

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Who's ERIC?: Charter, Starlink

Counter Mystery Coalition's RDOF Claims

Charter says it can ensure its RDOF integrity just fine, thank you very much. Earlier this month, a group calling itself the **Ensuring RDOF Integrity Coalition** [ERIC] asked the **FCC** to **deny** granting Charter Eligible Telecommunications Carrier status—a requirement for receiving funding in the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund—in census blocks where it won support. ERIC has also asked the FCC to deny a **Starry** ETC application and to deny or defer action on a **SpaceX** subsidiary **Starlink** petition for ETC status.

It's not clear who ERIC is, with the group only telling the FCC it is made up of "rural broadband providers, rural Americans, and local government officials" that want to ensure the RDOF proceeding results in timely broadband service to rural America.

"Although ERIC's membership and funding are clouded in secrecy and remain undisclosed, this so-called coalition essentially repackages filings made by Starlink's would-be competitors, such as **DISH**, in other proceedings," SpaceX said in defending its ETC petition for satellite broadband upstart Starlink. "Hopefully, this mystery filer, which purportedly aims to 'ensure integrity' while directly parroting the arguments of others, will dish out the truth about its funding and membership at some point." (We're going to speculate that the phrase "dish out the truth" was intentional on SpaceX's part, as it's filing repeatedly makes references to ERIC making positions "like DISH." DISH didn't return a request for comment.)

Charter said ERIC's central claim is that it has committed to build its network in some RDOF areas for less support than the coalition

believes is necessary "to make a business case" and therefore, ERIC argues the company won't fulfill its RDOF obligations. "This objection is not only unsupported, it is inapposite to whether petitioners meet the qualifications for ETC designation," Charter said.

Before prospective winners in the FCC's \$9.2 billion RDOF auction can begin collecting federal financial support for their broadband buildout projects, they have to receive ETC status in the census blocks they won funding in. Many are in the midst of that process right now, with all RDOF winners required to upload documentation of ETC designations and a certification letter to their FCC form by June 7. The ETC petition process is another opportunity for those challenging the viability of some of the auction wins to throw down red flags. Another round of ETC petitions was just recently **put out** for comment by the FCC.

Charter accuses ERIC of launching a fishing expedition as it seeks access to its long-form RDOF application, which includes confidential project funding descriptions as well as detailed technology and system design info. Long-form applications are already being reviewed by FCC staff, with a bipartisan group of lawmakers calling for close scrutiny to ensure rural America receives the speeds and service promised. "We are assessing them for their financial viability, rational viability and their technical viability," FCC acting chair *Jessica Rosenworcel* told reporters this week. "I hope there will be a time in the not-too-distant future where we will have more announcements to make. We are combing through these applications very, very carefully to make sure those who bid can truly deliver on the services they can."

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The prevailing rule of thought is that the FCC will issue RDOF long-form approvals in tranches, with well-known entities getting the first OKs. That means it could take longer for lesser-knowns, like Starlink, which is currently in beta mode. For its part, SpaceX accused Starlink's critics of deeply flawed analyses that don't reflect the actual capacity of the network. "Starlink is specifically designed to take advantage of technological advances to serve increasing consumer demand. By replacing our satellite fleet at a regular cadence, Starlink is able to rapidly introduce new technology into our constellation, bringing ever-increasing amounts of network bandwidth to our customers. As an industry leader in launch capabilities and launch economics, SpaceX will leverage this ability to meet and exceed its RDOF service obligations," the firm said.

Starry, a fiber wireless provider with a concentration on MDUs, dismissed ERIC's objection as a "secretive coalition seeking to use the ETC designation process as an opportunity to mount a collateral attack on the RDOF rules." ERIC claims Starry's mmWave technology isn't capable of delivering the RDOF promised gigabit speeds and notes it doesn't advertise such speeds. "To date, Starry does not mass market a gigabit plan as a business decision. Starry will be deploying its gigabit network across its licensed spectrum footprint, including in all census blocks for which it won RDOF support, and will be rolling out a gigabit tier to offer to all consumers within its tier to offer to all consumers within its footprint, including all required RDOF locations," Starry said.

FRONTIER SETS EMERGENCE DATE

It's a date. **Frontier** now expects to emerge from Chapter 11 bankruptcy on April 30, and many are still optimistic about the potential future for the new company. "Frontier is one of the most compelling opportunities we see within the US Communications landscape," **New Street Research** said in a note. "We expect the company to transform itself from broken ILEC into a fiber-based infrastructure asset, resulting in a return to growing revenues, expanding margins, a higher multiple, and a claim to acquire more copper assets to transform." The company has also formed a new eight-member board led by executive chmn *John Stratton*, who previously served as evp/pres, global operations at **Verizon**. Other members include Frontier pres/CEO *Nick Jeffery*, **2B Partners** CEO *Kevin Beebe*, former **Liberty Media** svp/deputy general counsel/corporate secretary *Pamela Coe*, former **Vodafone** CTO *Stephen Pusey*, **The Coca-Cola Company** svp/global chief people officer *Lisa Chang*, **Kaiser Foundation Health Plans and Hospitals** svp/chief digital officer *Pratabkumar Vemana* and *Maryann Turcke*, senior advisor to the infrastructure division for **Brookfield Asset Management**. Frontier's new common stock is expected to begin trading on the NASDAQ exchange on May 4 under the ticker FYBR.

SNY NETWORK FOR SALE?

The *Wilpon* family is reportedly exploring a sale of NY Mets RSN **SNY**. *Sportico* reported Friday that the family is considering multiple options for a majority stake in the network, though there's no guarantee of a deal. Logically, *Steve Cohen*, who bought the team from the *Wilpons* last year for \$2.42 billion, is said to be interested. *Sterling Equities*, ran by the *Wilpon* and *Katz* families, owns about 65% of **SNY**, with **Charter** and **Comcast** sharing the rest. **SNY** declined comment.

