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What the Industry Reads First

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Up in Arms: Consumers Report COVID Complaints to FCC

The FCC has received more than 2K consumer complaints related to the COVID-19 pandemic, chmn Ajit Pai told members of House Commerce during a teleconference Tuesday. Of the 2200 submitted, approximately 500 of the complaints filed were specifically in relation to the Commission's Keep Americans Connected Pledge and whether carriers were (or were not) living up to their pandemic-related promises. Carriers have promised not to terminate service for residents or small businesses affected by the pandemic, waive late fees and open up all WiFi hotspots to the general public. After it receives those complaints, the FCC forwards them to the correct carrier, which has 30 days to respond to the consumer. Carriers have responded to 1400 complaints thus far. "It's my understanding that most of the complaints that we have received about the pledge have been resolved to ensure that the consumer remains connected," Pai said. The other complaints related to the pandemic have largely been questions in relation to billing, network issues or broadband access. More than 750 carriers have agreed to abide by the pledge's terms through June 30. In response to questioning about how the Commission will support rural communities post-COVID to ensure they're not on the wrong side of the digital divide the next time disaster hits, Pai pointed to the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Phase I auction set to kick off on Oct 22. The \$16bln auction will target over 6mln unserved homes and businesses, and the FCC will vote on draft procedures at its June 9 open meeting. While members were excited about the prospect of additional broadband buildouts, many were still concerned about census blocks being excluded from consideration in the auction due to either the FCC's flawed broadband maps or carriers claiming to already serve those populations. Pai again said that while he hopes to soon move forward with an NPRM to implement the Broadband Data Act in the coming months and hopefully correct some of the bad data at the Commission, he cannot make significant progress without Congress appropriating the funds needed to enact the law to the FCC. For now, there is a team dedicated to investigating challenges to the preliminary list of eligible census blocks to be included in RDOF Phase I and taking out blocks that are already receiving connectivity services. The FCC is also taking a close look at the challenges to ensure that in areas that are supposedly already served, carriers are offering minimum speeds of 25/3Mbps. Any challenges claiming speeds lower than that benchmark will not be considered valid. "I certainly do not want unserved areas to be taken out of the auction because of inaccurate challenges," Pai said.



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RDOF Notice: The FCC released on Tuesday its more than 100-page draft of Phase 1 auction procedures for the \$16bn Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction. While the **California Public Utilities Commission** sought to postpone the auction start date by at least 120 days due to COVID-19, the FCC is proposing only a one-week delay, with bidding to start Oct 29. “The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates how essential it is that all Americans have access as soon as possible to high-speed broadband to telework, attend online classes, communicate with family and friends, and obtain healthcare remotely. Notably, potential bidders—i.e., those entities that would have to apply and develop bidding strategies—widely oppose a delay,” the draft order said.

NCTA Backs Fox in Free Speech Fight: NCTA and the **Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press** are supporting **Fox Corp** in its efforts to dismiss a suit claiming that reporting by **Fox News** related to the COVID-19 pandemic was harmful to consumers. “While all cable programming enjoys First Amendment protection, the constitutional prohibition against unwarranted governmental interference with programming on news networks is especially clear,” the pair wrote in an amici curiae brief. The suit was raised by the **Washington League for Increased Transparency and Ethics**, which claims that Fox News violated Washington state consumer protection laws by participating in a “campaign of deception and omission regarding the danger of the international proliferation of the novel coronavirus.” A state judge will consider Fox’s motion to dismiss at a Thursday hearing.

YouTube Relaunches Ad Offering: Google-owned **YouTube** announced a new global content solution it’s calling YouTube Select. In a blog post, YouTube advertising vp of product management *Vishal Sharma* wrote that YouTube Select is a “reimagination and unification” of existing products for premium advertisers, such as Google Preferred and prime packs. The company said the new solution offers more flexibility to reach audiences, offering a more curated and higher quality selection of creators and publishers. YouTube is introducing a dedicated streaming TV lineup in the US, which it said customers will be able to reach audiences with a single, scalable offering on TV across content from popular creators, YouTube Originals, live sports, news, movies and more.

Doing Good: **WOW!**’s executive leadership team is the latest to commit significant portions of their paychecks to support employees affected by the pandemic. That money will be directed to WOW!’s Arm-in-Arm fund, an employee-funded program to provide financial support to other WOW! employees in need. Leaders and employees throughout WOW have also made large donations to food banks across its service footprint to support local communities. WOW! is also offering contactless installations for new customers that have purchased either its high-speed broadband service or Whole-Home WiFi product. A significant number of current installations are being done without face-to-face interaction, but should a technician need to enter a customer’s home, they wear personal protective equipment and wipe down equipment or anything else they may touch in the home with disinfectant. At this time, WOW! has had only two positive cases of COVID-19 among its frontline employees. WOW! CEO *Teresa Elder* recovered from her own bout with COVID-19 last month.

