

Cablefax Daily™

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What the Industry Reads First

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That's a Wrap: Cable Bills on Review as Retrans Blackouts Boom

Often times, the dawn of a new year brings about a rush of statements from lawmakers fretting over their constituents' loss of broadcast or cable programming, but this year the magnifying glass has moved to cable bills. Instead of reporters being hit with concerns over viewers in some 50 markets losing local stations, Senators *Claire McCaskill* (D-MO) and *Rob Portman* (R-OH) sent a new release focusing on the placement of Broadcast TV Surcharges—a fee first levied by cable operators a few years ago to highlight the high retransmission costs they pay broadcasters. The placement of such surcharges or RSN fees on bills is “misleading in that it suggests to the subscriber that the government requires the cable or satellite provider to impose these charges,” the lawmakers wrote in letters to **Charter** and **Comcast** dated Dec 23. The missive is a follow-up to issues raised in the **Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations** report and hearing on pay TV billing practices. The lawmakers want to know if Charter has removed the RSN fee from former **Time Warner Cable** customers' bills, a move it suggested was coming at the June hearing. They also said Charter and Comcast didn't provide an adequate response to questions over whether they provide the non-promotional price to consumers. For Comcast, the subcommittee wants to know if its statement at the hearing that it doesn't put such fees in the area with taxes or govt fees is true for all billing displays, including those online. Charter and Comcast's **NBCU** are two of the companies involved in end of year negotiations for **NBC O&Os**, **USA**, **Bravo** and other nets in the portfolio. It's still not resolved, with the companies announcing hours before their contract expired that they'd agreed to extend negotiations. Comcast quietly completed a deal with **21st Century Fox** for continued carriage of **Fox News** and several Fox RSNs. It also has agreed to begin carrying **YES Network** again but hasn't specified when it will return. A spokesperson said it would launch early in the 2017 regular season, saying the MSO needed time to send out customer notifications and work through some operational matters before giving an estimated date. As promised, Comcast did drop **Fox College Sports** from its Sports Entertainment Package (**CFX**, 12/13). A source said it will make the service, which includes a hedgepodge of college sporting events and weekly coach's shows, available via broadband through the Xfinity app. **The Not-So-Lucky: DirecTV** took the biggest retrans hit, with 32 **Hearst** stations in 26 markets going dark on its lineup at midnight Jan 1. The spat continued at our deadline, with viewers missing Bowl games, the premiere of **ABC's** “The Bachelor,” the last week of regular season **NFL** games

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and winter finale of **NBC's** "Brooklyn Nine-Nine." The DBS provider also briefly lost **Cox Media** stations in 10 markets, but they returned in less than 24 hours. **Cable One** suffered a blow with the loss of **Northwest** stations in 3 markets, with customers in Grenada and Cleveland, MS, losing all 4 of their local stations—**WABG (ABC)**, **WABG2 (FOX)**, **WNBD (NBC)**, and **WXVT (CBS)**. A spat between **DISH** and **Griffin Communications** has resulted in a blackout affecting 2 markets, including Oklahoma City. DISH also lost **Bonneville** station **KSL** in Salt Lake City. **Altice USA**-owned **Suddenlink** lost **Morgan Murphy** station **KXLY (ABC)** in Idaho. **Frontier** customers in 6 markets lost **Sinclair** stations, including ABC affiliate **KATU** in Portland, OR. **AT&T U-verse** lost ABC affil **KTBS** and **CW** affil **KPXJ** out of Shreveport, LA. Both are owned by the *Wray* family. And this is just the beginning. Retrans reform group the **American TV Alliance**, which counts DISH and Charter as members, counted 48 markets with blackouts (we count 50). That's just in the first couple days of January, putting us well on the way to eclipse ATVA's count of 104 total blackouts for all of 2016. Happy New Year.

