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What the Industry Reads First

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Declaring Solidarity: AT&T Joins Net Neutrality 'Day of Action,' Turns Heads

In every dust-up over net neutrality, broadband providers make sure to reiterate that they too support an open Internet despite their opposition to Title II. Even so, it came as a surprise Tuesday when **AT&T** announced its intent to join Wednesday's Day of Action movement, a digital protest against the **FCC's** plans to roll back net neutrality regulations in which more than 200 companies, websites and organizations plan to participate. The nation's third-largest broadband provider, of course, doesn't see eye to eye with Day of Action organizers, who will encourage Internet users to file comments to the FCC in support of preserving Title II. "This may seem like an anomaly to many people who might question why AT&T is joining with those who have differing viewpoints on how to ensure an open and free Internet," AT&T senior evp, of external and legislative affairs *Bob Quinn* wrote in a company blog post. "But that's exactly the point—we all agree that an open Internet is critical for ensuring freedom of expression and a free flow of ideas and commerce in the United States and around the world." The telco's declaration of solidarity is likely to strike net neutrality activists as disingenuous given the company's history as of opposition to Title II. "It's outrageous, and a blatant attempt to confuse the public, that they are claiming they are joining a grassroots online protest that's explicitly intended to defend the Title II based net neutrality protections," **Fight for the Future** campaign director *Evan Greer*, whose group is one of the organizers of Wednesday's protest, said in a statement. The organizers do not plan to add AT&T to its official list of participants, which includes tech giants like **Amazon**, **Google** and **Twitter**. The Day of Action site states, "The one thing all of them agree on: defending Title II net neutrality." Still, AT&T plans to run TV spots in the DC area Wednesday asserting that it is opposed to blocking and throttling web traffic. Quinn in his statement also called for Congress, not the FCC, to ultimately determine standards for net neutrality. That will be a popular refrain from members of the industry Wednesday. **Broadband for America**, which according to its website represents **Comcast**, **Charter**, **CenturyLink**, AT&T and a number of trade associations, is executing a campaign encouraging Internet users to contact their legislators. The group has taken out ads on tech sites like **The Verge**, **ReCode** and **CNET**, as well as political outlets like **The Hill**, **Axios** and the **Washington Post**. The ads link to a microsite where users can look up their reps and send a pre-written form letter urging them to "pass legislation that makes net neutrality permanent and encourages more broad-

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band.” **Marathon Strategies** vp, communications *Kevin Glass*, who reps BFA, said the group will also look to convince activists that Title II regulations are not the best way to ensure net neutrality. “Members of this coalition that is pushing the Day of Action do try and equate Title II and net neutrality, and they’re not exactly the same thing,” he said. “There is some nuance that’s there and that’s what Broadband for America is trying to get through to people.”

Speaking of Congress: A group of Democrats led by Sen *Edward Markey* (MA) will hold a press conference Wednesday at 12pm ET to show support for the Day of Action movement. Sens *Ron Wyden* (OR), *Al Franken* (MN) and *Richard Blumenthal* (CT) also will participate, along with six members of the House. Several groups responsible for organizing the Day of Action will also be in attendance.

Need More Time: NCTA, ACA, AT&T, CTIA and other petitioners have asked the US Supreme Court for a 60-day extension to petition the high court to hear their objections to the FCC’s 2015 Open Internet order. On May 1, the DC Court of Appeals issued its decision not to rehear the challenge to Title II classification and other aspects of the rules. The parties then had 90 days to decide whether to file a petition for writ of certiorari to SCOTUS. They argue that extra time is warranted because the current FCC has initiated a rulemaking to reinstate ISPs’ information service classification and return to a light-touch regulatory framework. Initial comments on the FCC proceeding are due Monday. “Depending on how the Commission responds to the comments, the rulemaking has the potential to moot applicants’ challenges to the Title II Order in whole or in part and to alter the relief that applicants may seek in their petitions,” the groups wrote in their application for additional time. They are seeking to have until Sept 28 to file.

Weekly Ratings: History’s “Amelia Earhart: The Lost Evidence,” a two-hour special disputing the accepted narrative about the historic pilot’s death, drew a whopping 4.3mln viewers in primetime Sunday. The special helped the net achieve a 24% week-over-week increase in average primetime viewership. Its average of 1.4mln primetime viewers last week trailed only **Fox News** (2mln) and **HGTV** (1.5mln). **USA** (1.4mln) and **MSNBC** (1.2mln) rounded out the top five. In total day viewership, Fox News also notched its 27th consecutive week as the most-watched net with an average of 1.3mln.

Derby Delight: Monday night’s **MLB** Home Run Derby on **ESPN** delivered a 5.5 overnight rating, making it the highest-rated Derby since 2009, according to **Nielsen**. The rating represents a 38% increase from last year’s 4.0. Across **ESPN** and **ESPN Deportes**, the event averaged 8.5mln viewers. The top five markets were KC (13.6), New York (10.8), Hartford (9.7), Minneapolis (8.7) and Pittsburgh (7.9). Yankees rookie *Aaron Judge*, who hit 47 homers en route to a Derby Victory, was a boon for viewership in the Big Apple.

