

FCC to be led by Ajit Pai, staunch opponent of consumer protection rules

Ex-Verizon lawyer Pai will take “weed whacker” to net neutrality under Trump.

[Jon Brodtkin](#) - 1/20/2017, 1:17 PM



FCC Republican Commissioner (and soon-to-be Chairman) Ajit Pai.

[FCC](#)

President Donald Trump will select Republican Ajit Pai to become chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, [Politico reported today](#).

"Two industry sources" who are familiar with the decision said an announcement could be made as soon as today, the report said. Pai would become chairman immediately, without needing to be confirmed by the Senate, because he is already a member of the commission. New commissioners must be approved by the Senate, but the president can select the chair from among the commissioners without any additional approvals.

Pai was widely expected to be appointed chairman on at least an interim basis, but *Politico* says Trump is appointing him as a long-term chair. That would mean Pai could lead the commission throughout Trump's four-year term in the White House.

"Pai, who met with Trump in New York on Monday, had been seen by many as a top contender for the job given his reputation as a telecom law expert who's comfortable in front of the camera," *Politico* wrote. "But his selection is also somewhat of a departure for the incoming administration, which has tapped people outside of Washington for many top positions."

There's been no official confirmation of the decision yet, but we'll provide an update as soon as there is an announcement. We contacted Pai and his staff this afternoon but haven't heard back yet.

Pai does need to be reconfirmed by the Senate [by the end of 2017](#) in order to serve another five-year term as commissioner, but that's likely a formality.

Pai was associate general counsel for Verizon from 2001 to 2003 and subsequently served as counsel for the US Senate Judiciary Committee, the US Department of Justice's Office of Legal Policy, and the FCC. Pai was nominated to the FCC by President Barack Obama at the recommendation of Senate Republican leadership. He was confirmed by the Senate in 2012.

Pai consistently opposed consumer protection regulations during the three-

year chairmanship of Democrat Tom Wheeler, who [left the FCC today](#). Pai opposed net neutrality rules and, after Trump's victory, said those rules' "[days are numbered](#)." He also opposed [lower rate caps for inmate calling](#), rules designed to give TV consumers [cheaper alternatives to rented set-top boxes](#), rules that [protect the privacy of ISP customers](#), an update to the 31-year-old Lifeline phone subsidy program to [help poor people buy Internet service](#), a speed increase in the [FCC's broadband standard](#), an investigation of AT&T and Verizon [charging competitors for data cap exemptions](#), and preemption of state laws that [restrict expansion of municipal broadband](#).

Pai often argued that Wheeler's FCC exceeded its legal authority. In some cases, he was proven correct. For example, the municipal broadband decision was [overturned in court](#), and the FCC [lost several court decisions](#) on inmate calling rate caps.

On the other hand, Pai also argued that Wheeler's majority "[us\[ed\] legal authority the FCC doesn't have](#)" when it passed net neutrality rules and reclassified broadband as a common carrier service. Wheeler won that battle when a [federal appeals court upheld](#) the net neutrality rules and reclassification.

In his [FCC bio](#), Pai argues that "consumers benefit most from competition, not preemptive regulation." After Trump's election victory, Pai [gave a speech](#) vowing to "fire up the weed whacker and remove those rules that are holding back investment, innovation, and job creation," and said that "during the Trump Administration, we will shift from playing defense at the FCC to going on offense."

Consumer advocacy group [Free Press](#) was alarmed by the news of Pai's promotion. "Ajit Pai has been on the wrong side of just about every major issue that has come before the FCC during his tenure," Free Press CEO Craig

Aaron said in a statement sent to Ars. "He's never met a mega-merger he didn't like or a public safeguard he didn't try to undermine... Pai has been an effective obstructionist who looks out for the corporate interests he used to represent in the private sector. If the new president really wanted an FCC chairman who'd stand up against the runaway media consolidation that Trump himself [decried](#) in the AT&T/Time Warner deal, Pai would have been his last choice."

The FCC currently has two Republicans and one Democrat. One more Republican and one more Democrat could be appointed to give the FCC its typical composition of five members, with the president's party having a 3-2 majority.