

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

No More Silos: Sarnoff's Impact on WarnerMedia

WarnerMedia studios and network group CEO *Ann Sarnoff* hasn't been afraid to make her voice heard since being tapped as the first woman to head **Warner Bros.** Speaking at **CES** Wednesday, Sarnoff attributed much of what she's learned about diversity and inclusion to her early days at **Nickelodeon** in the late '90s.

"In terms of being a woman in this industry, it hasn't been easy. Earlier on, as in most industries, you had to conform to more of the male culture," Sarnoff said. "At Nickelodeon, honestly, it's the first time where I felt I could bring my full self in, and part of it is because it was being run by *Geraldine Laybourne*, who was a woman, and the staff was 60% female." Laybourne's leadership served as an example of how to get a seat at the table and make a difference, she added.

Her top priority since joining **AT&T** has been to deconstruct the silos that remained in place from the old **Time Warner**. What Sarnoff didn't expect to find was a just-as-siloed Warner Bros. "We have had weekly meetings on our big franchises talking about how we can collaborate together, how we make the whole more than the parts, how we bring the amazing characters and stories to life in a new and different way," she said. "What I said to them was 'Look, you don't want your fans to see your org chart, and boy can they see it right now.'"

Sarnoff pointed to the DC Fandome virtual event as a great example of the newfound unity amongst the various segments of WarnerMedia. The virtual DC Fandome, which occurred in

August, was free to fans and offered first looks at upcoming projects in the DC Comics' universe, including movies, video games, comics and TV shows.

"It really was a tribute to the things that the fans love about DC and bringing it all together in one place, at one point in time, and creating an event of it," the CEO said. The event was a major success for Sarnoff and the team, generating more than 22 million fan interactions in August.

Those that attended the Fandome got a sneak peek of what was to come with "Wonder Woman 1984," which made its debut on Christmas Day on **HBO Max**. Warner Bros announced in early December that all of the movies in its 2021 slate would also premiere day-and-date on the streaming platform. With the shift that has become necessary due to the ongoing nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sarnoff said companies can no longer rely on opening day box office numbers to predict the success of their films.

"Unless you're serving ads, the eyeballs in that day-and-date world are less relevant to the overall engagement of the service—the amount it costs you to acquire a subscriber, the churn level every month... it's a completely different set of metrics that the industry is not geared to measure," she said. "When more of the world is looking at streaming and looking for proxies of success, my guess is there will be things we will learn sooner on in the equation."

PAI QUESTIONS BIG TECH TRANSPARENCY

When outgoing **FCC** chair Ajit Pai was asked on **C-SPAN** last week about **Facebook** and **Twitter's** decision to suspend the

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C-BAND AUCTION HITS \$30MLN
 The **FCC's** C-band auction surpassed the \$30mln mark before Friday's last bidding round ended. Bidding is scheduled to continue through Round 45, which ends at noon ET on Dec 23. The auction will

an ongoing initiative made in partnership with @livingwellsat, to help bolster the works, messages, and careers of Black artists based in the network's hometown of Atlanta, Georgia: bit.ly/AS_ATLMP



intend to get groceries at kiosks (37%), buying gift local retailers (23%) at their favorite businesses and friends (24%).

(Source: Comcast Business)

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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Dark Day: Powell Describes Capitol Chaos as Unimaginable

The world watched via television networks and broadband connections as the US Capitol was breached by president Trump supporters Wednesday as the House and Senate debated a move by some Republicans to overturn election results.

"This is a sad and deeply disturbing moment for our nation," **NCTA** pres/CEO Michael Powell told **CFX** "We could not have predicted this. It's a historic moment in our nation's history. The Republican Party has a long history of trying to overturn election results. This is a sad and deeply disturbing moment for our nation."

