

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Emergency Broadband: NCTA, ACAC Stand Up for Non-ETCs

A number of industry groups stopped by the **FCC** last week with concerns about the implementation of the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program and whether current proposals will give Lifeline providers a leg up on the competition.

The \$3.2 billion program was created by Congress in an effort to give more low-income customers access to broadband during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it promises to reimburse participating companies for providing discounted service and connected devices.

During a January 7 meeting with FCC commish *Geoffrey Starks* and his chief of staff *Bill Davenport*, **NCTA** applauded Congress for recognizing that the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program should be available to all participating providers, not just those that are Eligible Telecommunications Carriers. But the association said more has to be done by the Commission to ensure robust participation from non-ETC companies.

The FCC has proposed relying on certain **Universal Service Administrative Company** databases and procedures in its implementation of the program that companies who are not ETCs don't have access to if they don't currently participate in Lifeline. While current Lifeline providers won't have to get FCC approval of their procedures for verifying eligibility, non-ETCs will. NCTA's concern is that non-ETCs will be delayed by those requirements and not be able to compete with Lifeline providers.

"Participation by non-ETC providers and their customers in the EBB Program should not be delayed or otherwise disadvantaged simply because they previously chose to support low-income customers through their own programs rather than through the Lifeline program," NCTA said.

In its ex parte, **ACA Connects** shared a similar fear with the **Wireline Competition Bureau**, saying that its members, many of whom are not ETCs and have no experience with Lifeline, "are likely to stay on the sidelines if the rules do not create a level playing field and a common starting point for all participating providers."

The association recommended that the FCC set a single date on which all participating providers can begin offering benefits that are eligible for reimbursement. It also offered recommendations on how to streamline the steps non-ETCs must complete to be considered for the program, including that the FCC should immediately direct the USAC to grant any requesting non-ETC provider prompt access to the multiple Lifeline databases. Standing up for its smaller members, ACA Connects asked the Commission to consider a fast tracked approval process for rural fixed wireline providers that are not ETCs.

"Such providers will be disproportionately burdened by any upfront costs associated with the program, yet in many areas, they may be the only viable option for consumers who want a robust wireline service," the association said.

Filing their ex parte together, **Public Knowledge, Free Press, Open Technology Institute** and other consumer

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Cablefax Award Submission Deadlines:

The FAXIES Awards

Entry Deadline: March 19
Final Deadline: March 26

Cablefax 100 Nominations

April 9

Top Ops Nominations

April 23

The Diversity List Nominations

July 16

Most Powerful Women Nominations

September 10

Program Awards

Entry Deadline: November 19
Final Deadline: December 3



groups agreed with the need for new criteria for non-ETCs, and also said that the Commission should allocate a portion of the administrative funds to promote awareness for the program.

“The FCC should work with USAC and the FCC’s Consumer and Government Affairs Bureau to develop ‘plug and play’ materials that are clear, concise, and easy to understand, to be made available for marketing purposes for all entities trying to inform eligible participants of the program,” the groups said. The hope would be that the efforts would complement outreach by participating providers, which should be a required component of participation in the program, they added.

The FCC is continuing to accept comments on the program with the deadline set for Jan 25.

SCRIPPS MOVING INTO ION

Scripps will migrate multicast networks Bounce, Court TV, Court TV Mystery, Grit and Laff to carriage on its newly acquired ION stations beginning March 1. It’ll be a rolling transition, continuing as network affiliation agreements expire over the next five years. ION will continue to operate on the 48 primary channels of ION stations, but the multicast networks will replace ION’s multicast lineup of ION Plus, QUBO and SHOP ION, which will cease operations as of Feb 28. Scripps has begun a reduction of about 120 jobs across its national networks and corporate workforce and now expects to exceed its initial estimate of \$500 million in synergies with the \$2.65 billion acquisition.

NEW GOP COMMERCE MEMBERS

Eight new Republicans are set to join House Commerce. The list includes Rep Neal Dunn (FL), who joined with 107 Republican members of Congress in 2017 to voice support of FCC chairman

Ajit Pai’s plan to repeal Title II. Last week, Dunn and newly named Republican Commerce members John Joyce (PA), Debbie Lesko (AZ), Gary Palmer (AL) and Greg Pence (IN) joined 139 representatives in the House to vote to sustain one or both objections to Electoral College results. The other Republicans joining the committee are Kelly Armstrong (ND), Dan Crenshaw (TX) and John Curtis (UT). “People expect results, and they made that clear when they sent a significant number of Republicans this cycle to the People’s House. That’s why I made sure the House Energy and Commerce Committee’s ratios reflected these historic gains,” said Cathy McMorris Rodgers (WA), the committee’s Republican leader. The eight recommendations must be approved by the House Republican Conference before becoming official.

