

Cablefax Daily™

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What the Industry Reads First

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Still Connected: ISPs Sign on to FCC Coronavirus Pledge

After a number of conference calls held Thursday by FCC chmn *Ajit Pai*, broadband and telephone service companies are announcing that they will not terminate the service of any customer unable to pay their bills for the next 60 days due to disruptions caused by the coronavirus. Pai asked those on the calls to take up the Keep Americans Connected Pledge, which also asks companies to waive late fees any customer would incur because of their economic circumstances during the pandemic and to open all WiFi hotspots to any American requiring access to a broadband network. "This may be a difficult time for our nation, but if we all work together, I am confident that we can rise to the challenge," Pai said. Some 69 companies agreed to take the pledge and are working quickly to implement it as soon as possible. The list includes providers of all sizes, ranging from the likes of **Charter** and **Comcast** to small rural op **BOYCOM Vision**. The plan also has been endorsed by a number of trade associations including **CTIA**, **NCTA**, **USTelecom**, **WISPA** and **ACA Connects**. "With nearly 800 members that employ and deploy a myriad of programs, billing services, technologies and policies, 'one size fits all' has never worked. However, I'm confident that in this crisis, our ACA Connects members will demonstrate the true meaning of 'one for all, all for one' to not only ensure our customers are connected, but also to help overcome the challenges before us," ACA Connects pres *Matt Polka* told **CFX**. FCC commish *Jessica Rosenworcel* called Pai's pledge a welcome first step to keeping people online, but said there's still plenty of work to do. She called for the FCC to use its universal service powers to provide hotspots to students unable to attend school during the outbreak and for continued coordination between the FCC and health care providers to ensure telehealth services will be available. "We need to expand these pledges and make adjustments to FCC programs so that even more Americans can get online during this crisis at little or no cost. Where data caps and overage fees are in place, they need to be lifted and eliminated," Rosenworcel said. On the data cap front, **AT&T** became the first major ISP to suspend broadband usage caps when it made its announcement late Thursday. Comcast followed suit Friday, saying it would pause its 1TB data limit for 60 days. Other providers are increasing access to their networks through the ongoing pandemic. **DISH** is providing its entire portfolio of 600 MHz spectrum to **T-Mobile** at no cost for 60 days to help bolster wireless capacity. Starting Monday, **Cox's** Connect2Compete is offering a free month of service to new customers. The service is normally priced at \$9.95/month. Cox

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is also increasing the service's speed from 25/3Mbps to 50/3Mbps for 60 days. That will go into effect Tuesday. Cox also is increasing speeds of its Starter and StraightUp Internet package to 50Mbps during this period. For those tiers, Cox is extending its Cox Complete Care remote desktop support at no charge to residential customers with remote helpdesk and assistance for loading new applications they may need to use during this time, like online classroom support applications and web conferencing services. It's also moving up a planned upgrade that will take its Essential tier to 50Mbps from 30Mbps. **Sparklight** is making unlimited data available on all its internet plans for the next 30 days. Charter is offering free Spectrum broadband and WiFi access for 60 days to households with K-12 and/or college students who do not have a Spectrum broadband subscription at any service level up to 100Mbps. Folks can enroll starting Monday, and installation fees will be waived for new student households. Charter is also partnering with school districts to spread awareness of its efforts. It will also open WiFi hotspots across its footprint for public use. **Altice USA** is making its Altice Advantage 30Mbps broadband solution available for free for 60 days to any new customer within its footprint to help with students displaced due to school closures. Comcast announced a similar update to its Internet Essentials program, boosting speed to 25/3Mbps and offering it free for 60 days to low-income families. It's also opening its WiFi hotspots to all.

