

Cablefax Daily™

Friday — March 27, 2020

What the Industry Reads First

Volume 31 / No. 060

Some Relief: Breaking Down the Senate Coronavirus Stimulus Bill

The Senate unanimously passed a \$2 trillion coronavirus stimulus package late Wednesday and sent the bill—which offers relief to individuals, small business and large corporations—over to the House. It lays out a number of measures designed to combat the pandemic and devotes funding to keeping Americans connected in the coming months. Should the bill be signed into law, the **FCC** will receive \$200m to invest in telemedicine. The Commission will be able to use the funding to upgrade the quality and availability of remote health checkups by pushing funding towards services and devices that help doctors connect with patients. “The FCC has a vital role to play in helping Americans connect with health care providers. Senate passage of the CARES Act and the proactive measures we’ve already taken are major steps forward in fulfilling that role,” FCC chmn *Ajit Pai* said. An additional \$100m has been set aside for the **USDA’s** Reconnect pilot program, which offers grants for the costs of construction, improvement or acquisitions of facilities and equipment needed to extend broadband availability into rural areas. The USDA will receive another \$25m for its Distance Learning, Telemedicine and Broadband program, which offers grants for rural communities to gain access to technology designed to help students, teachers and medical professionals. The bill also authorizes **Veterans Affairs** to expand the mental health services it delivers via telehealth and allows it to enter into short-term agreements with telecom companies to provide veterans with temporary broadband services. Not everyone was satisfied with the contents of the stimulus package. Sen *Ed Markey* (D-MA) was satisfied with much of the package, but he said it neglected to address funding needed to continue closing the homework gap and protect the emergency spectrum used by first responders. Senate Democrats including Markey, *Chris Van Hollen* (D-MD) and *Michael Bennet* (D-CO) asked their colleagues across the aisle to agree to allocating at least \$2bln in E-Rate funds for schools and libraries to provide WiFi hotspots or other devices with WiFi capability to students that don’t have a reliable broadband connection and are being forced to finish the school year at home. “This will not be the last relief package that our families, workers and economy will need as this pandemic grows,” Markey said in a statement. **Public Knowledge** also had some problems with the legislation, saying that it failed to give Americans what they need by not funneling more money towards offering broadband subsidies and deploying broadband to unserved areas. “Furthermore, any internet service provider that receives funding from the stimulus bill through federal or state grants

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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

should meet specific obligations, like ramping up speeds where feasible or refusing to shut off service for those who suddenly lost their jobs, as a condition for receiving public money,” Public Knowledge senior policy counsel *Jenna Leventoff* said. The House will vote on (and is expected to pass) the stimulus package on Friday.

DOCSIS 4.0 Spec Released: In an important move toward 10G, **CableLabs** took the wraps off the DOCSIS 4.0 spec. DOCSIS 4.0 incorporates full duplex and extended spectrum capabilities, achieving a downstream speed of up to 10Gbps and an upstream speed of up to 6Gbps. Field trials typically start around 18 months after specs are published. It's a sign that even as the world adjusts to a new reality with COVID-19, the industry is continuing toward 10G. In fact, CableLabs principal architect *Doug Jones* noted in a blog that as cable operators respond to the evolving needs of consumers during this public health crisis, “remote work, learning, and health services stand to benefit from upstream broadband enhancements as DOCSIS 4.0 technology is deployed.” The upstream is important for tasks such as video conferencing, cloud applications and distant learning, with 4.0's capabilities 6x what DOCSIS 3.1 can provide. **CFX** recently asked **NCTA** chief *Michael Powell* if the pandemic would cause cable to hit pause on 10G efforts to focus on issues such as broadband buildout to rural areas. He stressed that they aren't mutually exclusive. “I think they're all part of the equation, and they're all important. When our companies were pushing to get to a gig, there were a lot of people who said, ‘what do you need to expand that much for?’ Right now, we're grateful we did and the country is going to be grateful we did,” Powell said. “I'm a big believer in the unknown and unknowable, and I think the fact is we have a very responsible path to 10G.”

Comcast Pushes Self-Installs: Comcast tweeted Thursday that its techs will visit homes or non-essential businesses only when it's necessary to provide connectivity to critical services. It's distributing self-install kits to residential customers who've asked to be set up with new services. A spokesperson confirmed this includes new Internet Essentials customers taking advantage of the 60-day free offering. **TV Answer Man** first noted the change in procedure. Comcast said professional installs have switched to drop and go, with a tech dropping off the modem and doing necessary remote work from the van. A Comcast technician in NJ passed away earlier in the week after contracting COVID-19.

