

Cablefax Daily™

Thursday — March 26, 2020

What the Industry Reads First

Volume 31 / No. 059

Pushed Back: COVID-19 Throws Wrench in FCC Auction Plans

The FCC is pushing back the timeline of Auction 105, one that offers priority access licenses in the CBRS band, to later this summer due to the ongoing impact of the coronavirus outbreak. "Given the COVID-19 pandemic, these changes were deemed necessary in order to protect the health and safety of Commission staff and to allow parties additional time to prepare to participate in Auctions 105 and 106," the FCC said in a statement. The short-form application filing window will now open on April 23 and close on May 7, with upfront payments being due to the Commission on June 19. Bidding will begin on July 23. More than 22K licenses will be offered in Auction 105, the most to ever be up for grabs in a single auction. Republican commish *Michael O'Rielly* said via **Twitter** that he and his team along with FCC chmn *Ajit Pai* agreed pushing back the CBRS auction was the most appropriate action for the time being. "To be clear, intention is to not delay the important CBRS auction any further than this, unless circumstances absolutely warrant it," O'Rielly tweeted. The move to postpone Auction 105 was applauded by **AT&T** vp, federal regulatory *Hank Hultquist*. "While the Commission and industry are focused on dealing with the pandemic, it would make no sense to put everyone into quiet period where talking about his spectrum is restricted," Hultquist tweeted. The FCC also announced it would be indefinitely postponing Auction 106, an auction of construction permits in the FM broadcast service. It was scheduled to begin on April 28. Auction 106 applicants that submitted upfront payments can receive a refund of those deposits after submitting a written request. A revised schedule will be announced in a future public notice. Thus far, no other auction proceedings scheduled to take place in 2020 have been affected, but there's no predicting how a continuing coronavirus pandemic could affect the packed calendar. Comments on the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Auction are due Friday and replies must be in by April 10. Bidding is set to start Oct 22 on the auction that will award up to \$16bln over 10 years to service providers committed to connecting unserved areas. Closing out the year is the highly-anticipated auction of the lower 280MHz of the C-band. That's currently scheduled to begin on Dec 8. Lawmakers, including Sen *John Kennedy* (R-LA), put pressure on Pai to get the auction rolling before the end of 2020 after the **C-Band Alliance**, a group composed of foreign satellite operators, promised they could allocate the spectrum by the end of the year via a private sale. "The C-Band auction will proceed apace," an FCC spokesperson told **CFX** Wednesday.

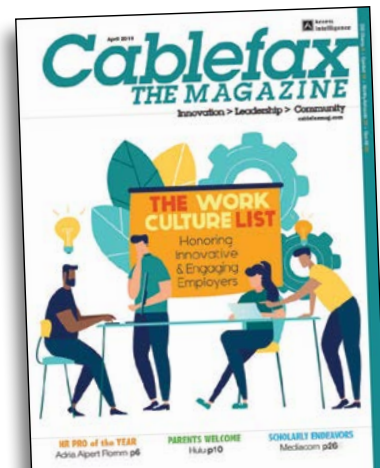
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Advertising Deadline: April 8 | Publication Date: April 22

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Cablefax Daily (ISSN 1069-6644) is published daily by Access Intelligence, LLC ● www.cablefax.com ● 301.354.2101 ● Editorial Director: Amy Maclean, 301.354.1760, amaclean@accessintel.com ● Publisher: Michael Grebb, 323.380.6263, mgrebb@accessintel.com ● Senior Editor: Sara Winegardner, 301.354.1701, swinegardner@accessintel.com ● Associate Editor: Mollie Cahillane, 212.621.4951, mcahillane@accessintel.com ● Acct. Exec: Olivia Murray, 301.354.2010, omurray@accessintel.com ● Director of Marketing: Kate Schaeffer, kschaeffer@accessintel.com ● Prod. Mgr: Joann Fato, jfato@accessintel.com ● Kerry Smith, Divisional President, Marketing & Media Group, ksmith@accessintel.com ● Group Subs or Subscription Questions, Client Services: 301.354.2101, clientservices@accessintel.com ● Annual subscription price: \$1,749.00/year ● Access Intelligence, LLC, 9211 Corporate Blvd., 4th Floor, Rockville, MD 20850

