

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## NAB Change-Up: Who is the Broadcasting Group's Incoming CEO?

With the news Wednesday that *Gordon Smith* would transition from president and CEO of **NAB** at year-end, all eyes are on his replacement, current COO *Curtis LeGeyt*. He doesn't come in with the sort of name recognition that Smith, a former two-term Republican US Senator from Oregon, had when he took the reins in 2009. But LeGeyt is pretty well known in lobbyist circles, leading the NAB charge on retrans, STELAR expiration, ensuring PPP loans for broadcasters and avoiding performance royalty fees on radio stations.

"The NAB, like many institutions in Washington, is experiencing a visible generational change. The broadcasting industry is making an effort to reach out and appeal to a young audience and bring in young broadcast owners to the industry. So, it made sense when the NAB made Curtis COO," said **Fletcher, Heald & Hildreth** partner *Francisco Montero*, who spoke highly of LeGeyt's track record.

It's notable given the change in administration that prior to joining NAB, LeGeyt served as senior counsel to then-Senate Judiciary chair *Patrick Leahy* (D-VT) and worked on the staff of the 2008 Obama for America presidential campaign. He was only named COO at NAB in 2020, but he's spent more than a decade at the organization climbing its ranks on the government relations side. His biggest successes include passage of the recent STELAR bill and inclusion of \$1 billion in the Ray Baum Act for stations impacted by the spectrum


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Insiders describe LeGeyt as detail oriented, a trait that's helped him guide NAB through the pandemic and remote work. He inherits an association that finds itself at a crossroads as cord cutting increases. **Kagan** estimates that multichannel subscriptions declined by nearly 7.2 million last year. All of that means less retransmission consent dollars for broadcasters. And a few broadcasters have already been complaining around Washington that independent station groups aren't having much success in negotiating retransmission agreement with virtual MVPDs, such as **YouTube TV** and **Hulu Live**.

Another big priority for NAB will be the continued deployment of Next Gen TV, the voluntary broadcast standard also known as ATSC 3.0 that will allow for UHD 4K video, on demand video and more.

A sign that NAB members feel good about their man may be that unlike with Smith's appointment or previous CEO *David Rehr*'s, the board didn't hold an open search for the job. LeGeyt takes over as NAB chief on Jan 1, 2022, with Smith transitioning to an advisory and advocacy role effective Dec 31, 2021. He'll continue in that special advisory role, which includes lobbying for broadcasters, through Dec 31, 2024.

Smith joined NAB after it had experienced some notable setbacks, including the **XM-Sirius** merger and membership division among TV stations and network groups (**FOX**, **CBS**, **ABC** and **NBC** had all left the organization at one point). "Since taking the NAB helm Gordon Smith has revitalized



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the association, grown the NAB PAC, and led the charge on many high-profile battles including the fight against recording industry licensing fees, AM revitalization, media ownership reform, STELAR and most recently NAB's unanimous victory at the Supreme Court on media ownership," Montero said.

"Gordon is the ultimate statesman, bringing people together from both sides of the aisle to discuss ideas, find common ground and lead NAB to success on countless fronts," said NAB joint board of directors chairman/**Hearst Television** president *Jordan Wertlieb* in thanking Smith for his service.

Smith was named head of NAB a couple years ahead of former **FCC** chair *Michael Powell* stepping into the CEO role at NCTA. While the two are often on opposite sides of an issue, they are friendly and respectful of each other. Powell, by the way, recently had his contract at NCTA extended through 2023.

**ACA Connects** is more often at odds with NAB, given its vocal calls for retransmission consent reform. But even ACA Connects chief *Matt Polka* offered up kind words (with a "free TV" dig): "Although free TV broadcasters and traditional pay TV providers have had their policy differences on occasion, Sen. Smith's leadership has permitted us, at times, to be able to set aside those differences and produce win-win outcomes that benefit the American public."

There's no **NAB Show** in Vegas this month to welcome LeGeyt and pat Smith on the back at, with the conference moved to an in-person event in October. But next week the association launches NAB Amplify, a digital showcase and teaser to the fall conference. Both execs are slated to speak at Monday's opening session, dubbed, "One Year of Broadcasting in a Pandemic."