Retrans Agenda: Virtual MVPDs, ATSC 3.0's Role in Retransmission

As we head into 2021, there may not have been a huge retransmission consent blackout to ring in the year (those happened a few weeks early and involved **DISH** and **AT&T**), but there's still plenty for broadcasters and MVPDs to fret about.

news networks and **Twitter**. When the House and Senate went out of session as a group broke into the Capitol, **C-SPAN** continued with live coverage from its studio (*Greta Brawner* hosting) mixing in interviews with reporters inside and outside the Capitol, members of Congress, live video

RATINGS

Fox News has now officially won prime and total day for 2020, as projected. It became the first cable news net to end a year with more than 3.5mln viewers in prime. It was a pretty good year for all the news nets though. See our story - Watching **TNT** and **TBS's**

Although traditional MVPD subscribers declined in the first half of 2020, retransmission consent revenue for major station groups increased in both the first and second quarters of 2020 by nearly 20% compared to the second quarters of 2019, according to **S&P Global**. The **FCC's** newly released Communications Market Report, broadcast retrans consent revenue jumped from

president's social media accounts, he said he wouldn't second guess those decisions given the circumstances at the Capitol. Since then, Twitter decided to permanently ban Trump's account. "With respect to those more recent decisions, look, we're going through difficult times and these are difficult questions to confront, but I do think these determinations speak to the consistency and transparency, or lack thereof, when it comes to the decision-making process," Pai said in a call with reporters Wednesday. "It's still unclear why certain decisions were made and whether the principles that animated those decisions are being applied throughout the platform. For example, why does the Supreme Leader of Iran still have an account?" He said he's been talking about the consistency and transparency of Big Tech for a long time now. Trump was impeached by the House Wednesday, with debate taking place at the same time as the FCC's open meeting. The House vote was 232-197. Ten Republicans joined with Dems in voting for impeachment, including former House Commerce chair (2010-2016) *Fred Upton*.

GOODBYE PAI

Ajit Pai will step down from the **FCC** on January 20, with commissioner *Jessica Rosenworcel* widely expected to take over as chairman. Wednesday's meeting was a review of FCC Bureau accomplishments over the last four years under his leadership. Rosenworcel used her remarks to address the Capitol riots, calling the violence an ugly chapter in American history. She said the country needs connections that "remind us that our states are united and that our interdependence is powerful," and she declared that the newly appropriated Emergency Broadband Fund for expanding internet access can help with those connections.

Rosenworcel joined other commissioners and staff in thanking *Pai* for his years of public service and in welcoming *Nathan Simington*, who was attending his first meeting as a commissioner. While Rosenworcel hasn't always agreed with *Pai*, she praised him for keeping FCC employees safe during the pandemic. "He went above and beyond to keep the staff of this agency informed and engaged in a time of crisis, and for that he deserves great credit and appreciation," she said. *Pai*, who served as a FCC commissioner before Trump named him chairman in January 2017, got a bit emotional as he said goodbye, particularly as he went through a long list of thank-yous that included family as well as his grade school principal. "To my parents, Indian immigrants who came in 1971 with \$8 and a transistor radio and the American dream, I hope I made you proud," he said, closing with, "It's been a ride of a lifetime and only in America."

LAWMAKERS CALL FOR FCC SCRUTINY ON RDOF

Long-form applications for winning bids in the **FCC's** Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction are due Jan 29, and members of Congress are preparing to ask the agency to closely scrutinize the submissions to make sure they are in compliance with program requirements. Phase 1 of the auction closed December 7, with 5.2 million locations auctioned for \$9.2 billion in subsidies to bidders for expanding broadband to unserved areas. **Charter** was the biggest winner, securing 1.1 million locations and qualifying for \$1.1 billion in subsidies. In a draft obtained by **Cablefax**, a lengthy bipartisan list of House and Senate members ask the agency to validate that each winner in fact has the technical, financial, managerial, operational skills, capabilities, and resources to deliver the services that they have pledged for every American



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they plan to serve. The letter, being circulated by Representatives *Jim Clyburn* (D-SC) and *Tim Walberg* (R-MI) and Senators *Amy Klobuchar* (D-MN) and *John Thune* (R-SD), also asks the FCC to make the status of its review available ASAP and to consider opportunities for public input on the applications. More than \$11 billion will be made available in Phase 2 of the RDOF auction, which targets areas that are deemed partially served as well as any that were not won in the first phase.

