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your smartphone — and its data plan of \$50 or so each month — as a modem to connect your laptop to the Internet. It came enabled in most smartphones, and in fact was considered a major selling point for phones that cost hundreds of dollars. Even those that did not come with tethering applications offered third-party solutions. Tethering has proven useful in areas where there is no free and accessible wi-fi. At the beach. At hotels that still want to charge \$12 per day to access the Internet. Driving in rental cars with no GPS system except the cell phone and a laptop. Most airports. And most important of all, to make secure data connections in place of public wi-fi that is more easily hacked. Unless you are someone addicted to watching streaming television on a two-inch screen, or to playing silly little games like Angry Birds all through the day and night, you likely will never use the full data allocation that you pay for on your cell phone. The data not used does not roll over. It simply goes away at the end of each month. But companies like Verizon Wireless want you to buy a separate and more expensive data plan and device for your laptop. It's an issue important enough that the Congress, worn out from trying to balance the budget and rein in their cost structure, has decided they should investigate. And for once, I may actually be in favor of them doing so. The ability to tether a cell phone for access where there is no wi-fi can be critical for accountants on the road, and should not be subject to the whims of any telecommunications provider. As the cell phone market shrinks this year from four competitors to three, it should be consumers who drive decisions about the applications they run on their cell phones. Bone-headed and arrogant decisions by cell phone companies could make me reconsider my position on Net Neutrality legislation. Not to mention how much I really need a data plan on my cell phone.

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