On the Hill: Freshman senator *Todd Young* (R-IN) is among Republican members serving on the **Commerce, Science & Transportation** committee in the 115th Congress. Young replaced former GOP Sen *Dan Coats*, who did not seek reelection in 2016. Sen *John Thune* (R-SD) continues to chair the committee. Subcommittee assignments have not been announced yet. Also new to the committee this year is Sen *Mike Lee* (R-UT), who as chair of **Senate Judiciary's Antitrust** subcmte, urged the **FCC** and **DOJ** to closely review the **Charter-Time Warner Cable** deal. Joining him as a new member are Sens *Jim Inhofe* (R-OK) and *Shelley Moore Capito* (R-WV), who has pledged to use the assignment to continue advocating for improved broadband access in her state. Committee assignments for **House Commerce** should come out later this week. Former **Communications** subcmte chmn *Greg Walden* (R-OR) is now chairing the cmte. On the first day of a new Congress, Walden wrote: "I am hopeful that we are able to agree on many areas of common ground and quickly move legislation that has earned support from both sides of the aisle. While I know we won't see eye to eye on everything, there are plenty of opportunities for both parties to work together for the good of the country." In other news, Thune reintroduced the Mobile Now Act, which passed the Committee last Congress on a voice vote. The legislation is aimed at boosting 5G wireless broadband by ensuring more spectrum is made available for commercial use.

Rose Bowl Ratings: **ESPN** saw Rose Bowl viewers climb 17% compared to last year, with 16mln watching USC's last-minute victory over Penn State. It is the most-watched non-semifinal New Year's Six game ever. The New Year's Six final three games, all played on the non-traditional Jan 2, averaged a total live audience of 11.1mln viewers, up from last year's final three New Year's Six games which were played on Jan 1.

CES 2017: **DISH** launched the Alexa voice control feature (developed by **Amazon**) for its Hopper DVR, letting customers control their TVs using voice commands. Customers can pair their Hopper DVR with the Amazon Echo or Echo Dot, both Alexa devices. DISH said it's the first TV provider to announce direct compatibility. Starting in the first half of 2017, users can ask Alexa to navigate, search and play TV content on a broadband-connected Hopper DVR based on channel, title, actor and genre. DISH also announced DISH Music, a Hopper-based feature powered by DTS Play-Fi that allows customers with Hopper 2 or Hopper 3 DVR the ability to sync music throughout their home with one central control. Any room with a connected TV or compatible Play-Fi enabled speaker can become a whole home sound system. DISH Music will be compatible with various music services, including **Pandora**, **iHeartRadio** and Amazon, as well as personal libraries on mobile devices. Finally, the satellite provider said its streaming service **Sling TV** launched its "Optimized for Sling TV" certification program, which recognizes devices and platforms that provide an exceptional Sling TV experience, like the new AirTV Player and Xiaomi's Mi Box. Program participants can use the "Optimized for Sling TV" logo on future packaging and will be recognized on the Sling TV website. Partners will be evaluated on factors that impact the Sling TV experience, including key criteria such as auto-launch and easy access. -- The **WICT** Signature Luncheon, which makes its CES debut on Fri, will be moderated by **E!** News co-host *Catt Sadler* and feature **HSNi** CEO *Mindy Grossman*, *Sandra Rice*, svp of national recruitment and leadership development for the **Emma L. Bowen Foundation**, and *Claire Smith*, coordinating editor for **ESPN's** universal news group. The closing keynote will be delivered by *David Cohen*, sevp and chief diversity officer for **Comcast**.

Comcast-Watchwith: To beef up its metadata offering, **Comcast** agreed to acquire **Watchwith**, which was founded in 2012. The company supports interactive advertising and audience engagement across web, mobile, smart TV and MVPD connected set-tops through the Watchwith platform, which enables creation, control and syndication of time-based meta-

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data. The deal, first reported by *Multi*, closed last month. As part of the arrangement, 15 employees of Watchwith, including CEO *Zane Vella*, join Comcast's CoMPASS unit. Launched last year, the unit focuses on cloud-based metadata, recommendation and personalization services for Comcast video. For example, CoMPASS supports next-generation content discovery features on the X1 platform including those enabled by the X1 Voice Remote. CoMPASS is part of the MSO's Technology + Product organization under the leadership of *Tony Werner*, pres of technology and product for Comcast Cable.

