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What the Industry Reads First

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Broadband Fund: If You Build It, Will Cable Come?

NCTA and ACA Connects were quick to applaud the FCC's approval Thursday of a report and order to establish the \$20bn Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF), but will their members apply for the support to bring broadband to unserved Americans? "Our members are very interested but there is an issue with them needing to have an ETC [Eligible Telecommunications Carrier] designation, which is a huge barrier for most," an NCTA spokesperson said. "They would definitely apply if the ETC designation was removed, but Congress would have to make that change." ETC status was a similar problem with getting cable operators to apply for Connect America Fund II money for broadband. Some are concerned ETC designation would open the door to additional regulation by state public utility commissions—not to mention just a general unease since most operators haven't dealt with ETC status before. But CAF II's lack of cable participation may have had more to do with the limited locations involved. RDOF opens up support for bringing broadband to essentially every area where the large telcos are currently receiving USF support—including areas adjacent to existing cable footprints. It doles out \$20.4bn over 10 years in reverse auctions to areas that don't have a fixed broadband offering of at least 25Mbps/3Mbps. It's expected that Phase I of the auction, which offers up \$16bn for unserved areas, will happen later this year. Phase II money is targeted at partially served areas. ACA Connects government affairs svp *Ross Lieberman* predicted his members would participate in "higher numbers" than in past proceedings. An element of RDOF that could favor cable is how the reverse auction process will favor the bidder with the best combination of speed and latency. Cable operators moving into new territory without existing plant are likely to deploy fiber. The FCC's Democratic commissioners approved and dissented in part to the RDOF item, complaining that it was rushed and not backed by strong data. "When we proposed this fund, we kicked off a series of policy changes to fix our [broadband] maps. What happened to that? Where did it go? Why are we not doing that now before we spend billions?" asked *Jessica Rosenworcel*. Commish *Geoffrey Starks* called out provisions in the order that he thinks penalize states that have made their own investments in broadband deployment, saying the item excludes any area the FCC knows to be "awarded funding through the **US Dept of Agriculture's** ReConnect Program or other similar federal or state broadband subsidy program." He said his own research

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found 30 states that fund rural broadband through their own programs that may find their eligibility reduced or eliminated. “Several members of Congress wrote to the Chairman just yesterday urging that we delay consideration of this Order until state and federal investments could be better coordinated,” Starks added. FCC chmn *Ajit Pai* said the limited funds must be targeted to bring broadband to those who will otherwise not be served. “That means limiting efforts to areas that do not have broadband and where there are no current federal and state programs that ensure broadband is deployed in the near future,” he said. “I cannot condone handing companies additional taxpayer money to deploy broadband in areas where they are already legally obligated to deploy broadband. Paying somebody twice to do something once is something that everyone should oppose.” Dems and Republicans both supported a change that loosened the letter of credit requirement from the initial draft. The revision was sought by **USTelecom**, **NCTA** and other groups, which argued the previous proposal could have created an undue financial burden and reduced participation.

WWE Forces Out Co-Presidents: *Michelle Wilson* and *George Barrios* are out as **WWE's** co-presidents, effective immediately, and will no longer serve on its board. *Frank Riddick III*, a board member for more than 11 years, has been named interim CFO and **WWE** has begun a search for both a permanent CFO and CRO. “I would like to thank George and Michelle for their 10+ years of service and contributions to the organization,” **WWE** chmn/CEO *Vince McMahon* said in a statement. “I am grateful for all that was accomplished during their tenure, but the Board and I decided a change was necessary as we have different views on how best to achieve our strategic priorities moving forward.” **WWE** stock plummeted after hours more than 22% following the announcement. Barrios and Wilson were elevated to co-presidents and board members in February 2018 after serving as chief strategy & financial officer and chief revenue & marketing offer, respectively.

C-band Vote Ahead: **FCC** chmn *Ajit Pai* plans to circulate a C-band item next week to be voted on at the Commission's February meeting. He revealed the upcoming vote during a press conference Thursday, but declined to disclose any particulars. Just this week, a new Senate bill was introduced that would cap incumbent spectrum holders' share of auction revenues at \$1bln. Commissioner *Jessica Rosenworcel* told reporters she think legislation is the “cleanest and clearest” path forward for auctioning the band.