Keeping Americans Connected: Reports continue to come in of operators seeing an uptick in broadband service requests. Alaska-based **GCI** reports that over the past few days, it's had more than 30x greater the number of internet upgrades via GCI.com and its call volume has doubled, likely in response to free internet offers. GCI is upgrading broadband plans for existing customers and offering free entry-level plans for new customers through the end of May, including free WiFi equipment for new customers who are students or teachers. Meanwhile, **Charter** announced Wednesday that it's expanding the eligibility for its free 60-day offer of Spectrum broadband to include educators who do not already have an account. **FCC** chmn **Ajit Pai** said Wednesday that 580 broadband and phone providers have now taken his Keep Americans Connected pledge, up from 190 last Thursday. Companies have committed to not terminate residential or small business customers for an inability to pay due to COVID-19, waive late fees and open hotspots to the public for the next 60 days.

Net Neutrality Comment Deadlines Postponed: The **FCC** Wireline Competition Bureau granted a 21-day extension to the deadlines for filing comments and reply comments on the public notice seeking to refresh the record in the Restoring Internet Freedom and Lifeline proceedings. Comments are now due on April 20 and reply comments are due on May 20, but commish **Jessica Rosenworcel** said the FCC should have pushed back the deadlines even further. "The FCC should extend all of its deadlines, to the extent it can, in light of the coronavirus pandemic. Everyone should be focused on what matters the most right now—that is responding to this crisis," Rosenworcel said in a statement.

Doing Good: The James M. Cox Foundation has committed up to \$5mln to Emory Healthcare for purchasing COVID-19 testing equipment. The equipment is currently only available in limited quantities, and Cox and Emory are working to purchase more equipment as it becomes available. The goal is to have the ability to complete 3K tests per day. The James M. Cox Foundation is named in honor of **Cox Enterprises'** founder and provides funding for capital campaigns and special projects in communities where the company operates. -- **Netflix** has created a \$100mln fund to help with hardships in the creative community. Most of the money will go to workers on Netflix productions, but it will allocate \$15mln to third parties and non-profits providing emergency relief to out-of-work crew and cast in the countries where Netflix has a large production base. -- **Charter** has donated airtime to run 1K COVID-19 PSAs per week on all **Spectrum News Networks** for four weeks. It will also run PSAs for the American Red Cross and other relief organizations. -- **AT&T** has created a \$10mln fund to support distance learning during this time. The first \$1mln will go to online learning platform Khan Academy. -- **Cisco** is committing \$225mln in cash, in-kind and planned-giving to support the COVID-19 response. That includes \$8mln in cash and \$210mln in product allocations. To date, Cisco has helped secure over 2.2mln people online, and its Webex has facilitated virtual response

We are so proud of our industry and the many ways companies are responding to the pandemic. Free internet, fresh content, employee safety and much more.

The Cablefax Editorial Team is reporting on vital industry updates every day. We want to hear from you so please reach out to share your news and stories.

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The Collapse of Theatrical Windows?: With theaters shuttering, will day-and-date releases become the norm? **Universal Pictures** is the first out of the gate, announcing "Trolls World Tour" will be available April 10 for a rental. Other in-release movie titles are set to be available as soon as this Friday. The movies will be available on **Comcast**, **Sky** and a "broad range of on-demand partners." Titles to be made available include "The Man" and "Emma" with a suggested retail price of \$49.99 in the US.

Tuesday — March 17, 2020

What the Industry Reads First

Volume

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 set aside their retrans dispute for now so that **DISH** can resume its carriage of 10 CMG stations in New York, Oregon, Washington, Arizona, Louisiana, California, Mississippi and Idaho. No word on how long the truce will last.

Cablefax Daily™

Friday — March 13, 2020

What the Industry Reads First

Volume 31 / No. 050

New Normal: Companies Roll Out Contingency Plans in Face of Covid-19

With a growing number of students and employees working from home, it's mission critical for the nation's broadband providers during the Covid-19 pandemic. Operators big and small are up-ending their day-to-day operations to ensure

Wednesday — March 18, 2020

What the Industry Reads First

Covering Covid-19: Content Companies Step Up Efforts

Programmers are shuffling schedules to respond to the coronavirus crisis. **The Weather Channel** is airing live programming at 50 minutes past the hour to share educational content during school closures. Topics include why thunder happens, how rainbows form and more. **Pledge** is scheduled for Friday at 2pm.