HALLMARK REQUESTS RETURN OF CAMPAIGN FUNDS

Hallmark Cards, parent company of **Hallmark Channel**, wants Senators *Josh Hawley* (R-MO) and *Roger Marshall* (R-KS) to return donations made by its political action committee. The decision was made after some lawmakers objected to the certification of last week's electoral vote. "Hallmark believes the peaceful transition of power is part of the bedrock of our democratic system, and we abhor violence of any kind. The recent actions of Senators Josh Hawley and Roger Marshall do not reflect our company's values. As a result, HALLPAC requested Sens. Hawley and Marshall to return all HALLPAC campaign contributions," Hallmark said in a statement.

UNIVISION LAUNCHING AVOD

Univision is the latest programmer to roll out a free, ad-supported streaming service. It bills **PrendeTV**, set to debut in 1Q21, as the only streaming service created exclusively for the US Hispanic audience to feature free, premium 100% Spanish-language programming. The announcement comes within two weeks of **ForgeLight** and **Searchlight Capital** closing on their acquisition of Univision. "With the launch of PrendeTV we are focused on bringing new ways for our advertisers to reach the US Hispanic audience and, importantly, PrendeTV will be a critical part of our strategy to grow the scope of our business partnerships with our key distributors," CEO *Wade Davis* said. It will launch with more than 30 channels and 10,000 hours of VOD programming.

SINCLAIR CBS RENEWAL

ViacomCBS and **Sinclair** signed multi-year agreements across 13 **CBS** network affiliations for Sinclair stations that serve nearly 6 million TV households. Sinclair is one of the largest operators of CBS affiliates. Under the deal, Sinclair's CBS affiliates will remain locally available to subscribers of **CBS All Access**, ViacomCBS' SVOD streamer. The renewal includes WPEC in West Palm Beach and WRGB in Albany.

CALIFORNIA NET NEUTRALITY FIGHT

Rep *Anna Eshoo* (D-CA) and 13 Democrats in California's congressional delegation have asked Attorney General-designate *Merrick Garland* to withdraw the federal government's lawsuit against the State of California over its net neutrality law as one of the first actions after inauguration. Asked about the move, **FCC** chair *Ajit Pai* said it would be up to the next administration to decide how to proceed. "As we saw it and as the **Department of Justice** saw it in the past, we believe the California legislative scheme was in direct conflict with the federal deregulatory scheme," he told reporters Wednesday.

SPARKLIGHT UPS DATA TRANSPORT GAME

Sparklight Business launched its Optical Wavelength service Wednesday. The service uses the company's fiber network to deliver a dedicated point-to-point, high-capacity data network service to business and carrier customers in the Sparklight footprint.

PARTNERSHIPS ABOUND

Firstlight Media and **Evergent Technologies** are working together to further integrate their cloud-based capabilities. The deal will see the combination of Firstlight's content management system and Evergent's OTT and traditional video solution to enhance user and subscriber management. "By combining our cloud-based platform with Evergent's advanced technology, we're creating an agile, robust solution that can support the industry's needs at a strategic point in the engagement funnel and can build long-term value for our customers," Firstlight co-founder/chief business officer *Paul Pastor* said. – **TiVo** and **Cox Communications** have agreed to a multi-year extension of the pair's IP agreement for the former's media-related patent portfolios.

PROGRAMMING

HBO's series "Insecure" will wrap with its upcoming fifth season. Production is set to begin this month, with episodes to debut later this year. – **TNT** and *Bleacher Report* are producing the first annual "AEW Dynamite Awards." The awards show, which will honor top **AEW** stars and viral moments of the past year, will livestream Jan 27 at 7pm ET on the Bleacher Report app.

