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Subject: FCC Commissioner: Feds May Come for Drudge  
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Federal Communications Commission (FCC) member Ajit Pai said over the weekend that he foresees a future in which federal regulators will seek to regulate websites based on political content, using the power of the FCC or Federal Elections Commission (FEC). He also revealed that his opposition to "net neutrality" regulations had resulted in personal harassment and threats to his family.

Speaking on a panel at the annual "Right Online" conference in Washington, D.C., on Saturday, Pai told audience members, "I can tell you it has not been an easy couple of months personally. My address has been publicly released. My wife's name, my kids' names, my kids' birthdays, my phone number, all kinds of threats [have come] online."

Pai, one of two Republicans on the five-member FCC, has been an outspoken critic of net neutrality regulations passed by the agency on Feb. 26. The rules, which are set to take effect on June 12, reclassify Internet providers as utilities and command them not to block or "throttle" online traffic.

However, Pai said it was only the beginning. In the future, he said, "I could easily see this migrating over to the direction of content... What you're seeing now is an impulse not just to regulate the roads over which traffic goes, but the traffic itself."

Continuing, he said, "It is conceivable to me to see the government saying, 'We think the Drudge Report is having a disproportionate effect on our political discourse. He doesn't have to file anything with the FEC. The FCC doesn't have the ability to regulate anything he says, and we want to start tamping down on websites like that.'"

In February, Pai co-authored an editorial with former FEC Chairman Lee Goodman that warned of efforts by those agencies to regulate content online.

"Is it unthinkable that some government agency would say the marketplace of ideas is too fraught with dissonance? That everything from the Drudge Report to Fox News... is playing unfairly in the online political speech sandbox? I don't think so," Pai said.

"The First Amendment means not just the cold parchment that's in the Constitution. It's an ongoing cultural commitment, and I sense that among a substantial number of Americans and a disturbing number of regulators here in Washington that online speech is [considered] a dangerous brave new world that needs to be regulated," he concluded.

In comments to CNSNews.com, Pai also talked about the FCC's finances, the imposition of taxes on Internet usage, and subsidies for Internet service.

The reclassification of Internet providers as utilities allows the FCC to impose what is known as a "Universal Service Fund" (USF) tax on their revenue. The USF has grown exponentially in recent years, and presently stands at \$12 billion annually so large that the FCC has requested it be allowed to transfer \$25 million of the money to its own budget to "administer" the fund. As a result,

some in Congress have proposed limiting the size of the USF to \$9 billion.

Pai did not specify where he believed the cap should stand, but he said the recent growth of the fund necessitated a limit going forward.

"I think it should be lower than what a majority of the FCC wants it to be... Whatever it is, there has to be a cap. What we've found is that USF funding has exploded over the past couple of years so that the USF tax is 67 percent higher than it was in 2009," he said.

Full article: <http://cnsnews.com/news/article/rudy-takala/fcc-commissioner-feds-may-come-drudge>

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