

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Internet Dollars: Broadband Benefits From Stimulus Package

The Senate voted 50-49 along party lines over the weekend to pass a revised version of a \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 stimulus package over the weekend. Like others before it, the legislation directs big money towards broadband initiatives.

More than \$7 billion will land in a new E-Rate Emergency Connectivity Fund. These dollars will go to elementary and secondary schools as well as libraries to provide WiFi hotspots, modems, routers and internet-enabled devices to students, staff and patrons. The funding will also cover internet service offered through the equipment. Should the bill become law, the **FCC** will need to set up the program within 60 days. The **Universal Service Administrative Company** will be charged with administering the funds, which will be available until 2030.

“Throughout this pandemic, we have asked our students to shoulder an enormous burden and continue their education from home,” Sen *Ed Markey* (D-MA) said in a statement. “This funding will help ensure that the ‘homework gap’ does not grow into a damaging learning and opportunity gap for our children, particularly those who live in communities of color, low-income households, and rural areas.”

Since the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, Democratic lawmakers have been pushing for the FCC to use E-Rate funding to support remote learning and connectivity for students. Former FCC chmn *Ajit Pai* argued that language in

the Communications Act made it clear that program funds could only be used to provide connectivity to classrooms, not to homes or connected devices used outside of that environment.

The Emergency Connectivity Fund comes in addition to monies that will become available through the FCC’s \$3.2 billion Emergency Broadband Benefit program. Through the program, eligible households will be able to receive a discount of up to \$50/month, or up to \$75/month on Tribal lands, off the cost of internet service. They would also be eligible for a subsidy on low-cost devices like computers and tablets.

Nearly \$10 billion will be set aside for the Treasury Department for a homeowners’ assistance fund that states can dip into for certain eligible expenses including mortgage payments as well as broadband internet access service.

Due to revisions made by the Senate, the bill will now make its way back to the House for another vote before heading to President *Biden*’s desk. While House speaker *Nancy Pelosi* (D-CA) has called for bipartisan support of the package. The final vote, likely taking place on Wednesday, is expected to again fall along party lines.

## GOP WANTS FCC MAPPING ANSWERS

A number of Republican lawmakers are questioning **FCC** acting chair *Jessica Rosenworcel* on the agency’s progress towards producing updated broadband maps. Sens *Roger Wicker* (R-MS) and *John Thune* (R-SD) along with Reps *Cathy McMorris Rodgers* (R-WA) and *Bob Latta* (R-OH) sent a letter

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to Rosenworcel Monday asking why there are still holdups in mapping efforts nearly a year after Wicker's Broadband Deployment Accuracy and Technological Availability Act was passed by Congress. "Any delay in creating new maps would delay funding opportunities for unserved households, meaning they will have to wait even longer to access the economic and social opportunities broadband provides," the letter read. "The effect of this delay is especially troubling given your assertion last year that the FCC should reduce funding for the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Phase I auction until the agency produces new maps." The lawmakers are asking for quarterly briefings on the status of the implementation. They are also asking for a detailed timeline for the development of new maps and steps to expedite that process by no later than March 22.

DISH BUYS REPUBLIC WIRELESS

DISH announced plans Monday to acquire Republic Wireless, an MVNO service operating on the T-Mobile network. Upon closing of the deal, DISH will assume approximately 200,000 customer relationships, the Republic Wireless brand and other supporting assets. DISH svp, Ting Mobile and MVNO platforms Rob Currie will assume leadership of the business. The existing Relay division of Republic Wireless, which provides communication solutions for frontline teams in sectors such as hospitality and healthcare, will become a wholesale customer on DISH's 5G network and continue to operate as a standalone company.

FUBOTV BULLISH ON SPORTS BETTING

fuboTV CEO David Gandler thinks his company is better set

up for success than other video providers that are starting to get into the sports betting space. When asked at an investor conference Monday why fubo is building its own sportsbook rather than partnering with somebody already in the space, Gandler said two major motivators were overall user experience and ownership of data following the launch of sports betting applications. "The real reason for this is that even with a deal like DISH and DraftKings, you can't create a seamless experience," he said, describing a situation where a subscriber could be watching their favorite team and see an integration that allowed them to easily bet on a specific play or outcome. "Today, if you look at some of the partnerships people are talking about, they're really just marketing partnerships." The company plans to launch a free predictive game in the third quarter with the full sportsbook to follow in the fourth quarter. While fuboTV has long advertised itself as a sports-centric vMVPD, the absence of the Turner nets on its lineup will be particularly felt with next week's return of NCAA March Madness. Gandler hasn't completely shut the door on the possibility of those nets returning someday. "There is a reality that this is supposed to be a relatively skinnier bundle, so you can't have everything," he said. "We're having discussions all the time and hopefully there's an opportunity to bring them back at some point."

