

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## On the Plus Side: Allen on Weather Channel Plus Launch

**Allen Media Group** founder *Byron Allen* has spent recent years expanding his reach through broadcast station acquisitions, investments in regional sports networks and ad-supported streaming service **Local Now**. He's putting everything that he has learned into the development and launch of his latest venture, **Weather Channel Plus**.

What he hopes will set the service, scheduled to debut in 4Q21, apart will be the comprehensive weather reports that aim to go beyond what's currently offered to consumers. While local news hosts often have to balance breaking new stories with the latest forecasts, those that are a part of Weather Channel Plus will be able to solely focus on the skies.

"I think it was over Labor Day weekend, several years back, and there was a big weather event occurring. All of these 24-hour cable news networks were talking about the weather, but then came the moment of truth. Unfortunately, there was also a mass shooting and all the cable networks had to abandon the weather event and cover the mass shooting...The Weather Channel's ratings went straight up like a rocket because a good, you know, third of the nation was interested in this weather event that was going to hit the nation pretty hard," he told **CFX**.

Weather Channel Plus will be available for \$4.99/month and debut with **The Weather Channel**, live linear cable

network feeds, movies, TV shows and documentaries on the streamer. The service will live on a separate app from Local Now. However, the existing AMG streamer did inform Allen's decision to launch Weather Channel Plus.

"We learned that weather really resonated with our users. It's essential and weather is the number one, number two or number three news story at the top of any hour, any day, because of climate change and global warming," Allen said. "So we've been able to really resonate with the consumers the way we do with Local Now. You have to have live, linear news be a part of it, and weather is a big part of it. We think The Weather Channel Plus is by far the greatest brand out there to do this."

Weather Channel Plus won't be without competition. **Fox News** has plans to launch an ad-supported streaming weather service, **Fox Weather**, before the end of the year. **AccuWeather** is also getting in on the fun, announcing its plan to launch streaming service **AccuWeather NOW** before the end of the summer.

Despite the potential challenges, the team behind Weather Channel Plus has high hopes for it, and currently projects that it will reach 30 million subscribers in its first five years.

"This was based on where we see the availability of subscribers right now," Allen said. "There's well over 25 million cord cutters as we speak, and we'll see that grow. As you see that move further engagement in streaming, we do believe folks will have multiple streaming services."

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We think that, if we hold our course, so \$4.99, and keep it affordable, and we believe that we can and we will, that we could possibly even surpass the 30 million subscribers."

INFRASTRUCTURE BILL DETAILS RELEASED

After weeks of speculation, the Senate has released the bipartisan infrastructure bill negotiated by President Joe Biden and Republican lawmakers. It had been confirmed that \$65 billion would be set aside for broadband investments, and now we know how it will be divided. A large portion, \$42.45 billion, will be designated for a Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment program. To be established within 180 days of the date in which the bill is signed into law, the program would offer grants to projects aimed at connecting unserved and underserved areas. Through the legislation, \$100 million would be given out to each of the nation's states while another \$100 million would be divided between territories including the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa and the Northern Mariana Islands. The FCC's Emergency Broadband Benefit program is here to stay, although under a different name. Some \$14.2 billion will be set aside for the now-dubbed Affordable Connectivity Fund, which would permanently offer a \$30/month subsidy for high-speed broadband service. A \$100 subsidy for the purchase of a connected device will also fall under the program. Language from Sen Patty Murray's (D-WA) Digital Equity Act has been included as part of the package, which supports digital inclusion efforts at the state and local level. It'll be a race against time for the Senate to pass the bill before its summer recess begins next week.