### T-MOBILE TALKS HOME BROADBAND, FREE 5G

**T-Mobile** officially launched its home broadband offering Wednesday, and the service will be available to 30 million households at launch. Nearly 10 million of those homes are in rural areas. "The unfortunate truth is that from the beginning of the digital age, connectivity for rural America has been an afterthought," T-Mobile CEO *Mike Sievert* said during a company presentation. The service is priced at \$60/month and a 5G router is included in the price. **New Street Research** believes T-Mobile will be able to capture some fixed customers in parts of the country that don't have upgraded broadband options, but it isn't positioning itself to make a meaningful impact in markets that already have strong broadband offerings. "At \$60/month, there won't be demand for their service in fiber and upgraded cable markets where the service is no better and the price is not meaningfully lower," New Street said. "If we use wireless postpaid/prepaid as a proxy, we would guess 80% of households in those markets prioritize speed and reliability over price. That 80% won't choose a 100Mbps wireless service over a fixed connection. The other 20% won't be interested at \$60/month." On the wireless front, the company revealed plans to offer free 5G phones to all customers with a trade-in. Customers taking advantage of the deal would be able to receive a **Samsung** Galaxy A32. All customers with a metered plan at **Verizon** or **AT&T** will be able to receive an unlimited plan at T-Mobile for the same price as their metered plans. After April 18, all T-Mobile and **Sprint** customers will be on unlimited plans. T-Mobile is doubling down on efforts to bring its 5G services to rural environments, committing to launching hundreds of retail stores in



## Who Deserves to Rank Among Cablefax's Annual Top Power Players?

The Cablefax 100 salutes the most influential executives whose leadership continues to take the industry to new heights. We will rank the top professionals in the media, cable & broadband industry and publish the list in the June edition of Cablefax:The Magazine.

**It's free to enter - but you must submit your entries by April 9!**



Enter at [www.Cablefax100.com](http://www.Cablefax100.com) | Questions: Mary-Lou French at [mfrench@accessintel.com](mailto:mfrench@accessintel.com)

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small towns that will create 5,000 new jobs. It is looking for an additional 2,500 “Hometown Experts” that will act as T-Mobile representatives within those communities. The company plans to contribute \$25 million over the next five years to fund community development projects in rural areas through grants.

#### VERIZON, ALLEN MEDIA JOIN FORCES ON DEI

**Allen Media Group** and **Verizon** are partnering on a new DEI initiative that would increase media spending with US Black-owned media companies. The effort will kick off with a Black-owned Media Summit next month. The announcement came on the same day Verizon revealed a new responsible marketing plan aimed at addressing D&I in the marketing industry. The plan includes increasing diversity and equity in both representation and economic investment within the creative supply chain and strengthening practices aimed at fighting racism, bias and stereotypes in advertising, content and media. The company is also taking steps to retain diverse talent and strengthen content policies that would prevent Verizon creative from being placed or run in broadcast or digital environments where harmful content appears.

#### SCTE REVAMPS TWO CERTIFICATIONS

**SCTE** has made significant updates to its two of its certification programs. Both the Broadband Premise Installer and Broadband Premises Technician certifications now have new learning modules to incorporate the latest developments in residential service. The BPI certification is geared towards entry-level professionals interested in working for a cable operator, contractor or vendor while the BPT certification ensures an experienced technician’s ability to troubleshoot common issues in the field. Both series are available on SCTE’s new learning management system, which launched in September.

#### DISH TAPS NOKIA FOR 5G NETWORK SECURITY

**DISH** announced a partnership with **Nokia** that will see it utilize the latter’s NetGuard solution to secure its 5G network. NetGuard will allow the company to safeguard 5G network slices, which will be provisioned to support enterprise and wholesale customers. The solution will also support the automation and response capabilities needed to scale the network and intelligently assess and resolve cyber incidents without significant manual intervention.

#### COMCAST DEBUTS ANOTHER WATCHWITH EVENT

**Comcast** is finding new ways to interact with its programming partners. Xfinity X1 and Flex customers will be able to join an exclusive livestream event with the cast of **ABC’s** “A Million Little Things” at 7:30pm ET Wednesday via the Watchwith app, followed by a new episode on ABC. The stunt follows a similar interactive livestream with **Bravo’s** “Real Housewives of Salt Lake City” in November. Comcast is also starting a weekly show with its Xfinity editors using the Watchwith interactive livestream app called “What to Watch Live” where they discuss the latest on entertainment—news, buzzworthy shows, etc.

#### C2HR SEEKS NOMINATIONS

**C2HR** is [seeking nominations](#) for its new HR Innovators Awards, which honor innovative initiatives in employee engagement and

workplace wellness, as well as its Social Impact and Aspiring HR Leader honors. The nomination deadline is May 14. Recipients will receive recognition during the C2HR CON, on social media, the C2HR website and in **Cablefax** Daily and HR Pulse.

#### DISTRIBUTION

**Scripps** is gearing up to launch its OTT news network **Newsy** over the air on October 1, primarily through Scripps-owned **ION** stations and select Scripps local television stations. Scripps estimates Newsy will be available over the air in at least 80% of US television homes. The network’s newsgathering and programming plans, under the leadership of the incoming head of news, *Kate O’Brian*, will be announced over the coming months. Newsy is available on connected TV platforms including Roku, Amazon Fire TV, Apple TV and Google Chromecast as well as over-the-top services including Pluto TV, Xumo, Samsung TV+ and Vizio WatchFree. – **Verizon Fios** customers can include regional packages as add-ons to any Fios TV base plan. Región Caribeña, Región Mexicana, Región Sudamerica and Región Española will be available at \$10 for the first regional package and \$5 for each additional region. Each regional Spanish package includes a set of unique channels and 42 channels shared by all regions.

