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What the Industry Reads First

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For Now: Providers Set Aside Disputes During Coronavirus Outbreak

As they face the common enemy that is the coronavirus pandemic, **Cox Media Group** and **DISH** have agreed to set aside their retrans dispute for now so that DISH can resume its carriage of 10 CMG stations in markets in New York, Oregon, Washington, Arizona, Louisiana, California, Mississippi and Idaho. No word on how long the stations, which have been blacked out since mid-January, will be carried by DISH. “We appreciate DISH’s cooperation in agreeing to suspend our dispute so that we can help our viewers navigate through this uncertain time,” Cox Media Group CEO *Kim Guthrie* said in a statement. DISH has also agreed to temporarily restore channels owned by **Mission Broadcasting**, **Marshall Broadcasting Group** and **White Knight Broadcasting** through April 13. “DISH is committed to ensuring that our customers have access to critical local news coverage regarding COVID-19 in their community,” DISH svp, programming *Andy LeCuyer* said in a statement. “Our customers always come first, and restoring these channels is one more step we’ve taken to help them get through this challenging time.” Folks are also banding together on the wireless side, offering those that require additional network capacity access to any extra spectrum they don’t need. The **FCC** granted **T-Mobile** special temporary authority to use additional spectrum in the 600MHz band to help bolster its networks. The Commission said T-Mobile plans to use the spectrum to support telehealth initiatives, distance learning, telework and the needs of first responders. T-Mobile will use spectrum that was held either in the FCC’s inventory or by other licensees that have consented to T-Mobile’s use of the spectrum. Those licensees include DISH, **Comcast**, **NewLevel**, **LB License Co**, **Channel 51**, **Omega**, **Bluewater** and **TStar License Holdings**. T-Mobile will also have access to **Sprint**’s spectrum portfolio when the pair’s merger closes next month as expected, but **New Street Research** suggested in a note that T-Mobile may try to get early access to that as well. New Street also said this could prove to be an important business move for T-Mobile as it looks to permanently bolster its network. “It will be interesting to see what T-Mobile does with the borrowed 600MHz after sixty days; they are using it for free now; presumably they would have to pay for it after the first sixty days; but it could make sense for both sides if they do (could be an important win for DISH),” New Street said in a note.

Coronavirus Broadband Access: Sparklight (formerly **Cable One**) is making unlimited data available on all



Sean Spicer

Is Back

Big Time . . .

on **NEWSmaxTV**



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internet services for the next 30 days, and waiving late fees for its customers for the next 60 days. Sparklight is also offering payment deferrals to customers who call to make arrangements. -- **TDS** is providing free broadband access to low-income individuals and/or families with children and college students for 60 days. Residents must provide documentation from qualifying programs to be eligible. -- **Mediacom** is increasing the speed of the Mediacom Connect2Compete low-cost internet program to 25 Mbps down and by 3 Mbps upstream, a significant increase from 10 Mbps/1Mbps. Qualifying families will who subscribe before May 15 will receive 60 days complimentary service. The company is also pausing monthly data allowances across all broadband service tiers through May 15, and extending the pricing of its Access Internet 60 broadband service to new customers at \$19.99 a month for the next 12 months (currently \$19.99 a month). Mediacom is also providing complementary access to all Mediacom Xtream WiFi hotspots for 60 days. -- **Cox** announced additional relief offerings to its residential customers Monday, announcing a \$19.99 offer for new Starter internet customers with a temporary boost up to 50Mbps download speeds. With the offer, which will be available through May 15, customers need not sign an annual contract. The deal is designed to assist groups like seniors and college students that have been severely impacted by the coronavirus outbreak. Cox is also eliminating data usage overages, and customers with a 500GB or unlimited data usage add-on plan will receive credits on their bills.

Stocks Plunge: Media stocks suffered as the Dow fell nearly 3K points on Monday, nearly 13%, the biggest point loss in the index's history. On the programming side, **ViacomCBS** was hit the hardest, plunging 17% to \$13.61. **Netflix** closed down 11% to \$298.84, and **Disney** dropped a little more than 7% to \$95.01. **Discovery** fell nearly 10% to \$20.63, but **AMC Networks** ended the day slightly up (0.43%) at \$28.06. On the operator side, **Altice USA** suffered the most, falling sharply by 22.5%. **Comcast** dropped 8% to \$36.04, and **Charter** closed down just over 14%. **Verizon** and **AT&T** both dropped nearly 6%. **T-Mobile** fell just over 10%, and **DISH** dropped nearly 13%.

Future Today, Cinedigm No Longer Merging: OTT platform **Future Today** terminated its planned merger with **Cinedigm** Monday, opting instead to enter into a content licensing agreement with the entertainment company. Cinedigm first announced its \$60mln acquisition of Future Today in March 2019. Future Today also reported that February marked the best performance of its OTT channels in its history, with users up almost 60% YOY and streaming hours up almost 70% YOY. Future Today recently scored distribution deals that place its most popular channels—HappyKids, FilmRise, Fawesome and ifood.tv— on **Comcast's** X1 and Flex platforms as well as on **LG** smart TVs.