AT THE COMMISSION

The FCC's Wireless Competition Bureau is seeking comment on multiple petitions for designation as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier for the purpose of receiving universal service support through the Rural Digital Opportunity

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Fund. RDOF auction winners must offer a Lifeline discount on all qualifying services in areas where they have received support. To the extent that a petition specifically includes locations outside of RDOF-eligible census blocks, the Bureau will treat the petition as a request for Lifeline-only designation in those areas. Comments are due April 7 and replies on April 22. – The **Media Bureau** granted requests from **Fox News, MSNBC, CNN** and **ESPN** for exemption from the FCC's audio description rules applicable to the top five national nonbroadcast networks. The Bureau concluded that those four networks were exempt because they provide less than 50 hours per calendar quarter of prime time programming that is not live or near-live. Starting July 1, the top five national nonbroadcast networks will be **TLC, HGTV, Hallmark, History** and **TBS**.

### PEACOCK SETS WWE NETWORK ROLLOUT

**Peacock** will begin rolling out **WWE Network** content across all tiers on March 18. A new WWE destination on the streamer will feature fan-favorite content at launch, including all past WrestleManias leading up to "WrestleMania 37." Peacock Premium will be home to all upcoming pay-per-view events and the current seasons of WWE original shows. On its free tier, the streamer will offer a WWE channel, select WWE Originals, reality shows, recent in-ring content and weekly episodes of select live shows like "RAW Talk." Peacock will continue to add WWE Network content to the library, making the entire archive available to stream on demand before this year's SummerSlam. Peacock is also offering a temporary discount tied to the WWE launch, offering the Premium service for \$2.50/month for four months.

### CELEBRATING WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

**WICT** launched the #ChooseToChallenge hashtag for International Women's Day, encouraging its members to stand up against gender bias and inequality. Members wishing to participate in the challenge should post photos using the hashtag with their hands held high. The organization will host a Virtual Fireside Chat on March 17 at 12pm ET with *Claire Wasserman*, author of "Ladies Get Paid." **Crown Media** chief communications officer *Annie Howell* will facilitate. – **TNT, truTV** and **TBS** teamed up with Black Women Animate to create five animated pieces highlighting issues such as the gender pay gap, body liberation and self-confidence for International Women's Day. The internal and external crew behind these features are all-female and the pieces feature the voices of *Samantha Bee, Jameela Jamil, Judy Reyes, Kristen Kish* and *Brandi Rhodes*. All five features are available on each channel's website. – **Liberty Latin America** gathered nearly 12,000 employees to participate in a virtual summit commemorating International Women's Day. The summit, which was held in English and Spanish, addressed topics related to gender equality, the pandemic's impact on working women, mental health and how to overcome biases. Throughout the year, Liberty Latin America will also be hosting a talk series to discuss topics like racial and gender equal-

ity. – **HBO Max** launched several curated, female-focused lists of programming to celebrate Women's History Month. – **Cheddar** hosted an hour-long episode of "ChedHer" Monday to celebrate International Women's Day. Special guests included **Time's Up** CEO *Tina Tchen* and **Pinterest** head of content & creative partnerships *Aya Kanai*. – **Nexstar** will begin highlighting finalists in its Remarkable Women Initiative Tuesday. The program is designed to honor the influence women have had in areas like public policy and social progress. Each Nexstar station has already chosen four local women for consideration as that market's "Remarkable Woman." By April 1, every market will select its Remarkable Woman, and Nexstar will make a \$1,000 donation to the winners' non-profits of choice. On April 10 at 4pm ET, all 113 Remarkable Women will participate in an telecast airing exclusively on **NewsNation**, where one participant will be named Nexstar Woman of the Year. Nexstar Charitable Foundation will make a \$5,000 donation on her behalf to the nonprofit of her choice.

### COMCAST ACCELERATOR OPEN

**Comcast NBCU's** LIFT Labs Accelerator is accepting applications for its next program, seeking startups worldwide that are developing innovations in areas of Connected Living, Next Gen Entertainment, Future of Work, and Personalized Experiences. Applications are due May 12 and the program will begin in August. Applicants selected will participate in a 13-week program followed by a demo day in November. Since the accelerator's launch, 32 companies from around the world have completed the accelerator program and 75% have secured pilots or agreements with a division or business unit of Comcast NBCU.

### RATINGS

February was a good month for **INSP**. The network experienced its highest 24-hour ratings monthly average to date. Ratings were up 6% over January 2021 and 11% over February 2020. **INSP** set a new record for weekly viewership the week of February 15, seeing its highest ever weekly and 24-hour ratings averages.

### DISTRIBUTION

**Newsmax TV** is now available on **AT&T TV** and **AT&T TV Now** in their Entertainment, Choice, Ultimate and Premier packages.

### PROGRAMMING

**HGTV** will premiere "My Lottery Dream Home International" on April 2 at 8pm. The series is a spinoff of "My Lottery Dream Home." – **AMC+**'s exclusive series "Cold Courage" will premiere its first three episodes on March 11 and will release subsequent episodes every Thursday. – **VH1's** "Black Ink Crew" franchise is expanding with five specials, starting with the first part of "Black Ink Crew: Secrets Unlocked" on March 15 at 9 pm ET. The airing of the rest of the specials will be timed to lead up to the season premiere of "Black Ink Crew: New York" in April.