COMCAST COMPENSATION NUMBERS

Comcast chmn/CEO *Brian Robert*'s compensation fell in 2020 to \$32.7 million, down from \$36.4 million in 2019. According to the company's **SEC** filing, his base salary came in at \$3.4 million, up from \$3.3 million in 2019. His option awards settled at \$10.6 million and his stock awards fell just under that number. **NBCU** CEO *Jeff Shell*'s total compensation totaled \$16.5 million for his first year in the role with a base salary of \$2.6 million. **Comcast Cable** CEO *Dave Watson* took home nearly 17% more than his 2019 total, receiving \$19.7 million in total compensation. He saw the biggest lift in non-equity incentive compensation which rose to \$5.9 million. His 2019 figure for the category was \$4.6 million. **Comcast** CFO *Michael Cavanagh* saw total compensation fall 5.8% to \$25.25 million from \$26.8 million.

WARNERMEDIA MERGES ADULT ANIMATION GROUPS

WarnerMedia is bringing together animation for **Adult Swim** and **HBO Max** under *Suzanna Makkos*. She'll become evp, original comedy and adult animation for the brands and report to both *Sarah Aubrey*, **HBO Max** head of original content, and **Adult Swim** president *Michael Ouweleen*. *Makkos* spent two decades at **Fox** before joining **WarnerMedia**, managing all aspects of the broadcasting net's comedy programming.

WATCHATHON WEEK RETURNS

Get ready for a full week of encouraged binge-watching, because **Comcast**'s **Xfinity** Watchathon Week returns Tuesday until May 3 for X1 and Flex customers. They'll be able to watch the year's programming from SVODs and premium networks such as **Hulu**, **HBO Max** and **HBO, AMC+, Showtime, Starz, Acorn TV, History, Vault, Lifetime Movie Club, Hallmark Movies Now, Here TV, Kidstream** and **Epix**. Customers can also access multicultural content through services such as Korean streaming platform **Kocowa**, African American movie-focused SVOD **Brown Sugar** and Spanish-language service **Pantaya**.

BBC AMERICA--NOT BRITISH, 'BRIT-ISH'

BBC America refreshed its brand design and tagline, calling itself "Brit-ish," a nod to its British-American double-identity. The brand refresh features a new design package for on-air

presence, graphics, promos and more. It comes just in time for Season 30 of “Top Gear,” premiering Sunday at 8pm ET on the network.

PROGRAMMING

All six episodes of **Spectrum** and **CBS Studios’** new series “The Bite” will be available exclusively to **Charter** video subscribers free on demand on May 21. – **ESPN** and **Marvel** will collaborate to launch a Marvel-inspired alternate presentation for the Warriors vs Pelicans game May 3. “NBA Special Edition Presented by State Farm: Marvel’s Arena of Heroes,” will start at 7:30pm ET on **ESPN2, ESPN+** and **ESPN Deportes** while the original game airs on ESPN. The program features a player competition to be Marvel’s First Champion by racking up “Marvel Points,” 3D virtual characters, custom graphics, animation packages, and an integrated original Marvel story throughout the game. – **HBO Max** renewed cooking show “Selena + Chef” for a third season. New episodes will premiere later this year exclusively on the streamer. Meanwhile, **HBO** will launch four-episode annual series “Back on the Record with Bob Costas” later this spring, and it will be available for streaming on HBO Max. – The fifth and final season of “The Bold Type” premieres May 26 at 10pm ET on **Freeform**. – **Disney Channel** ordered a second season of “Secrets of Sulphur Springs.” Production will begin in June.

PEOPLE

Stephanie Plaines was appointed to **Nielsen’s** board of directors and the board’s audit committee. She has served as the CFO of JLL, Starbucks and SamsClub.com. – **Antoine Prince Albert III** has joined **Public Knowledge** as policy counsel with a focus on net neutrality and digital platform governance. He served as the 2020 OPICS Public Interest Graduate Fellow at Georgetown’s Institute for Technology Law & Policy. – **Lindsay Broadband** added **Wade Sarver** to its team as a consultant. Sarver most recently served as senior manager, sales engineering for **SAC Wireless**.

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Research

- > 55% of respondents now watch a free ad-supported video service.
- > For Generation Z, playing video games is their favorite entertainment activity (26%). Only 10% say that watching TV or movies at home is their favorite form of entertainment.
- > Streaming music subscribers pay for an average of two paid music services, and those who subscribe to gaming services pay for an average of three.
- > 82% of US consumers subscribe to at least one paid streaming video service. The average subscriber has four paid video streaming services.

(Source: [Deloitte](#))

Up Ahead

- APRIL 23:** CABLEFAX TOP OPS NOMINATION DEADLINE
- APRIL 29:** INTERACTIVE CASE COMPETITION FINALS
- APRIL 30:** FCC TECH AND COMMUNICATIONS DIVERSITY OPPORTUNITY SYMPOSIUM
- MAY 13:** WICT ROCKY MOUNTAIN VIRTUAL WALK OF FAME

Quotable

“Yesterday’s guilty verdict of former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin was a step in the right direction toward justice and accountability. As crucial as it is, this verdict is just the beginning of the fight to dismantle the racism embedded in our criminal justice system. More work is needed to eliminate systems of oppression and disparity in equity, equality, and access in our country. I am encouraged by the dedication of the NAMIC community and its many allies who continue to work toward a more inclusive workplace community. Their commitment to developing and nurturing multicultural leaders, telling diverse stories, and implementing representative programming will help move our nation forward.”

– **NAMIC pres/CEO Shuanise Washington** regarding the verdict in the trial of **Derek Chauvin**