IMPEACHMENT RATINGS

CNN was the ratings leader for Wednesday’s impeachment vote in the House, dominating the cable news nets and broadcasters (when they were on the air with coverage). For 12:30-4:45pm ET, CNN averaged 3.8 million viewers vs MS-NBC’s 2.58 million and Fox News’ 1.39 million, according to Nielsen Fast National data. ABC averaged 2.398 from 12:24-5pm, while CBS nabbed 1.901 from 4:22-4:46pm. CNN Digital reached 47 million cross-platform global unique visitors. The livestream peaked at 568,000 at 4:30pm—more than 2.5x higher than peak concurrents seen during the first Trump impeachment house vote in 2019.

VIACOMCBS, DISH ADDRESSABLE AD MILESTONE

ViacomCBS and DISH Media announced Thursday they had delivered the first-ever addressable impressions within a live national broadcast via MVPD set-top box. Addressable ad replace-

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ment was successfully executed on a number of live campaigns across **DISH's** footprint in certain **CBS** owned-and-operated markets. **Adcuratio** powered the activation with a solution, developed in partnership with ViacomCBS and DISH, that enables broadcast addressability across MVPD households in a way that easily integrates with programmer and distributor infrastructures.

NEW CISCO-ACACIA DEAL

Cisco and **Acacia's** merger is back on, with Cisco now agreeing to pay \$115/share, or \$4.5 billion on a fully diluted basis, for the semiconductor maker. Acacia had moved to terminate the deal last week, claiming Cisco hadn't received timely approval from Chinese regulators. Cisco had originally agreed to pay \$70/share in a deal valued at \$2.6 billion.

DISTRIBUTION

Nexstar-owned **WGN America** reached a multi-year deal with MVPD **Vidgo**. It is the fifth agreement the cable network has snagged with subscription streaming services over the past two months.

FCC HAS NO VERDICT ON 'CUTIES'

FCC chairman **Ajit Pai** said he's not aware of any licensed television broadcaster that intends to air the controversial **Netflix** film, "Cuties," and thus, the Enforcement Bureau hasn't made a determination as to whether the program violates FCC rules concerning indecent or obscene programming. Pai made the remarks in a letter last week to former Rep **Doug Collins** (R-GA), who launched a failed bid for the US Senate in 2020 and left office Jan 3. Collins wrote Pai in September, urging the FCC to ensure the film is never broadcast on public television in the US. "While Netflix has stated that the movie acts as a 'social commentary against the sexualization of young children,' I fail to comprehend how sexualizing young children achieves that goal," Collins wrote.

PROGRAMMING

HBO Max launches new eps of "Looney Tunes," Jan 21. – **TNT** renewed "Animal Kingdom" for a sixth and final season. Season 5 debuts this summer. – **VH1** greenlit a new season

of "T.I. & Tiny: Friends & Family" for this spring. – **Peacock Premium** (\$4.99/month) will be the exclusive home of NBC Sports' speed skating coverage, beginning with the 2021 season that kicks off Saturday.

MAVTV ADDS STREAMER

MAVTV announced the launch of SVOD **MAVTV Plus**, which will replace Lucas Oil Racing TV. The service, a complement to the existing **MAVTV Motorsports Network**, will formally debut with exclusive coverage of the 2021 Lucas Oil Chili Bowl Nationals in Tulsa on Saturday with coverage across all digital platforms as well as the official **MAVTV Facebook** page. Subscriptions are priced at \$6.99/month or \$99.99/year. To commemorate its kickoff, all subscribers will receive 60 days of free access.

INAUGURATION CENTRAL

Discovery Inc and **Discovery Education** are partnering to present "I Do Solemnly Swear: The US Presidential Inauguration," a free, virtual learning experience for elementary and middle school students. It will premiere Jan 19 at noon on **discoveryeducation.com** and will air the same week on **Discovery Family** and in Spanish on **Discovery Familia**. There will also be a kids' edition livestream of the Inauguration live on **Discovery Education's** site at noon ET Wednesday that will air on **Discovery Family** and **Discovery Familia** later in the week.