Verizon Wins Wireless with Promotions: **Verizon** emerged as the wireless victor of 4Q19, reporting 790K postpaid adds in the quarter and total postpaid churn of 1.13%. Much of that was fueled by its promotional activity, including an offer of a free year of **Disney+**. **Verizon** CEO *Hans Vestberg* didn't offer any details on how many **Verizon** custom-



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ers had taken advantage of the Disney+ promotion, which applies to all wireless unlimited customers as well as new Fios internet and 5G home internet customers. “We are extremely pleased with the early uptake on Disney+ and the ability to partner with an iconic consumer brand and content company,” Vestberg said. Outside of wireless, Verizon’s story is one of stabilization. The company lost 51K Fios video subscribers in the quarter, up from a 46K loss a year ago, but reported 39K Fios internet net adds. Vestberg believes that the company’s Mix & Match program is an answer to slowing video losses. Launched earlier this month, the program allows customers to pair their broadband and video offerings by choosing an internet speed and then picking a video plan from **YouTube TV** or **Fios TV**. “We just think about our customers and where the market is going and we want to give them the optionality of actually having different ways they can address the market when it comes to their content consumption,” Vestberg said. “And here we have a great opportunity... we can work with all the types of optionality in the content market as we’re not owning any content.” Revenues within Verizon Media were nearly flat YOY at \$2.1bln as the company tries to offset declines in its legacy desktop search revenue streams.

Commissioner Wants Changes to FCC Program Carriage Rules: Commish *Mike O’Rielly* wants the **FCC** to change the statute of limitations for the Commission’s program carriage rules, which allow programmers to challenge negative carriage decisions by MVPDs. Under current rules, the clock for filing a complaint is tied to the complainant notifying an MVPD of their intent to file with the FCC—not when the offending action occurred. “This means that even if the questionable behavior happened a decade ago or more, an allegedly aggrieved party can still pursue a complaint with the Commission at any time, so long as it does so within one year of notifying the targeted MVPD. This is beyond ridiculous,” O’Rielly wrote in a blog this week. He recommends the shot clock begin running on the date of the alleged violation. O’Rielly also wants to change the program carriage procedural process. Currently, an Administrative Law Judge’s initial decision usually becomes effective upon release, requiring a party to make changes even as they may be seeking an appeal of the ruling. An example of this came in 2017 when the FCC overturned an ALJ decision that had found **Cablevision** discriminated against **Game Show Network** by moving it to a sports and entertainment tier. “Such a remedial process as currently exists can force immediate lineup changes, adding costs and potential confusion for current subscribers, and even more so in the case where a provider wins on appeal and must make changes for a second time,” O’Rielly wrote, advocating the FCC stay these initial ALJ decisions until parties have pursued challenges.

January FCC Meeting Round-Up: The **FCC** voted unanimously for a report & order modernizing certain cable/satellite notices so that they can be delivered to broadcasters via email vs paper. Examples include notices before launching service in a new market or deleting or repositioning a station within a channel lineup. -- *Jessica Rosenworcel* was the only commissioner to vote against a proposed \$12.9mln fine against an individual for apparently using caller ID spoofing in thousands of robocalls. Her objection was that the fine wasn’t higher. Later, she told reporters she received a spoofed robocall during the meeting. “They’re growing like crazy. This agency has got to recognize that we need to respond in kind,” she said.

Zlotnik Headed to Apple: Just two days after *Carmi Zlotnik* announced he was stepping down as **Starz**’s programming chief, news broke that the network exec signed an exclusive producer deal with **Apple TV+**. He’ll start at the streamer next month following his transition away from his current role. He follows in the footsteps of former **HBO** head *Richard Plepler*, who signed a five-year production deal earlier this month after launching Eden Productions.

Super Bowl Streaming: **DISH** is headed into Super Bowl Sunday with a number of **Fox** stations blacked out due to retrans impasses with **Apollo**-owned **Cox Media**, **Marshall** and **Mission Broadcasting**. But there’s a workaround thanks to some free digital options. The game will stream for free on any device on **NFL Digital** and **Fox Sports and Fox Deportes Digital** (English and Spanish feeds available). On **Yahoo Sports**, it’s free to stream on phones and tablets, as well as on 49ers and Chiefs mobile properties.

C Spire Taps Plume for WiFi Extension: **C Spire** is partnering with **Plume** to introduce a Smart WiFi solution that will extend coverage to address the “dead spot” problem in its subscribers’ homes. The solution is being offered to new and existing customers of C Spire Home. Subscribers will get the Plume app, two Superpods that extend WiFi coverage as well as services including online security and remote WiFi access for \$10/month.