From the Commission: Another 116 broadband and telephone service providers have taken **Pai's** Keep Americans Connected Pledge, agreeing to take specific steps to keep Americans connected for 60 days. Some notable names taking the pledge include **Hotwire Communications**, **Mild**

meetings for the French, Canadian, German, Colombian, and other governments around the world.

In Our Thoughts: Former **FCC** commish *Robert McDowell* tweeted late Tuesday that he was back in the hospital with double pneumonia and likely COVID-19. "Please don't text or tweet me. Prayers welcome," he wrote. There continues to be reports of positive tests in the industry, with **Fox News** reporting that 6 staffers in its NY office have tested positive. **ESPN** has said it has a "handful" of employees with the virus. On Monday, **Comcast** confirmed that a NJ technician succumbed to the virus.

Commisso Reassures Fiorentina Staff: *Rocco Commisso*, **Mediacom** CEO and owner of the **ACF Fiorentina** soccer club, sent a letter to Fiorentina staff Tuesday with an update on a Go Fund Me campaign in support of hospitals in Florence battling the coronavirus, his own health and the future of the club itself. The Go Fund Me campaign surpassed its initial target of €500,000 within 72 hours and, while things are looking better in Italy, Commisso encouraged staff to continue staying inside as much as possible. "I myself have been at home for the past ten days with my wife and daughter, while Joe Barone is isolating with his son Giuseppe in Florence, as is my son Joseph," Commisso said in the letter. He also told staff not to worry about the financial stability of the club and instead focus on either recovering from their own COVID-19 battles or supporting their friends and families in this difficult time. "While our Club is facing similar economic disruptions, I want to reassure you that Mediacom and Fiorentina are solid organizations, which gives me confidence in assuring you that over time we will grow Fiorentina into a successful enterprise," Commisso wrote. "Right now, however, all the Viola Family needs to worry about is its own health and that of its loved ones. For the rest, as I've said from the first day I arrived at the Club: 'You take care of me and I'll take care of you.'"

Finance Moves: **Comcast** raised \$4bln in debt to help get through the coronavirus pandemic, the company said in an **SEC** filing. The new debt raise is through five different senior notes, maturing between 2025 and 2040, with interest rates ranging from 3.1% to 3.75%." On Tuesday, **Discovery** retracted its full-year 2020 performance outlook and announced it borrowed \$500mln from a revolving credit facility. "As a result of the unknown impact of COVID-19 on the company's financial results and the uncertainty related to its duration, as well as the impact of the postponement of the 2020 Olympic Games, the company is withdrawing its fiscal 2020 outlook," it said in an SEC filing. Discovery has upcoming corporate debt maturities in June 2020 of \$600mln and in June 2021 of \$640mln.

OpenVault's Tool to Keep Techs Out of the Field: **OpenVault** launched a suite of solutions designed to help service providers maintain customer satisfaction and reduce their need to interact with technicians face-to-face. The Distance Diagnostics and Remote Care suite allows ops to remotely identify and address node congestion, diagnose performance issues related to connected WiFi devices and reduce call volume through proactive diagnostics.

Sinclair Creates Fund for RSN Freelancers: **Sinclair** established a multimillion-dollar emergency fund to support nearly 1K freelancers who work across the **Fox** RSNs and **Marquee Sports Network** in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. All eligible freelancers will be able to receive a \$2.5K interest-free advance beginning April 3. Eligible freelancers include those who worked regularly on an RSN's games in a home market last year.

Coronavirus Events: **GSMA** said it will refund tickets in full for last month's canceled **Mobile World Congress**. The organization is also offering exhibitors a choice of refunds or credits toward the cost of attending the event over the next three years. Exhibitors who pulled out before cancellation are not eligible for a refund, but can receive a 125% credit of the fees paid this year to offset the cost of future attendance. -- **Light Reading** rescheduled its Cable Next-Gen Technologies & Strategies conference for Aug 25-27 in Denver. The event was originally scheduled March 16-18.