#### RATINGS

**TBS’s** “Chad” premiered Tuesday night as cable’s number one scripted comedy series (2021 YTD, P18-49 L+SD), with 1.9 million total viewers. The series premiere delivered 285K P18-49 and 695K P2+. – **NBC** and **Golf Channel** posted the most-watched Calero Texas Open last weekend on record dating to 1999, with a four-round average of 1.4 million viewers.

#### PROGRAMMING

**Turner Sports** greenlit documentary “More Than Just a Game: Baseball Remembers 9/11.” – **Shudder** ordered a 10-episode fourth season of “The Boulet Brothers’ Dragula.” – **Smithsonian Channel’s** “Murderous History” premieres April 25 at 9pm. – **Tubi** made a content deal with **Shout! Factory** to bring anime films to its viewers. Films like “Liz and the Blue Bird” and “Millennium Actress” will be available in subtitled and dubbed versions beginning April 8. – As part of a content partnership, **A+E Networks** and Land Rover North America will debut documentary “All You Need to Know: Overlanding” April 18 at 10pm ET on **FYI**. An encore presentation will follow on **The History Channel** April 24 at 9am ET.

#### PEOPLE

**MTV Entertainment Group** tapped *Jason White* as the new CMO for the nine-brand portfolio. He replaces *Jacqueline Parkes*, who stepped down from her role at the end of 2020. – **Grom Social Enterprises** announced it will acquire **Curiosity Ink Media**. With this acquisition, the company will hire two former **Nickelodeon executives**. *Russell Hicks*, president of Curiosity, and *Paul Ward*, public relations and brand consultant at **PW Strategic Communications LLC**, will lead the company’s animation, social media and educational divisions. Hicks will become Grom’s CCO and president of Grom subsidiary **Top Draw Animation, Inc.** Ward will become evp, social enterprises and president of Grom Social.

# Think about that for a minute...

## E / T

Commentary by Steve Effros

The next several months are going to be taken up by political fights over the definition of “infrastructure.” Luckily, we won’t really be a significant part of all that. There is little argument that “cable” or “broadband” is a vital part of our infrastructure. For us, the issue is going to be how allocated money, assuming it’s approved, will be spent. Whether it’s \$80 billion or \$100 billion, what’s it going to be spent on, and why?

There are already indications of some of the thinking surrounding that question. Some of it’s not bad, some of it makes little sense to me, or at least reflects a lack of understanding of what the infrastructure issues really are. Let’s start with the bumper sticker phrase “digital divide.” Yes, there are those who want broadband access who can’t get it, or not enough of it. The stories for the past year have focused on rural areas where kids can’t link effectively to their pandemic required remote classes, or urban kids whose families simply can’t afford the service that is available.

There are different solutions. The government has finally realized that spending money to subsidize services that are readily available is far more efficient than proposing building new plant under the unproved theory that additional competition will significantly reduce prices. There’s also a recognition that a not small number of folks simply don’t have computers, are not sufficiently literate or do not consider broadband to constitute a value proposition for them. Spending more money on education rather than technology would likely be more effective in that case.

Proposing spending large amounts of money in rural areas, particularly supporting construction of competitive systems by “co-ops” and municipalities, is an indication of a serious lack of understanding of the facts on the ground.

I would urge adherence to two simple measures; evidence and transparency. E/T. With regard to building competitive local infrastructures, i.e., new “last mile” systems, the catchphrase seems to be “fiber optics.” Someone has done a damn good lobbying job! But the politicians suggesting that billions must

be spent on a specific technology, the “road to fiber optics,” don’t seem to be aware of the evidence that the currently existing, constructed hybrid fiber-coax systems already built around the country are more than capable of upgrading and delivering “100/100” upload and download broadband speeds! You don’t need “fiber” for that. Sure, it’s good technology, but the idea that we need to spend billions to “keep up” in the world with modern “fiber” infrastructure displays a lack of understanding the evidence that the current DOCSIS 4.0 technology now being rolled out can be just as fast, no, faster than the current fiber plants!

The “rural” problem, as I’ve said in this column many times, is the “middle mile!” The connection between smaller, rural communities and the major data centers in metropolitan areas. Those “middle miles” are totally controlled in most instances by telephone companies and the charges for bulk high speed delivery to rural areas is uneconomic. If you build a local “fiber” system in that rural town it will still not be able to provide the best modern service because it, too, will be hobbled by the lack of affordable “middle mile” service. Creating a competitive “middle mile” provider would solve this problem, and it would likely cost a little less than building all those “last mile” systems now being talked about. Being a co-op or a municipality building a second local system does not fix the underlying problem!

Ok, so now you are getting some inkling of what I’m talking about on the “E” side of all of this. The “evidence.” As to the “T,” the “transparency,” we’ll get to that next week.



*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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And soon, this day  
will be too.



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