Obituary: The industry lost legendary former producer and exec *Fred Silverman* on Thursday, who passed away in his home. He was 82. [Silverman](#) has the distinction of being the only person to have headed programming for **CBS**, **NBC** and **ABC**.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

INSP Keeps 'The Cowboy Way' Alive

Cowboys have been a part of America's history since the late 1800s, and there's still a number of hardworking men and women that continue to live the cowboy lifestyle in the 21st Century. Three of them—Chris "Booger" Brown, Cody Harris and Bubba Thompson—have spent the last four years offering **INSP** viewers a peek into their lives as ranchers and cowboys in Alabama. The series' sixth season, premiering Feb 5 at 8pm, sees the cowboys exploring new ways to expand the company. Even though they're best friends, the trio rarely agree on the best way to move forward. Harris is always looking for the latest technology that could help them grow the business while spending more time with their families, experimenting with mixed results. Thompson and Brown tend to want more immediate results based on proven methods. "It's a struggle for all of us," Thompson said. "But, for the most part, everything works out for the best and we always seem to pull through together on anything we're going through." Their bond, faith and families keep them going through the worst of times, and Harris is proud that those elements are at the heart of the show. Beyond that, he hopes it makes Americans stop and tip their hats to the small farmers and ranchers that provide the world with everything from beef to broccoli. And while all three admitted that there have been times where they've thought about pulling away from the difficult world of ranching, there's something special that keeps bringing the cowboys back. "I've tried getting away from it in times growing up... I always come back to my roots," Brown said. For any young people that watch the show and get inspired to pursue ranching, Brown said it's important to find a mentor and pay their dues. "You've got to have the heart," Thompson added. "The horsemanship and the cowboying—it's all a sacred art." — Sara Winegardner

Reviews: "Night on Earth," streaming from Jan. 29, **Netflix**. Netflix makes like **BBC** and **National Geographic** with this gorgeously filmed, six-part docu-series that cleverly targets animals' nocturnal behaviors. Our favorite was "Sleepless Cities," which uses high-tech cameras to capture leopards that nightly inhabit Mumbai, India. As narrator *Samira Wiley* tells us, somewhat stiffly, since food sources are declining in areas surrounding cities, animals are moving downtown. While elephants sashaying through African cities for an evening graze seem almost charming, the 50 leopards that patrol Mumbai nightly constitute the densest concentration of the species anywhere. And, as Wiley notes, they're "killers." Some 1,000 dogs annually end up as leopard food. Though footage of leopards stalking targets in back alleys is compelling, security footage almost steals the show. An interior camera shows a leopard entering a lobby and exiting like lighting with a helpless canine in its jaws. Not all the night-time activities of animals occur in exotic locales. Filmmakers *Bill Markham*, *Martha Holmes* and *Tom Hugh-Jones* capture thousands of migrating Vaux's swifts as they make their yearly stop in a chimney at the University of Oregon. -- "McMillion\$," premiere, 10pm, Monday, **HBO**. *Mark Wahlberg* tells a wild story about how the FBI infiltrated a crooked Monopoly game at McDonald's in the 1990s. It's entertaining, but with 3 episodes, it's a tad long. — *Seth Arenstein*

Basic Cable P2+ Prime Rankings* (01/20/20-01/26/20)		
Mon-Sun	MC US	MC US AA (000)
FNC	1.080	3,319
MSNBC	0.610	1,873
CNN	0.385	1,182
HGTV	0.382	1,174
TLC	0.374	1,150
HIST	0.370	1,138
A&E	0.360	1,106
HALL	0.347	1,066
TBSC	0.343	1,053
ESPN	0.332	1,019
ID	0.306	941
DISC	0.304	936
TNT	0.300	922
FOOD	0.273	840
USA	0.265	815
NICK	0.196	601
INSP	0.188	579
TVLAND	0.186	572
LIFE	0.184	564
BRAVO	0.182	561
FX	0.180	554
ADSM	0.180	554
NAN	0.162	498
HMM	0.153	470
ESPN2	0.152	466
WETV	0.144	441
TRAVEL	0.141	432
SYFY	0.140	430
PARA	0.136	418
GSN	0.135	416
DSNY	0.135	415
AMC	0.130	401
NKJR	0.125	385
BET	0.124	381
DSJR	0.124	380
APL	0.123	378
NBCSN	0.115	353
VH1	0.114	351
COM	0.112	345
CRN	0.110	338
NATGEO	0.108	332

*P2+ L+SD rankers are based on national Nielsen numbers, not coverage.



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