr. Abrams has served as counsel for Google in patent cases, including a Federal Circuit Court infringement case regarding software updates of the Chrome browser as well as patent infringement cases brought against the company over geolocation technology for mobile devices.³
- Stephen Davidson: As chair of Steptoe & Johnson's International Arbitration Group, Mr. Davidson has represented Google in litigation throughout the United States and abroad.⁴

¹ http://www.steptoelaw.com/professionals-Markham_Erickson.html

² http://www.steptoelaw.com/professionals-Markham_Erickson.html

³ http://www.steptoelaw.com/professionals-Bill_Abrams.html

⁴ http://www.steptoelaw.com/professionals-Steve_Davidson.html

Steptoe and Johnson has a long history of representing some of Silicon Valley's most powerful monopolies in the so-called net neutrality matter – the subject of your June 26th town hall meeting: Steptoe and Johnson partner Pantelis Michalopoulos represented Netflix in a U.S. Court of Appeals case brought by the company to uphold rules that benefit the company, and the firm also filed as an intervenor on behalf of Netflix in defending the rules.⁵

As we're sure you're aware, Amazon, Alphabet (Google's parent company), and Facebook today are three of the five largest companies in the world by market cap. Silicon Valley monopolies are facing a litany of legal, anti-consumer and antitrust challenges around the globe: Google is facing record fines in Europe for anticompetitive behavior, while Amazon's recent \$13.7 billion purchase of Whole Foods raises antitrust concerns here in the U.S. Notably, Silicon Valley's own Congressman Ro Khanna remarked just last week that the Amazon/Whole Foods deal will likely decimate local grocers in his district.⁶

As importantly, companies like Google and Facebook have come under increased scrutiny for arbitrarily banning and censoring users, manipulating content and using their unprecedented corporate power and influence over our nation's independent media as well: Amazon owner Jeff Bezos' purchase of the *Washington Post* in 2013 for instance has raised extremely troubling questions about how Silicon Valley monopoly power is corrupting our free press.

Free Our Internet -- and we suspect many of your constituents – believes that the unchecked corporate greed of Silicon Valley behemoths has reached an inflection point: Left unchecked, the monopoly power of Google, Facebook and Amazon alone threaten to destroy a truly free and open Internet, and we are already seeing incidents of content discrimination, prioritization and blocking from these gatekeepers.

In sum, we believe that having Mr. Sallet – a paid mouthpiece for the very corporations actively lobbying to keep the existing net neutrality rules they helped to craft under President Obama⁷- participate in your town hall meeting raises questions about whether you are truly representing the interests of your constituents or the interests of rapacious Silicon Valley monopolies. The ethical questions raised by his participation and the lack of transparency regarding his financial conflict of interest on the very topic of the town hall, should be of concern to your constituents.

We feel you have a duty and responsibility to the public to disclose that Mr. Sallet is hardly an unbiased observer of Internet policy issues, but rather a partner at a

⁵ <http://adage.com/article/digital/court-upholds-obama-s-net-neutrality-rules-win-google/304501/>

⁶ <http://www.cnbc.com/2017/06/19/amazon-whole-foods-deal-hurts-grocers-in-my-district-says-ro-khanna.html>

⁷ <http://thehill.com/business-a-lobbying/233626-fcc-dem-wants-last-minute-changes-to-net-neutrality-rules>

lobbying firm representing some of the most powerful companies in the world today – companies that stand to benefit greatly from rules that protect their monopoly status, and allow them to escape any requirements to abide by the very principles of neutrality they say they support.

Sincerely,

Christie Lee McNally
Executive Director, Free Our Internet
www.freeourinternet.org