PEOPLE

Former **Fox** exec **Jamia Bigalow** joined **Amazon** as head of partner marketing for Fire TV. Bigalow was at **21st Century Fox** from 2011 through 2019, most recently serving as svp, distribution marketing. – Fresh off **Morgan Stanley Infrastructure Partners'** acquisition of 49.99% of **Lightpath**, the fiber-based enterprise company selected **Chris Morley** as CEO. He most recently served as senior operating advisor for **Stonepeak Infrastructure Partners**. He's joined by two former **Lightower** execs—**Doug Dalissandro**, who will serve as chief revenue officer, and **David Mayer**, tapped as chief strategy officer.

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PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

Finding a 'UFO Witness'

There will forever be questions about what exists beyond our skies, but **Discovery** is hoping "UFO Witness" will help uncover more about life beyond Earth's atmosphere. Each episode of the series sees the reopening of case files on some of the most prominent UFO encounters in history, files that have been locked to the public for decades. "The project started three years ago, when author *Mark O'Connell*, one of our contributors on the show, just completed a biography about *J Allen Hynek*," **Travel Channel** gm *Matthew Butler* told **CFX**. During his research, O'Connell came across information that led him to *Jennie Zeidman*, the last surviving member of the Air Force's top-secret UFO investigation called Project Blue Book. O'Connell then reached out to former federal agent *Ben Hansen*, a UFO investigator, for assistance on the case. UFO Witness takes a deep dive into what the pair uncovered. "What makes this show like no other is the exclusive access to Dr. Hynek's files, and the notion that all these secrets will finally see the light of day. And then, Ben Hansen took a truly unique approach to investigating the existence of UFOs by comparing the iconic Project Blue Book cases that spanned over 30 years, with similar cases that took place decades later," Butler said. The research team was also granted exclusive access to the Center of UFO Studies, and viewers can expect coverage of some of its most fascinating cases. The first three episodes of the series premiered Thursday on discovery+ with the remaining five episodes to be added to the streamer weekly. And while there are plenty of shows about the possibility of alien life, Butler is confident that viewers will keep coming back for this one. "For us, it's all about the story. Ben Hansen and Mark O'Connell are experts in the field with deep contacts within the government. Each investigation is so thrilling, we guarantee our passionate fans, who have a hunger for the unexplained, will come back every week to learn the real story of UFOs visiting our planet." – *Sara Winegardner*

REVIEWS

"Frontline: President Biden," 10pm, Tuesday, **PBS**. "To the victor belongs"...a short, but nicely done PBS doc. In two weeks, the loser gets "Trump's American Carnage" (Jan. 26, 10pm). The juxtaposition couldn't be more obvious. Interestingly, though, select footage from both these docs were presented in a single production a few months ago: "The Choice 2020." In that excellent production, the message was clear: Predicting a person's future when they're young is difficult. Neither *Joe Biden*, nor *Donald Trump* began life well. Director *Michael Kirk* drew the parallels beautifully. Can he get enough additional mileage from that production to fashion two compelling docs on each man? In the case of "President Biden," the answer is yes. (PBS has yet to send critics Trump's American Carnage.) Another question, of course, is: If you've seen The Choice 2020, do you want to watch President Biden? Again, yes. There's enough interesting material here, with apposite footage and talking heads like *Peggy Noonan* of "The Wall Street Journal" and, appropriately and poignantly, *John Hendrickson* of "The Atlantic." There's plenty to absorb and great stories about 46, as a politician and as a person. – Notable: Props to **Discovery** and **Discovery Education** for "I Do Solemnly Swear," a family-appropriate guide to the inauguration (Tues, 12pm ET, discoveryeducation.com and running on **Discovery Family** and **Discovery Familia**, check for times). – *Seth Arenstein*

BASIC CABLE		
P2+ PRIME RANKINGS*		
(01/04/21-01/10/21)		
MON-SUN	MC	MC
	US	US AA
	AA%	(000)
CNN	1.335	4,111
MSNBC	1.226	3,776
FNC	1.006	3,098
HGTV	0.362	1,113
HALL	0.334	1,029
TLC	0.311	959
HIST	0.283	872
DISC	0.264	814
TNT	0.257	792
FOOD	0.244	753
TBSC	0.238	733
ID	0.212	654
USA	0.211	650
INSP	0.199	612
ESPN	0.188	579
TVLAND	0.175	539
A&E	0.172	529
HMM	0.164	505
LIFE	0.162	499
NAN	0.149	458
BRAVO	0.149	458
AMC	0.145	446
FX	0.141	434
NWSMX	0.137	421
ADSM	0.133	408
WETV	0.130	402
E!	0.115	353
GSN	0.114	352
TRAVEL	0.112	345
APL	0.110	339
SYFY	0.107	330
NATGEO	0.107	329
MTV	0.106	328
FRFM	0.101	312

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

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