

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Big Money: 2021 Telecom Lobbying Tops \$108 Million

Fourth quarter was all about infrastructure, infrastructure, infrastructure—and that showed up in lobbying spending on the Hill. **NCTA – The Internet & Television Association** upped its lobbying spending in 4Q21 to \$4.17 million, up nearly a million dollars from the total spent in each of the previous quarters, according to documents filed Thursday with the Senate Office of Public Records.

Through Oct. 22, 2021, lobbying spending on telecom services was \$81.7 million, according to OpenSecrets.org. A **Cablefax** analysis of lobbying disclosures from 4Q21 shows that the total spend for 2021 will top last year's record \$108.67 million on telecom lobbying spending. With a permanent **FCC** chair finally seated, an **NTIA** administrator in place and a beaucoup of broadband bucks up for grabs, the spending isn't expected to slow in 2022. States will play an important role with that NTIA money flowing through them. And of course, there's the fact 2022 is a mid-term election year.

NCTA was the biggest lobbying spender among cable players in 2021, topping \$14 million. That's down from 2020's \$15.46 million, and a hair below 2019's \$14.2 million expenditure. In addition to infrastructure, the association lobbied on issues such as cybersecurity and digital equity. Less familiar bills that NCTA lobbied on include the End Taxpayer Subsidies for Drug Ads Act, which would prohibit

pharmaceutical drug manufacturers from claiming tax deductions for expenses on advertising directly to consumers. Rep. **Cindy Axne** (D-IA) reintroduced the legislation last week.

Comcast was the second biggest spender among cable, with its lobbying bill topping \$13.2 million, down from \$14.28 million last year. It was followed by **Charter** (\$10.7 million), **Cox Communications** parent **Cox Enterprises** (\$3.63 million), **ACA Connects** (\$1.12 million, including **Alpine Group** lobbying on its behalf) and **Altice USA** (\$580,000). Plenty of that money went toward lobbying big bills such as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the Build Better Act and the CARES Act. Other issues that saw lobbying dollars include sports programming, retransmission consent, spectrum issues and a bill from Rep **Yvette Clarke** (D-NY) that would have amended IRS code to provide tax credits for carriage of independent programmers by qualified MVPDs.

Other big spenders in the telecom lobbying space include **CTIA** (\$12.4 million), **T-Mobile** (\$9.57 million), **Huawei** (\$3.59 million), **Crown Castle** (\$2.12 million) and **DISH** (\$2.12 million).

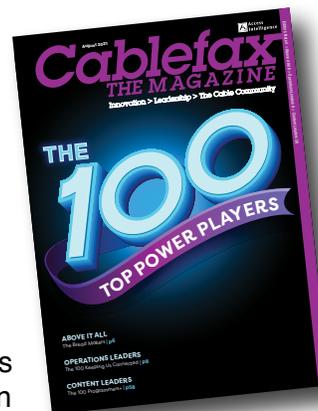
While telecom is set to have a big year, it doesn't seem likely a major telecom bill will make it through Congress this year. Instead, the action seems to be primarily aimed at Big Tech, including antitrust legislation targeting tech companies. The fact tech is in Congress' sights can be seen in 2021 lobbying expenditures, with **Meta/Facebook**



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.

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topping \$20 million spent and **Amazon** spending \$19.3 million. Both represent company records.

One of the first big regulatory actions facing the cable/broadband industry in 2022 will be a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to be debated at Thursday's **FCC** Open Meeting that would require broadband providers to display labels to disclose price information, including introductory rates, data allowances, broadband speeds and management practices. **New Street Research** believes the idea may be easier said than implemented.

“While industry no doubt would prefer not to have to provide the information, there is a fundamental challenge that is not political, which is, how does the FCC provide enough information about a multi-faceted product to be useful to the average consumer while not confusing the average consumer with too much, or too little, information,” analyst *Blair Levin* wrote in a research note. “It is not an easy needle to thread. While there is a lot of uncertainty here, our guess at this moment is that the implementation will not thread it in a way that causes consumers to use the information to switch.”

CHARTER TURNS ON FIRST RDOF LOCATION

Just over a year after being awarded Rural Digital Opportunity Fund subsidies, **Charter** has launched its first RDOF service launch. Charter launched Spectrum internet, mobile, TV and voice services to more than 1,230 homes and small businesses in rural El Paso County, Texas. Residential broadband download speeds will start at 200Mbps, but speeds of up to 1Gbps are available throughout the

buildout area as well. Spectrum Business customers can access download speeds of 200Mbps, 600Mbps and 1Gbps. Additional homes and businesses in El Paso county and Dona Ana County will also receive service from the RDOF expansion in the coming months. Texas is one of Charter's biggest investment areas. The operator said last March that it expects to spend at least \$400 million in private investment in the near term along with more than \$186 million in RDOF funds within the state. Once completed, Charter's RDOF expansion will provide broadband to approximately 1 million customer locations across 24 states.