DirectTV Channel Launches: A few new channels recently joined **DirectTV’s** lineup, including **Newsmax TV**. The added carriage, which also includes **AT&T U-verse**, brings Newsmax’s distribution to 35mln US homes. On June 30, DirectTV added **Sprout** and **EI Rey** to its HD channel lineup.

Xfinity Mobile Adds Assurant Protection: On Tuesday, **Comcast** launched the “Xfinity Mobile Protection Plan” through a partnership with extended service provider **Assurant**. For an additional \$12/month, customers of the new mobile service can have coverage for accidental damage, loss/theft, unlimited customer support and more. Any customer who previously purchased device from Xfinity Mobile is eligible to enroll in the protection plan, with an open enrollment period in place through Aug. 11.

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Grande Gig Expansion: Corpus Christi, TX, is the latest area to get **Grande's** 1 Gigabit Internet service. Grande, which counts Charter as a competitor, already launched in Austin, San Marcos, Dallas, Midland and Odessa. Residential pricing starts at \$69.99/month and includes wireless home networking at no extra cost.

Lifeline Abuse: FCC chmn *Ajit Pai* sent a letter Tuesday to the acting CEO of the **Universal Service Administration Company** calling for immediate action on the waste, fraud and abuse that has plagued the Universal Service Fund's Lifeline program since wireless resellers began participating in earnest in 2009. He cites the recently released **GAO** report on Lifeline abuse as well as the FCC's own investigations. Pai's directives include having USAC identify and audit the top 10 eligible telecom carriers with the highest number of potentially ineligible subs. He wants a report on USAC's implementation of the safeguards by Aug. 8.

BDS Block: The FCC's Wireline Competition Bureau denied a motion by **INCOMPASS** and others to stay the agency's April BDS order, saying petitioners are unlikely to prevail on their efforts to challenge the ruling. The BDS order, slated to take effect August 1, deregulates the rates incumbent providers can charge for special access services, such as wireless backhaul.

Programming: Investigation Discovery premieres five new series this summer, including "Gone," about people who disappear without a trace (July 24), and "Guilty Rich," which chronicles murders involving super wealthy killers (August 31). -- On July 26, **VH1** debuts "Signed," a music competition series following moguls *Rick Ross*, *The-Dream* and *Lenny S* as they work to develop unsigned artists in the ATL. -- **Starz** has expanded its OTT offerings by more than 125% to 5,500 titles since the launch of the Starz app in April 2016. A majority of the newly added content has been kid's programming and Spanish-language content. Starz plans to further increase content offerings across its OTT services to 7,700 total selections by the end of the year. -- HGTV is expanding its "House Hunters" series with "House Hunters Family," which debuts July 31. This time, kids get to join the parents as they all work to agree on the ideal new home. -- "All Access: Mayweather vs. McGregor" will debut July 28 on **Showtime**. The show will offer a behind-the-scenes look at the weeks leading up to the fighters' much-hyped PPV boxing match on Aug. 26. -- Season 3 of "Outlander" will premiere Sept. 10 at 8pm ET/PT on Starz. The third season will contain 13 eps. -- **HBO** will debut "Spielberg," a feature-length documentary about the legendary director's filmography, on Oct. 7.

International Dealings: SVOD service **Starz Play Arabia** has raised \$125m since its inception, including new 2017 commitments from investors **State Street Global Advisors**, **SEQ Capital Partners** and **Delta Partners**. In May, Starz Play reported a total of 95m viewing sessions across the Middle East and North Africa, making it the 11th most-visited website in Saudi Arabia and 25th in the UAE, according to **SimilarWeb** data.

People: Cox Communications welcomed *Karen Bennett* on board as evp and chief human resources officer. She previously served in a similar role for **Cox Media Group**, Cox Comm's sister company that owns newspapers, TV and radio stations, and digital media properties. -- FCC chmn *Ajit Pai* tapped Tina Pelkey as press secretary. She most recently served as svp, **Black Rock Group**, focusing on strategic communications and public affairs. -- **RLTV** promoted *Matthew Walsh* to vp, development and production. He's been with the programmer since 2006. -- **Warner Bros. Digital Networks** expanded its management team with the additions of *Eric Besner* as svp, business development; *Greg Salter* as svp, business and strategic planning; and *Katie Soo* as svp, marketing. All three execs will report to WBDN evp *Jay Levine*. Besner previously worked at **Spotify**, where he served as head of global acquisitions for video and non-music audio. Salter spent the past decade as Warner Bros vp, corporate business development and strategy. Soo joins WBDN from **Fullscreen Media**, where she was vp, consumer marketing.

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