Netflix Outage: **Netflix** went down for spots of subscribers in the US and Europe on Wednesday for about an hour. Netflix said the outage has since been resolved. Last week, the streamer announced it is limiting streaming quality on its service for the next 30 days for European users to try to reduce the strain placed on ISPs during the coronavirus pandemic.

Programming: **YES Network** is enhancing its social media offerings through its "YES, We're Here" initiative to keep fans engaged. YES talent will host interviews three times a day, and throughout the rest of the week will post new episodes daily of all three shows on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and YESNetwork.com. -- **MLB Network** will marathon memorable Opening Day games on Thursday, what would have been baseball's Opening Day. The programming event kicks off at 1pm with *Derek Jeter's* first Opening Day with the New York Yankees against the Cleveland Indians in 1996.

People: **605** named *Stephanie Mitchko-Beale* to its board. She currently holds the role of evp, CTO at **Charter**. -- **CuriosityStream** named *Jason Eustace* as CFO. He's previously held finance roles at **Bluemercury**, **Pet360** and **Discovery**. -- **Anthem** named *Ariel Shnerer* the new gm of **Fight Network**. Shnerer first joined the net in 2007, and most recently served as senior director of programming, global distribution & communications for Anthem.

Think about that for a minute...

Stepping Up

Commentary by Steve Effros

It's not easy writing a column at times like these. That's especially true when we're besieged by both a political and totally random, unique health crisis at the same time. Being a lifelong "news junkie," (I've worked at ABC, NBC and The New York Times) my natural inclination is to want to address the "big" issues facing us, from our political dysfunctionality to reasoned, rather than irrational government messaging regarding the coronavirus. But this column has long been focused on how what is going on around us fits with our telecommunications, broadband, cable, journalism, Internet business. So, I'm going to try to restrain myself and stay on topic.

In many different ways various segments of our business are stepping up to the plate when it comes to responding to the "stay at home" mandate we are facing. There are bits and pieces of it obvious all over the place, from voluntarily suspending disconnects to increasing broadband speeds to opening up WiFi Hotspots to offering free children's programming. All of that is responsible and necessary.

Of course, the primary job, and the one that is at the base of what we do is to keep the infrastructure up and operating, and to make sure that our workforce is protected to assure that they can do that job. There's every indication that most companies are stepping up to that plate as well.

It's hard to miss the occasional consumer press article or political broadside worrying about whether we can keep up with the obviously increasing broadband demand. After all, more than half the population is under "stay at home, work from home" orders. However, the system seems to be holding up very well.

Yes, the systems in Europe have experienced stress, and the program distributors, Netflix, et. al., have cur-



tailed their HD feeds to reduce that stress. But so far, at least, that has not happened here because most of our systems have been built out with considerable extra capacity. We've been aiming toward "10G" for some time now. Our engineers, along with CableLabs, have been designing high-capacity plans into our systems for years.

But now we're hearing once again about the "digital divide" and the folks, particularly students at home, who don't have sufficient digital access. To be sure, we have to work to resolve as many of those problems as we can, but it's also incumbent upon us to stand back and remember that a significant number of Americans are not part of the digital community not because they don't have access, but because they have no effective way to use that access.

They don't have computers, for one. And even more disturbing, more than 15 percent of our population is considered functionally illiterate. Hooking those folks up to an Internet connection may sound like a great political rallying point, but I suspect it would be far more useful to spend some money on our education and adult literacy training system to address the more fundamental need.

None of this is to say we shouldn't do everything in our power right now to do everything we can. But the technology, by itself, is not the answer. Yes, it's great that we're supplying free entertainment and some educational tools to kids stuck at home with parents trying to address their needs at the same time they are trying to work from home. We have to step up and do that. But let's remember, there's lots more "stepping up" that this hopefully temporary crisis has exposed. Let's not forget it.

Steve

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(Steve Effros was President of CATA for 23 years and is now an advisor and consultant to the cable industry. His views do not necessarily reflect the views of Cablefax.)

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