AT&T CLOSES DIRECTV DIVESTITURE

AT&T and TPG Capital have officially closed on their deal to establish DirecTV as a separate video company. Under the new deal, which was announced in February, DirecTV now owns and operates AT&T's US and Puerto Rico video businesses including its satellite, streaming and IP video services. Across the next several months, DirecTV's services will be revamped and given a new look. The company's logo has been the first item to receive a makeover. At close, AT&T received \$7.1 billion in cash and transferred approximately \$195 million of video business debt. AT&T now holds a 70% interest in the common units of DirecTV while TPG Capital holds a 30% stake. HBO Max, Vrio, U-verse's network assets and AT&T's Sky Mexico investments were not included as part of the deal. DirecTV's streaming products, including AT&T TV and U-verse, will become a single brand under the DirecTV Stream name later this month. Customers who were previously AT&T satellite, streaming or IP video subscribers will automatically keep their video service and any bundled wireless or internet services, including HBO Max. As part of the deal, AT&T will continue to fund NFL Sunday Ticket through 2022.

GCI EYES BETHEL EXPANSION

GCI and Tribal health organization Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation have plans to apply for a \$53 million NTIA grant for a project that would bring fiber internet to Bethel, Alaska. The project, to be completed in 2024, would deliver 1 gigabit speeds to communities along the fiber route. The proposed buildout will follow a combined submarine

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route from GCI's existing Levelock, Alaska, fiber network to the mouth of the Kuskokwim River, where it should follow a terrestrial route to Bethel. The proposal will be submitted for consideration by NTIA's Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program, which will distribute \$1 billion for major broadband infrastructure projects. The deadline for grant applications is Sept 1.

#### BERNSTEIN HALTING MEDIA COVERAGE

**Bernstein** is temporarily suspending its coverage of U.S. media companies in light of senior analyst *Todd Juenger's* sabbatical. "We plan to reinstate coverage following the Senior Analyst's return in a couple of months," the firm said in an email. "Effective today, July 30, 2021, our previous reports, ratings, target prices and earnings estimates should no longer be relied upon." Pre-existing models and content can be received from other members of the Bernstein team.

#### VIZIO GIVES STREAMER A FACELIFT

**VIZIO's** WatchFree+ free streaming service unveiled a redesigned programming guide and an expanded content offering Monday. Part of that enhanced offering is the introduction of curated channels for viewers as well as a featured category with seasonal programming and pop-up channels. Current curated channels that are exclusive to the platform include VIZIO Fork & Flight, which features a mix of cooking and travel shows, and VIZIO Investigation, a collection of everything from true crime to deep dives into the unknown. New navigation features allow for enhanced search and discovery, giving users the ability to search movies, shows and other free content quickly. The enhanced program guide also supports voice navigation through the latest VIZIO Voice remote or through the SmartCast Mobile app.

#### CHARTER OFFERING SENIOR NOTES

**Charter Communications** intends to offer senior un-

secured notes due 2034. The operator plans to use the proceeds from the sale of the notes to pay down debt and fund potential buybacks of Class A common stock of Charter or common units of Charter Communications Holdings, LLC.

#### MIDCO RSN GETS NEW LOOK

**Midco Sports Network** is getting a new name and look. The regional sports network is being rebranded to **Midco Sports** and will feature a revamped color palette with orange at its center. The transformations will also be reflected on Midco Sports Plus, a streaming service for those that aren't customers of Midco that want access to the RSN's live sports content.

#### PROGRAMMING

**Telemundo** is launching celebrity dance competition reality show "Así Se Baila," set to premiere on the network in September. Episodes will also be available to stream next day on **Peacock** as well as live and post-air on the Telemundo app. – Sports betting operator **BetMGM** and news net **Cheddar News** are partnering to launch weekly sports betting and financial market program "Cheddar Bets" starting Aug 19 at 4:30pm ET. The agreement also establishes BetMGM as the exclusive sports betting partner of Cheddar News. – **Showtime** picked up drama series "The Chi" for a fifth season, set to debut in 2022. – **Disney+** renewed "Mighty Ducks: Game Changers" for Season 2. Production is scheduled to begin in early 2022.

#### PEOPLE

*Eric Dodson Greenberg* has been named evp/general counsel/corporate secretary of **Cox Media Group**, effective August 16. He will report to Cox Media Group president/CEO *Dan York*. Greenberg will join from Perkins Coie, LLP, where he currently serves as a partner in the mergers & acquisitions and technology transactions practice groups.

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