Covid-19 Events Update: Finally, some good news for sports fans as the 2020 **NFL** Draft will proceed as usual and

ANNOUNCING Cablefax's TOP OPS Nominations

For the Executive(s) of the Year: Tout your best execs! We're looking for MSO and independent operator executives who drive success in all areas of the business, including finance, legal, marketing, operations, business development, sales and beyond. These are the top performers exceeding company goals, advancing new initiatives and innovations, and pushing through unique marketplace challenges. Tell our editors who we should be recognizing in 2020!

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*Help Cablefax choose the
MSO and Independent
Operator of the Year!*

**It's free to enter – but you must
submit your entries by March 27!**

*The Independent Operator of the Year
Award (IOY) is presented in conjunction
with ACA Connects and NCTC*

will be televised, though all public events surrounding the draft in Vegas will be canceled. The draft takes place April 23-25, airing across **ESPN, ABC** and the **NFL Network**. -- **WICT** has canceled the April sessions of its Executive Development Series and its Rising Leaders Program, with registrants moving to fall sessions. The Signature Luncheon in April is canceled, with details on the revised event forthcoming. All **WICT** employees are working remotely with full capabilities, and all out-of-town business travel is suspended for now. -- The **VCTA** is postponing this year's Virginia Cable Summit, originally scheduled April 28 and 29 in Williamsburg, VA. No new date slated yet, but the group expects it will be sometime in late fall. -- **ACA Connects** may have postponed this year's summit, but the group is still supporting its members by hosting two webinars on Covid-19. "The FCC's 'Keep America Connected' Pledge During the Covid-19 Crisis" takes place on Tuesday at 2pm, and "Covid-19 Preparedness and Response" is scheduled for Friday at 2pm.

From the Commission: Another 116 broadband and telephone service providers have taken up **FCC** Chairman *Ajit Pai's* Keep Americans Connected Pledge, agreeing to take specific steps to keep Americans connected for the next 60 days. Some notable names taking the pledge include **Hotwire Communications, Midco** and **GCI**. The 185 companies that have now taken the pledge will not terminate service to any residential or small business customers because of their inability to pay bills due to disruption from the coronavirus pandemic, waive any late fees and open WiFi hotspots to any person, even if they are not a customer. The pledge has also gained the support of the **Telecommunications Industry Association** and the **US Pan Asian American Chamber of Commerce Education Fund**. -- Comments are due April 6 on the new truth-in-billing requirements added to the Communications Act of 1934 by the recently-passed Television Viewer Protection Act. Reply comments are due April 13. Those requirements are set to go into effect on June 20, six months after the TVPA is enacted, but the Commission may for "good cause" extend the effective date by an additional six months.

Supporting Distance Learning: Sens *Ed Markey* (D-MA), *Michael Bennet* (D-CO) and *Brian Schatz* (D-HI) led 13 other lawmakers in calling on the **FCC** to temporarily allow schools to use E-Rate program funding to offer WiFi hotspots or devices with WiFi capabilities to students lacking internet access at home. The E-Rate program is capped at \$4bn each year. The FCC has already allocated about \$2bn this year, leaving the rest available for potential emergency action. "This swift, immediate action would help ensure that all students can remotely continue their education during the current public health emergency," the lawmakers said in a letter to the Commission. Markey authored the original E-Rate program created as part of the 1996 Telecommunications Act. The program is designed to connect schools and libraries to the internet and ensure access for low-income students and families. -- The FCC authorized \$521K in CAF II funding over the next decade to expand broadband in Idaho's Benewah County. **Red Spectrum Communications** has agreed—in exchange for funding—to provide broadband at speeds of at least 25/3Mbps to approximately 185 unserved rural homes and businesses, some of which are in tribal areas.

Broadband Expansions: **TDS** is heading to Stoughton, WI. The company announced a fiber-to-the-home network project that will offer customers up to one gigabit speeds, TDS TV and phone service. Businesses can receive up to 10 gigabit connections, dedicated fiber and a hosted VoIP business phone service. The Madison-based company expects to be connecting customers in Stoughton by the end of 2020. -- **Vyve Broadband** is working on upgrading its rural cable infrastructure, launching 1 gigabit internet service to customers in the City of Hillsboro, Florence and Marion, KS. The new download speed is expected to be available in April.

Distribution: **Pluto TV** is set to launch in Latin America with 55 media and content partners. At launch, it will include 24 live, linear channels curated into categories. Pluto TV Latin America will be available by the end of March in 17 countries.

Ratings: The **CNN-Univision** Democratic debate Sunday evening pulled in more viewers than any other CNN debate this election cycle. A total 10.827mln viewers tuned in, 3.414mln in the A25-54 demo.

Programming: Run out of things to watch on **Netflix**? **Acorn TV** is extending its free trial for new subscribers to 30 days, previously seven days. Interested viewers can use the code "FREE30" -- There's still some sports left in the US! **ESPN** is kicking off the 2020 **NFL** league with more than 13 hours of NFL Free Agency specials through Wednesday. Coverage kicked off Monday at 2pm with "NFL Live." -- **FX** is indefinitely postponing the Season 4 premiere of " Fargo," originally slated for April 19. Production was halted due to the coronavirus pandemic, and a new date will be announced when production resumes.