NBCU CEO Tests Positive for Coronavirus: NBCU CEO *Jeff Shell* revealed in a memo Thursday that he has tested positive for COVID-19. “Although the virus has been tough to cope with, I have managed to work remotely in L.A. and am improving every day,” he wrote in the missive, which also expressed sorrow over the passing of **NBC News** audio tech *Larry Edgeworth*, who died after contracting the virus. Shell said the company has committed more than \$150mIn across film, TV and parks to help employees and other workers, at least partially, until normal operations can resume. Shell thanked employees for their service, and said that while things are challenging now, there's a lot to look forward to in 2021.

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MAGNA Forecasts 12% Drop in Linear Ad Sales: MAGNA is predicting a V-shaped recovery for US advertising, and revising its media owners net advertising revenue forecasts for 2020 and 2021. It expects media suppliers' total linear ad sales in 2020 to decline by 12% (-20% in the first half, -2.5% in the second), split through -13% for national TV, -12% for OOH, -25% for print and -14% for radio. Overall, all-media full year ad sales may decrease by -2.8%, less so than otherwise thanks to incremental political spend. For 2021, MAGNA increased its normalized, non-cyclical advertising spending forecast from +3.7% to +4%, and actual ad dollar growth will be higher than previously forecasted (+2.5% vs +1.4%). Digital media sales are predicted to be more resilient, growing by 4% this year and accelerate to up 7% in 2021.

C-SPAN Steps Up During COVID-19 Crisis: C-SPAN is responding to a special request from House Majority leader *Steny Hoyer* to aid in connecting members of Congress with the public during the current health crisis. For the first time in its 41-year history, C-SPAN is working with Congressional leadership of both parties to dedicate airtime to House members' brief video statements explaining their positions on the emergency coronavirus relief legislation. It anticipates running the members' statements in blocks during primetime next week. The videos also will be streamed on C-SPAN.org and archived in C-SPAN's online video library.

Esports for the Win: Fox Sports 1's decision to air on Sunday the eNASCAR iRacing Pro Invitational Series race, putting actual NASCAR drivers into simulators for a virtual competition, paid off. Nielsen said the live event's 638K homes and 903K P2+ viewers made it the most-watched linear esports broadcast in history. The telecast scored 1.6mln unique viewers that watched for at least 6 minutes, with viewers tuning in for an average of 59.42 minutes (more than half of the 112-minute broadcast). Nielsen said the broadcast also exposed NASCAR to new viewers, bringing in 255K viewers who hadn't yet watched a NASCAR Cup Series race in 2020.

Cuomo Tips Hat to Several Companies: NY Gov *Andrew Cuomo* thanked several companies in a series of tweets Thursday for donating supplies during the COVID-19 crisis. NBCU was applauded for sending medical supplies and personal protective equipment. Cuomo also mentioned **Corning**, whose Life Sciences division donated 15ml centrifuge tubes and 4ml cryovials, and **Huawei**, which has donated N-95 masks, isolation gowns, gloves and medical goggles. Other donations mentioned include 2500 gallons of hand sanitizer from **Facebook** and masks from **Goldman Sachs**.

From the Commission: The FCC has extended the due date for comments in the 2020 Biennial Report on Accessibility Under the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act to April 14 from March 30. -- **AT&T** received special temporary authority to use additional spectrum to serve Puerto Rico and US Virgin Islands during the coronavirus pandemic. The FCC is granting AT&T access to the AWS-4 spectrum, currently licensed to **DISH**, for 60 days to expand its network capacity to meet expected increases in network traffic as a result of more Americans on the islands working from home, social distancing, and sheltering in place. -- The FCC released consumer tips for maximizing at-home internet performance as more people are staying connected during the coronavirus pandemic. Advice includes plugging directly into your internet connection when possible to reduce the burden on WiFi, considering a schedule for different high bandwidth-dependent tasks and testing the speed you're receiving.

Distribution: **ViacomCBS** and **Meredith** struck multi-year affiliation renewals for all seven **CBS** affiliates, serving more than 7.6mln households. Meredith's CBS affiliates will continue to be locally available to subs of CBS All Access, and distributed across vMVPDs and traditional cable and satellite services.

COVID-19 Event Updates: **ACA Connects** will not reschedule its annual Summit for a later date in 2020. "Although we seriously considered and worked toward the fall for new dates for the Summit, ACA Connects in the end concluded that now was simply not the time to reschedule the Summit for later this year because of all of the unprecedented challenges facing our country and our members," ACA Connects pres/CEO *Matt Polka* said. The organization added it will decide later if a streamlined Capitol Hill visit and a mini-summit of some kind makes sense.

Sports Emmy Nominations Announced: The Sports Emmy Awards have been rescheduled from April 28, but the nominations are out. **ESPN Networks** earned the most with 58 nods, followed by **Fox** nets with 48. **NBC Sports Group** has 24, **CBS Sports** pulled in 20, and **Turner Sports** with 17.

