

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Inside the Beltway: NCTA to be More Discriminating with Donations

As Joe Biden was sworn in as the 46th president of the United States, the country continues to grapple with the assault on the Capitol 14 days earlier. The industry's largest association, **NCTA**, told **Cablefax** in a lengthy statement Wednesday that it would be more discriminating with political donations going forward. It doesn't specifically mention halting money for those voting against certifying election results, but the association said it will not support those who "choose to break our democracy rather than build it, most especially by courting violence."

It may not seem that surprising given that some of NCTA's largest members, such as **Comcast** and **Disney**, have suspended donations to those who voted against certifying the Electoral College results. But this is the cable and broadband industry's main lobbying arm. **ACA Connects**, which represents small and mid-size independent communications providers, is putting a pin in donations for now. "ACA Connects through its fundraising organization, ACA PAC, is pausing all PAC giving while we review these issues with our board and members and seek their direction," ACA president/CEO Matt Polka told CFX. When asked Wednesday if **NAB** would suspend donations to Republicans who challenged the results, a spokesperson declined comment. Last week, the **Motion Picture Association** said it would suspend for the foreseeable future all contributions to members of Congress who objected to certifying results. **USTelecom** is opting to pause political

contributions while it assesses "these troubling developments and their implications."

NCTA's full statement: "In the cold shadow of the January 6 episode, every American and every institution is left to reflect on what they honor and where they want to stand in this moment of crisis. While NCTA is just a modest trade association, we are an active participant in policy and in electoral politics. We make financial donations to many candidates for political office. Typically, the criteria for these donations are based on whether a candidate takes a constructive interest in our industry. However, it is time to be more discriminating with our donations. Going forward, we will support not just those who embrace our policy preferences, but those who stand up for the preservation of our democracy when it is needed. And, importantly, to refuse to support those who choose to break our democracy rather than build it, most especially by courting violence. These principles have nothing to do with choosing sides rather it is a commitment to elevate the criteria by which we make our political donations. They rest on a resolute belief that the American ideal is bigger than our commercial self-interest. We will use these principles in guiding our future giving."

## INAUGURATION DAY

The congratulations came from all over Wednesday as Joe Biden and Kamala Harris were sworn into office. "Charter, which has 95,000 employees serving more than 30 million customers across our 41-state footprint, looks forward to work-



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market where Pluto TV and Paramount+ will both be available to consumers, and it is one where the AVOD has exceeded all expectations. “We do see a great opportunity to leverage that funnel, so to speak,” Day said. “We’re going to be trying a lot of things that you have seen in the US.” That includes pop-up channels and premiering episodes on Pluto to drive additional awareness. ViacomCBS’s linear content is still incredibly important, providing the backbone and library content that will hopefully keep folks interested in Paramount+ for months and years to come. “There is a real ambition in many markets of the operators to disrupt themselves a little bit and think super creatively about how to deliver to the consumer a combination of both linear experiences and streaming experiences. What it means is you have a proliferation of really unique go-to-market strategies,” she said. “This relationship between linear and streaming is just getting closer and closer together, and we’re finding that combined we can deliver real value to the consumer and real value to the operator.”

#### LAWMAKERS WANT RDOF DUE DILIGENCE

A bipartisan group of Senate and House members have asked the **FCC** to thoroughly vet the winning bidders in the \$9.2 billion Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Phase 1 auction. **Cablefax** reported on a draft of the letter [last week](#). The letter, signed by 157 members of Congress, calls for close scrutiny of long-form applications which winning bidders must submit by Jan 29. They want the FCC to validate that each provider has the technical, financial, managerial, operational skills, capabilities and resources to deliver the services promised. Groups such as **NTCA – The Rural Broadband Association** and **The Fiber Broadband Association** have been calling for transparency in the process. “With the bidding portion of the RDOF round one auction now complete, the real work is only just beginning to ensure that broadband is delivered as promised to millions of rural Americans,” said NTCA CEO *Shirley Bloomfield*. “There is far too much money at stake and far too many consumers on hold to gamble on confidential promises about unproven service capabilities that might only be found to fall short years from now. The real success of this effort will be defined not by the auction results themselves but by the actual delivery of robust and reliable broadband to rural consumers.”

#### FCC STANDS BY LIGADO DECISION

The **FCC** voted 3-2 late Tuesday to reject a petition requesting a stay on its decision to authorize **Ligado Networks** to deploy a low-power terrestrial 5G network in the L-band. The petition was filed by the **NTIA** in May, and received additional support from more than 70 groups on Tuesday ranging from **AccuWeather** to the **National Cotton Council**. In the letter, the groups expressed concern that Ligado’s proposed network would jeopardize the nation’s GPS as well as those who rely on L-band satellite operations, but the Commission ruled that the petition did not demonstrate an irreparable injury or a likelihood of success on the merits of NTIA’s related petition for reconsideration of the Commission’s order. “That order imposed stringent conditions in order to protect incumbent users, including GPS services and Pentagon operations that operate

outside this band, and the technical evidence in our record continues to demonstrate that the FCC made the correct decision,” now-former FCC chairman *Ajit Pai* said in a statement.

#### LOCAST CROSSES 2 MILLION MARK

While broadcasters’ legal challenge over free, over-the-air streaming app **Locast** continues to wind its way through the court, the nonprofit keeps growing, reporting 2.3 million registered users since its January 2018 launch. Locast, currently available in 26 markets, said it added more than 1 million users last year.