MIP to Buy Cincinnati Bell: Macquarie Infrastructure Partners, a fund managed by Macquarie Infrastructure and Real Assets, is acquiring **Cincinnati Bell** in a transaction valued at \$2.9bn. "MIP exhibits deep telecommunications expertise and a strong track record of investing in capital intensive businesses, which will be critical as we deliver on our strategy to drive next generation, integrated communications through an expanded fiber network as well as our IT services platform," Cincinnati Bell pres/CEO *Leigh Fox* said in a statement. The news comes after Cincinnati Bell's board determined that the offer from MIP was superior to a previously merger agreement with **Brookfield Infrastructure**. Brookfield had until midnight Thursday to negotiate revisions to its deal after Macquarie raised its bid over the weekend, but decided to walk away. Cincinnati Bell has paid Brookfield a \$24.8mIn breakup fee.

FCC Frees Funds for Telehealth: The **FCC** adopted an order Friday to fully fund all eligible Rural Health Care Program services for the current funding year with an additional \$42.19mIn in funding. The total FY19 demand for the Rural Health Care Program was \$719.48mIn, which exceeded the \$677.29mIn in previously available funding. The order permits USAC to use additional unused funds from prior years to cover funding gaps and waives the cap on multi-year commitments and upfront payments that would lead to reductions in support for rural health care providers and their patients. "Covid-19 presents serious challenges to healthcare providers, and they need every tool in the toolbox at their disposal, particularly the enhanced connectivity that enables

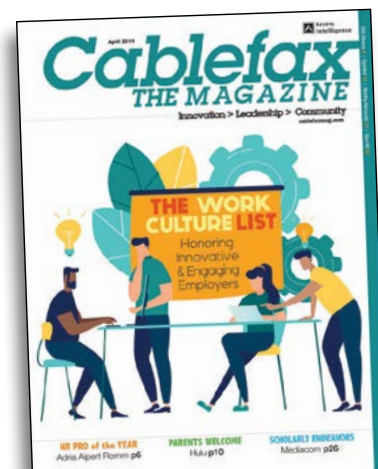
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them to provide vital healthcare services to the American public,” FCC chmn *Ajit Pai* said.

Corona Cancellations: The Cable

Center has rescheduled its 23rd annual Cable Hall of Fame event, originally set for April 30 in NYC. The dinner will now take place in mid-to-late September. **Adaptive Spirit** canceled its annual fundraising event, originally scheduled April 2-5 in Vail, CO. “In the interest of protecting the health and safety of our athletes and attendees, Adaptive Spirit regrettably must cancel AS2020 due to the spread of Covid-19. While the event itself is canceled, the organization is committed to its mission of building business relationships and effective networking practices in the telecommunications industry. We will also continue to follow through with our commitment to the US Paralympics Ski and Snowboard Team by moving forward with an online version of our spectacular Silent Auction,” the group said in a statement.

Ratings: Thursday night’s Town Hall with **Facebook** on **CNN** drew its biggest town hall audience in more than two years. “Coronavirus Facts and Fears with Facebook” averaged 785K in the A25-54 demo from 10pm-12am. The programming saw 1.7mln livestream starts on CNN Digital, its biggest in more than two years. On Facebook, the livestream pulled in 14mln streams, peaking at 192K concurrent at 11:25pm.

Cablefax Dashboard

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1:25 PM · Mar 12, 2020 · Twitter Web App

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Research

- Combined cable, DBS and telco subscriptions fell by more than 1.6mln in 4Q19, a 50% increase YOY. Satellite accounted for the bulk of the traditional decline.
- An estimated 63.4% of occupied US households subscribed to traditional multichannel in 4Q19.

(Source: [Kagan](#))

Quotable

“We’re first focused on rolling it out in the HBO Max official offering with a product that covers multiple demographics, millennials, children, adults of any gender, any background. I think that’s an expansion of the demographics covered by HBO...it will be basically a domestic product... And expect next year, we’d move towards an AVOD product, an advertising-assisted product to provide the affordability of the product into more people by the use of advertising and supplementing it so that, if you will, we’re still generating the revenue, but it doesn’t have to necessarily come out of the consumers’ pocket. While those things are going on, we’ll continue to look to further expansion internationally and further expansion with the potential to add other products and services, like you said, live TV.” – **AT&T CFO John Stephens** speaking on the launch of HBO Max at a Deutsche Bank investor conference

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