ID Goes Virtual: ID’s fan engagement event IDCON is going virtual for “IDCON: Home Together.” Fans are encouraged to stay at home and ask questions, receive sneak peeks and more during a two-hour event beginning Thursday at 6pm, hosted on Zoom. Instead of an attendance fee, ID is encouraging donations to nonprofit organizations it supports, includ-

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5 Gig Fast: Sparklight Business is upgrading its local fiber network, **Pirahna Fiber**, in select markets to offer 5 Gig symmetrical speeds for SMBs. The company plans to expand the offering across its entire footprint in the future.

Xfinity Adds 5G: Xfinity Mobile launched 5G Tuesday using its MVNO with **Verizon** and introduced new data plans that include 5G services for free. Xfinity Mobile customers can opt-in to a 5G data plan through the Xfinity Mobile app and then access 5G outside of their homes in 34 major cities across the US.

Webby Award Winners: The 24th annual Webbys aired online this year on Tuesday, with the 2020 show WFH: Webby From Home dedicated to honoring individuals and organizations who are using the internet to respond to the coronavirus pandemic. **Nat Geo** took home 14 awards, including the Media Company of the Year Award. The company also won awards across categories including social, podcasts, video and websites. **Google** also brought in 14 awards. **HBO** was honored for best branded editorial experience, and **ESPN** for best user interface, websites.

Cable ONE Initiates Public Offering: **Cable One** commenced an underwritten public offering of \$400mln of shares of its common stock Monday. In addition, the operator intends to grant underwriters an option for 30 days to purchase up to \$60mln of additional shares of its common stock. Cable ONE intends to use a portion of the net proceeds to repay outstanding borrowings under its credit facility and the remainder for general corporate purposes, including strategic acquisitions and investments.

Distribution: fubo Sports Network is now available on **Pluto TV**. The live, free linear sports net launched last fall, and will now be available on over 75mln devices. It was already carried on free platforms **LG Channels**, **Samsung TV Plus**, **The Roku Channel**, **Vizio Channels** and **XUMO** as well as through **fuboTV**'s subscription service. -- **Insight TV** and its two digital channels launched on **Vizio SmartCast TV**, bringing the channels to more than 13mln TV sets in the US.

Ratings: Fox News won the week in cable, averaging 1.898mln viewers in total day and 3.486mln in primetime. In total day, **MSNBC** followed with 1.2mln viewers, and **CNN** with 1.057mln. In prime, MSNBC brought in 2.064mln and CNN 1.506mln. -- The finale (eps 9 & 10) of **ESPN**'s "Last Dance" saw double-digit growth, averaging 5.6mln viewers across **ESPN** and **ESPN2** Sunday. Episode 9 (9-10 p.m.) averaged 5.9mln viewers, up 10% from last Sunday, becoming the third most watched episode of the series (behind eps 1 and 3). The original airings of all ten episodes also averaged 5.6mln viewers in same day, solidifying the series on the GOAT as the most-watched documentary content ever on **ESPN**.

Programming: Freeform announced its 2020-2021 programming slate, renewing "Everything's Gonna be Okay" and "Motherland: Fort Salem" for second seasons. "Grown-ish," "Cruel Summer" and "Good Trouble" will return in 2021. -- **Tubi** is celebrating upcoming LGBT Pride Month with a range of independent LGBT films, including "But I'm a Cheerleader," "Saved!" and "Elton John: Becoming Rocketman." -- **ESPN** will celebrate 2020 graduates at HBCUs on its content platform "The Undefeated." HBCU Day takes place this Saturday and will be headlined by former pres **Barack Obama**. -- Networks are coming together to honor the late **Andre Harrell**, founder of Uptown Records, on Sunday at 7pm. The tribute will air commercial free on **BET**, **Revolt TV**, all **iONE** digital brands and on **Fox Soul**. It will feature appearances from **Chris Rock**, **Mariah Carey**, **Jamie Foxx** and more.

People: ViacomCBS upped execs **Trevor Rose** and **Justin Rosenblatt** to senior roles as the company's entertainment and youth group continues its shuffle. Rose has been promoted to evp, talent & content development and head of talent, entertainment & youth. Rosenblatt will now hold the title svp, alternative & comedy content for the entertainment and youth group. The promotions follow the recently announced exit of **Sarah Babineau**, head of **Comedy Central** content & creative enterprises, who will be leaving the company at the end of the year.

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