PEOPLE

BET promoted *Tiyale Hayes* to svp, brand strategy and marketing, reporting to CMO *Kimberly Paige*. – Media marketing vet *Jennifer Ball* joined **BBC Studios** as svp, marketing. Ball has previously held marketing roles at **Univision** and **Promax**. – New **CSG** CEO *Brian Shepherd* is establishing his leadership team, tapping *Ken Kennedy* for the new post of COO and president of the Revenue Management and Digital Monetization solutions unit. A 15-year CSG vet, Kennedy was previously president of technology and product. – **ViacomCBS Kids & Family** consolidated all live-action production under one team that will be by **Nickelodeon's** *Shauna Phelan* and *Zack Olin*. The two are broadening their current roles to now also oversee live-action for **Awesomeness** and third-party platforms. – Global licensing company **Principal Media** named former **Playboy Enterprises** global TV president *Gary Rosenson* as its new CEO. Ex-**A+E Networks** exec *Melanie Torres* joins Principal as svp, worldwide distribution, and *Daniel Boluarte* was upped to svp, business development. – The board of **Adaptive Spirit** voted to expand its membership by two, adding **Cox** svp, field operations *Colleen Langner* and **Liberty Latin America** vp, product and technology *Ewam de Freitas*. "We are excited at the new perspectives they will bring to the organization and thank them for their willingness to pitch in to support the cause," board chair *Steve Raymond* said in a statement.

Think about that for a minute...

Cusp

Commentary by Steve Effros

As should be obvious, my column in last Wednesday's issue of **Cablefax** was written prior to the unbelievable desecration of the nation's Capitol. There's lots I could write about that despicable event, but most of it has already been said. That our industry has a unique relationship with Congress and the Capitol should be obvious. We have long known and heralded that institution and promoted the ability of all Americans to witness, for themselves, what was being said and done in "the people's house." The cable industry, after all, started and funds C-SPAN.

Today, an article of impeachment of the President was adopted, again, by the House with the C-SPAN cameras letting the entire world witness, and judge for themselves, what is happening. No one behind a microphone will tell you what is "true" or what is "fake." You will see it as it is happening. That's a particular type of communication, and a valuable one, but it can't be the exclusive way we learn about what's going on around us.

Context, interpretation, and additional perspective are also very important in understanding. That's where editorial discretion, and, yes, well identified opinion are critical. Once this current crisis is stabilized, how we deal with all of that is, as I suggested last week, going to be the subject of intense debate.

Of course it already is, in the context of things like "Section 230," something you have been reading about here for well over a year. But now we have reached cusp. We have gotten to a point where it is obvious that how things are said, which forums are used, or abused, and who controls those forums and means of communication are a central part of what happened last week. We cannot let it happen again.

So how do we protect the right of everyone to "speak their minds," while at the same time assuring that information does not become so warped and amplified that it spurs delusional acts? Note, again, that this is not an issue of "the First Amendment." That is a restriction on what the

government can do. The obvious mechanisms that led to the echo chambers and feedback loops leading up to efforts to overturn an election and the sacking of the Capitol are privately owned.

The current cynical, repetitive manipulation of the inherent power of platforms like Facebook and Twitter has finally been staunched. But that's only because the private owners, who have every right to do so, belatedly said "enough" when the violence that many saw coming finally flared. That's just a tourniquet, and there's a very good question as to who, if anyone, should have the power to apply it.

I have been wrestling with these questions for most of my adult journalistic and legal life. There are no easy answers. But what I do know is, as I said, we have reached cusp. The intersection of the arc of uncontrolled public discourse and public action is now going to force us to seriously rethink how big, how powerful, how loud any one speaker or forum should be allowed to get. There are only a few major platforms, or networks that now control the distribution of ideas. There are estimated to be only 35 major "influencers" who dominate those communications forums. We will have a significant debate about how and who should monitor those forums and users, but to start, I would suggest we disallow any to remain that big or influential again.



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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