News Nets: With the new year comes *Megyn Kelly's* new job. She's leaving **Fox News** for **NBC News**, where she'll anchor a new, 1-hour daytime program that will air weekdays (time to be announced). She'll also anchor a Sun evening news magazine show. Fri will be Kelly's last day on Fox News, which—by the way—was the most-watched cable net on New Year's Eve. It averaged 1.95m viewers from 8pm-1am vs **CNN's** 1.92m, according to **Nielsen** figures. It's a flip from last year when CNN won the night with 1.63m to Fox's 1.3m.

People: *Kurt Tondorf* was named svp, development for **Animal Planet** and **Science Channel**. He previously served as development vp for Animal Planet. -- **ABC exec Jason Sarlanis** has joined **TLC** as svp, development.

Cablefax Daily Stockwatch

Company	01/03 Close	1-Day Ch	Company	01/03 Close	1-Day Ch
BROADCASTERS/DBS/MMDS					
DISH:	59.69	1.76	LEVEL 3:	58.94	2.58
ENTRAVISION:	6.70	(0.3)	MICROSOFT:	62.58	0.44
GRAY TELEVISION:	10.95	0.10	NETFLIX:	127.49	3.69
MEDIA GENERAL:	18.81	(0.02)	NIELSEN:	42.27	0.32
NEXSTAR:	62.85	(0.45)	SEACHANGE:	2.47	0.17
SINCLAIR:	33.85	0.50	SONY:	28.29	0.26
TEGNA:	21.54	0.15	SPRINT NEXTEL:	8.56	0.14
MSOS					
CABLE ONE:	619.66	(2.07)	SYNACOR:	3.15	0.05
CHARTER:	285.77	(2.15)	UNIVERSAL ELEC:	65.50	0.95
COMCAST:	69.05	UNCH	VONAGE:	7.25	0.40
GCI:	20.51	1.06	YAHOO:	38.90	0.23
LIBERTY BROADBAND:	71.14	(1.32)	TELCOS		
LIBERTY GLOBAL:	30.65	0.06	AT&T:	43.02	0.49
SHAW COMM:	20.17	0.11	CENTURYLINK:	25.35	1.57
SHENTEL:	28.90	1.60	FRONTIER:	3.58	0.20
PROGRAMMING					
21ST CENTURY FOX:	28.72	0.68	TDS:	30.40	1.53
AMC NETWORKS:	53.55	1.21	VERIZON:	54.58	1.20
CBS:	64.39	0.77	MARKET INDICES		
DISCOVERY:	27.96	0.55	DOW:	19881.76	119.16
DISNEY:	106.08	1.86	NASDAQ:	5429.08	45.97
GRUPO TELEVISIA:	21.47	0.58	S&P 500:	2257.83	19.00
HSN:	34.25	(0.05)			
MSG NETWORKS:	21.85	0.35			
SCRIPPS INT:	72.37	1.00			
TIME WARNER:	96.76	0.23			
VIACOM:	39.55	1.05			
WWE:	18.24	(0.16)			
TECHNOLOGY					
ADVANTAGE:	1.74	(0.03)			
AMDOCS:	58.19	(0.06)			
AMPHENOL:	67.43	0.23			
APPLE:	116.15	0.33			
ARRIS GROUP:	30.11	(0.02)			
AVID TECH:	4.63	0.23			
BLNDER TONGUE:	0.57	0.10			
CISCO:	30.54	0.32			
COMMSCOPE:	36.71	(0.49)			
CONCURRENT:	5.57	0.22			
CONVERGYS:	24.56	UNCH			
CSG SYSTEMS:	48.58	0.18			
ECHOSTAR:	51.61	0.22			
GOOGLE:	786.14	14.32			
HARMONIC:	5.25	0.25			
INTEL:	36.60	0.33			
INTERACTIVE CORP:	67.44	2.65			

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