



OPINION: WHAT WOULD THE INTERNET LOOK LIKE WITHOUT SECTION 230?

Posted on December 2, 2021 by Laurent Crenshaw | Inside Sources



Over the last couple of years, Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act has drawn sharp rebuke from politicians on both sides of the aisle. In fact, President Biden and former President Trump have separately called for the law to be [“revoked”](#) and [“repealed.”](#) respectively, and many members of Congress have echoed those sentiments.

But what would the Internet look like if Section 230 were suddenly gone? What would happen to the vibrant creator economy that is only in its infancy? Or the legions of people who have found communities and homes in various online servers and forums? A diverse range of small and medium-sized Internet companies and organizations came together to form the [Internet Works](#) coalition to show that repealing Section 230 would not affect just the biggest social media companies that draw the most outrage, but rather the entire internet ecosystem and in particular, users in emerging online spaces such as the creator economy and in user-moderated forums.

Internet Works hosted a [webinar](#) in October on what a world without Section 230 would mean for travel sites, e-commerce platforms, job sites, data hosting platforms, even libraries and consumers and many other companies and organizations. The panel featured Internet Works members Discord and Patreon and public interest non-profits American Library Association and Public Knowledge. And one of the biggest takeaways from that conversation is that Section 230 doesn’t just impact companies and platforms, it affects users, consumers, and everyday citizens.

In a world that has become increasingly more digital, especially considering the COVID-19 pandemic, Section 230 is more important than ever in ensuring communities have access to diverse artistic, educational, and informational programming that is now online. Additionally, time and time again Section 230 has shown itself to be a speech amplifier that gives platforms the leeway to maintain spaces for people to freely express their opinions.

The complexity of the Internet ecosystem requires flexibility in how different organizations approach content moderation, which is a key principle in Section 230. Patreon, and all Internet Works members, are working together to ensure policymakers understand how Section 230 benefits many types of online platforms and their users.

Patreon may not be the first platform people think of when discussing content moderation and Section 230, but we rely on the law to moderate our platform in a “creator-first” manner against content funded through our platform that falls outside of our Content and Benefits guidelines. We’re able to moderate against a creator’s campaign holistically, rather than just an individual piece of content. Without Section 230, we would be forced to greatly reduce the types of creators that we could support, while in the process likely becoming a de facto publisher of their content.

And our story is one of many within Internet Works. Members range from web hosting companies to digital libraries to e-commerce platforms and more.



Section 230 makes it possible for consumers to find authentic reviews before buying a product or booking a hotel. It helps neighborhoods stay connected online and in real-time without being overwhelmed by irrelevant information or spam.

The law even impacts our cyber security and storing our data in the cloud. Without Section 230, cybersecurity companies—like Cloudflare—would be legally responsible for customer data flowing across their network, meaning resources and attention would be diverted from cybersecurity to content moderation teams. And if cloud storage companies, such as Dropbox, were responsible for all the personal information and data their users store, the companies would cease to exist, meaning we'd go back to using thumb drives.

And repealing Section 230 affects many individuals on more than just a consumer level. Thousands of Wikipedia editors and community moderators on Reddit are also afforded legal protections thanks to Section 230, and without the law, they could be subjected to lawsuits for any editing or moderation decisions they make.

Section 230 enables the diversity of thought, competition and innovation to all thrive online. As Congress contemplates changing, and even repealing Section 230, it ought to consider the drastic and negative consequences for the pillars of the Internet that we love and appreciate and the burden that will inevitably be felt by not only small and medium-sized companies, but also libraries, small businesses and everyday consumers and online users.