#### SLING INTEGRATES NHL CENTER ICE

**Sling TV** launched out-of-market live game subscription service **NHL Center Ice** Monday. Sling is the first streaming service to integrate NHL Center Ice, which is available for \$29/month as a standalone subscription or as an add-on to any Sling TV base subscription.

#### WEEKLY RATINGS

Football trumped news last week, with **ESPN** taking the #1 spot in the primetime weekly cable race with 3.361 million viewers. **CNN**’s post-election momentum continued as it nabbed second place in prime with 3.121 million viewers, followed by **MSNBC** (2.834 million) and **Fox News** (2.489 million). – It was a season high for **WE tv**’s “Life After Lockup,” with Friday’s episode delivering 469,000 women 18-49 and more than 1.2 million viewers in L+3 ratings.

#### PROGRAMMING

**BET** picked up “Tyler Perry’s Sistas” for a third season. The series was the #1 new scripted cable series for African Americans 18-49 last year. – **Newsmax TV** is bringing Democratic political strategist *Doug Schoen*, a longtime **Fox News** contributor, on board as an analyst.

#### PEOPLE

**NCTA** chief *Michael Powell* selected association vet *Nilda Gumbs* as his chief of staff. Also, *Mark Kulish* will become chief administrative & financial officer. His new title represents a broader range of duties in addition to overseeing finances, IT, HR and facilities. – **WarnerMedia** set the **HBO Max** leadership team for Europe, the Middle East and Africa ahead of the streamer’s international rollout. *Christina Sulebakk* will serve as gm, HBO Max EMEA, and report to *Johannes Larcher*, head of HBO Max International. *Line Mykland* will lead the content experience team, *Roberto Soto* is heading up growth marketing and *Brett Horowitz* has been charged with guiding data, insights and planning. *Tobias Andersson* will be the EMEA regional legal lead, *Andreas Ferdinand* will be leading product experience and *Mark Spivey* will serve as the talent lead.

#### TRADE WINDS

Congrats to our own *Sara Winegardner*, who was promoted to managing editor of **Cablefax**. In her new position, she will play an integral role in shaping and improving **Cablefax Daily** as well as managing our associate editor. She’ll work closely with editorial director *Amy Maclean* to ensure that Cablefax delivers the quality editorial our readers have relied on for more than 30 years.



## Think about that for a minute...

### Change

Commentary by Steve Effros

This is the closest I've ever come to missing a deadline for writing my column. I was totally engrossed in watching the media coverage of the inauguration of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris. It was captivating. It was different from what we have seen for the past four years. It was a great indication of the changes we're going to witness, both in what we see and what we hear and read as well as the impact the media is going to have on our nation.

There's just no question that we are about to engage in a great debate regarding the importance of the media and whether there should be significant new perspectives on what should be considered the "norm" when it comes to our ability to communicate with each other. President Biden's speech was perfectly tuned, and one of the words that jumped out to me was when he noted that "profit" has been one of the contributing factors to the warping of our national discourse.

You can look at that in many ways, and I suspect we'll be looking at all of them in the coming reckoning of what has happened in the past four years to our perspective regarding "truth," "facts" and social media. There's little question that some of our most watched broadcast (both television and radio) media have veered into a path that values ratings over accuracy, promotion and advocacy over context and clarity. When the ratings become more important than anything else, a broadcaster can have significant impact and assume little responsibility so long as the "bottom line" is going in the right direction.

That's the situation we've had for quite some time, especially, it's been noted, since the "fairness doctrine" was repealed. In 1949 it was recognized that broadcasters had a uniquely powerful role in influencing the public. The requirement that broadcasters both air controversial issues and present both sides was adopted. It was dropped in 1985 when the assumption was that since there were so many new broadcast outlets they would "even out" the presentation of views. But the Rush Limbaughs of the world proved that wrong.

As Rupert Murdoch said at a Congressional hearing when

asked why his networks were so skewed in one direction, he said he would gladly start another one and skew it in the other direction if he thought that he could get as big an audience, but he doubted he could. Ratings ruled. That's the world we have lived in regarding broadcasting ever since; a battle of different worlds, different perspectives, different realities aimed at unique, "bubble" audiences who never really get to hear "the other side." Should we bring the "fairness doctrine" back? How would it work? Who would decide? No easy answers, but we need to ask the questions.

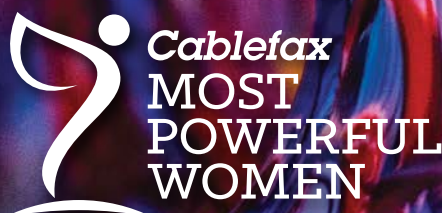
The same is even more true for that new purveyor of warped communication: the internet. Again, the largest, most successful manipulators of that medium have profit as their guidestar. Getting the largest following, creating the most viral reaction is what provides the fodder which feeds the advertising and data purveying business plan which bloats these companies. Should that be allowed to continue? Do facts and truth depend on who gets the most "likes?" Should it? Has it warped the public discourse to the point we have to reconsider the entire business basis of these companies to create some discipline over the public discourse? Again, good questions, and ones that we will undoubtedly be looking at very seriously, and hopefully with great care as we experience a major change. It's about time.



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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