Obituary: **Shaw Communications** founder, exec chair and former CEO *JR Shaw* passed away Monday at age 85. He stepped down as CEO of Canadian provider Shaw in 1998 when his eldest son, the late *Jim Shaw*, took over. Current CEO, *Brad Shaw*, began in the role in 2010. "JR—that's how we all knew him—was an archetype of the cable entrepreneur. He always had the best interests of the industry at heart, even when acting in Shaw's own self-interest might have been more advantageous," **SCTE-ISBE** pres/CEO *Mark Dzuban* said. "He knew how to get things done, but it was his honesty, his integrity and the value he placed on personal relationships that really stood out."

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

Syfy's 'Vagrant Queen' is Out of This World

For those folks going stir crazy stuck at home, Syfy's latest series "Vagrant Queen" offers a welcome distraction through a whirlwind roadtrip through a futuristic galaxy. The 10-episode series, based on comic books from Vault Comics, follows the adventures of a young queen-turned-outlaw dodging the government determined to extinguish her bloodline. While there are men in the universe, Vagrant Queen's behind-the-scenes is comprised of an all-female team of writers and directors. "We have a long way to go to reach parity, and you don't see enough women in sci-fi and genre," said creator and showrunner *Jem Garrard*. "It was important to me going into this in a position of power that I amplify these voices, and I want to be part of the change. I want to see more women in sci-fi. And on the director side, I know how difficult it is for women to get hired." Vagrant Queen, described as a "fun, violent, snarky space opera," puts its characters first. "What drew us to the comic was how fun it was, we enjoyed the banter between the characters and it was really set against this big epic backdrop," said Garrard. It's easy to get swept away in big ideas, in this new galaxy with crazy things. We wanted to really put character first and be self-aware. Ultimately, we have all this fun, ridiculous stuff, but people are going to come back and watch it if they love the characters." No worries for fans of the comics, as Vagrant Queen aims to stay close to source material. And no worries for those who haven't read the comics either. "It's a great comic, you should read it, but you don't need to to enjoy the show," said Garrard. "It's strange right now with everything going on, it's strange promoting a show. But ultimately when this comes out I really hope people enjoy it and it gives them a respite from the heaviness." The series premieres Friday at 10pm. — *Mollie Cahillane*

Reviews: "Making the Cut," streaming from March 27, **Amazon Prime**. A sign of the times. One of the first things we noticed about this new series, which obviously was taped prior to coronavirus, is how much things have changed. Co-hosts *Heidi Klum* and *Tim Gunn*, the former "Project Runway" comrades, kiss immediately upon seeing each other during the series' opening seconds. Then follows a series of hugs and kisses between Klum, Tim and designer-hopefuls, who are vying for \$1 million and, conveniently, a chance to sell their collections on Amazon. The series is light entertainment during a dark moment in world history. A good escape. — **Notable:** Not to brag, but cable deployed the infrastructure that much of the country is depending on as its lifeline during this moment. In addition, it's good to see cable operators doing good, ensuring students and urban families maintain their internet connection. On the programming side, props to **Court TV**, which is tapping into a slew of newly housebound crime-story junkies. Court is opening its considerable vault, offering iconic trials for free streaming at trialson-demand (courtTV.com). The 'docket' includes the entire "Trial of the Century," CA vs O.J. Simpson trial, from 1995. Need we say more about that? The free fare also includes FL vs. *Aileen Wuornos* (1992), which was depicted in "Monster," starring *Charlize Theron*. — *Seth Arenstein*

Basic Cable P2+ Prime Rankings*
(03/16/20-03/22/20)

Mon-Sun	MC US	MC US AA
	AA%	(000)
FNC	1.319	4,053
MSNBC	0.753	2313
CNN	0.685	2,104
HGTV	0.398	1,224
TLC	0.368	1,132
HIST	0.344	1,058
DISC	0.337	1,036
HALL	0.336	1,032
TBSC	0.331	1,016
A&E	0.313	961
FOOD	0.295	907
USA	0.292	899
TNT	0.284	873
AMC	0.234	719
INSP	0.232	713
ID	0.222	681
BRAVO	0.216	665
NICK	0.189	580
ESPN	0.187	574
ADSM	0.187	574
TVLAND	0.184	565
GSN	0.171	524
HMM	0.170	524
SYFY	0.165	507
LIFE	0.164	504
NAN	0.153	471
FRFM	0.145	446
VH1	0.145	445
FX	0.142	436
WETV	0.142	435
NKJR	0.138	425
COM	0.138	424
BET	0.133	408
TRAVEL	0.131	402
HBO	0.129	397
DSNY	0.125	384
MTV	0.124	381
PARA	0.122	373
DSJR	0.119	365
NATGEO	0.117	358
LMN	0.109	334

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



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Advertising Deadline: April 8 | Publication Date: April 22
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