AT&T FIBER CELEBRATES MULTI-GIG SPEEDS

AT&T Fiber launched new multi-gig speeds across its 5.2 million customer locations Monday. In conjunction, AT&T introduced new pricing plans across its consumer portfolio that have no equipment fees, annual contracts, data caps or price increases for 12 months. For new customers, AT&T Fiber's 2 Gig plan comes in at \$110/month while the 5 Gig plan clocks in at \$180/month. For business customers, AT&T Business Fiber 2 Gig starts at \$225/month and the 5 Gig option is available for \$395/month. The provider isn't slowing down on its pursuit of higher speeds and a larger footprint. AT&T has achieved up to 10 Gig speeds in its labs and plans to cover 30 million customer locations by the end of 2025.

ALLEN SCORES WIN IN MCDONALD'S SUIT

Byron Allen's racial discrimination suit against McDonald's gained new life Friday after a federal judge refused the fast food giant's request for the case's dismissal. Allen raised the

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\$10 billion suit in May, alleging that McDonald's would not advertise with his business ventures and engaged in behavior consistent with racial stereotyping. It also alleged that McDonald's has a tiered advertising structure that differentiates on the basis of race with the "African American" tier receiving a much smaller budget and different pricing and terms than the "general market" tier. The initial complaint was dismissed in December for allegedly not including sufficient factual evidence that would validate the claims, but Allen followed that up with a second and now third amended complaint. The judge largely decided to refuse because McDonald's improperly referenced materials outside the pleadings. McDonald's has until Thursday to respond to Allen's initial complaint or re-enter a motion to dismiss.

OLYMPICS READY

NBCUniversal is teaming up with **TikTok** for the 2022 Winter Olympics. NBCU will add daily content across select NBC TikTok handles and produce a three-episode livestream show to be hosted by a TikTok creator. The livestream show will also be featured in a dedicated NBC Olympics Hub on the platform. Globally, more than 18 billion video views have been generated across Olympics-related hashtags on TikTok.

GOOGLE SUED OVER LOCATION DATA

The battle against Big Tech in 2022 continued Monday with four state attorneys general suing **Google** over the company's collection and use of location data from users of its devices and services. Washington, Indiana, Texas and D.C. filed similar suits over the company's practices, which they called deceptive and misleading to consumers. "Google leads consumers to believe they are in control of what information Google retains about them and how it is used. In reality, consumers who use Google products cannot prevent Google from collecting, storing, and profiting from their location," the State of Washington said in its filing. Google has said it will fight each of the cases.

MOODY'S ON DIAMOND DEBT FINANCING

Moody's said **Sinclair** RSN subsidiary **Diamond Sports Group's** \$600 million of new financing from some secured creditors would likely be considered a "distressed exchange" if completed as outlined. The new \$600 million term loan will provide Diamond with the liquidity bandwidth it needs to pursue its DTC launch this year. "Even with the DTC platform performing in line with the company's best expectations, leverage is expected to remain very high in 2022 through 2023. Moody's will assess the final capital structure, liquidity and strategy of Diamond once the exchange transaction has closed," Moody's said Wednesday. Sinclair announced the new financing last week along with the acquisition of DTC streaming rights for **NBA** games.

CINEDIGM DIVES DEEP INTO AR

Cinedigm partnered with consumer AR glasses maker **Nreal** to bring three of its channels to Nreal's AR "TV" app. Fans of **Bloody Disgusting TV**, **Realmadrid TV** and **CONtv** will be able to take part in the viewing experience using a pair of

Nreal's glasses and the app's Theatre Mode, which projects a virtual 220-inch HD screen in front of the user.

COX KICKS OFF SOCIAL IMPACT ACCELERATOR

Cox Enterprises announced the third class of its Social Impact Accelerator powered by **Techstars** Monday. The three-month program offers hands-on mentoring, funding and networking opportunities to 10 for-profit companies with powerful mission statements. Among those selected for this year's class are **Dreami**, a web application build for tracking and scaling career mentorship, and **Mini City**, a company providing technology solutions to help the homeless population connect to opportunities for housing and employment. Those chosen for the class will be mentored by Cox business leaders who will help bring the ideas to market and boost their businesses beyond the early stages. The program will culminate in a Demo Day presentation to be held on April 21.

PROGRAMMING

"The Rally" will premiere Monday at 5pm ET on the **Bally Sports** RSNs. The discussion-based show will air weekday afternoons and also be available on the Bally Sports app. – **Bravo** is debuting Season 3 of reality show "Below Deck Sailing Yacht" on Feb 21 at 8pm ET. – **Ovation TV** will celebrate Black History Month by spotlighting Black artists who have made an impact in different mediums. Throughout February, a Friday night "Red Carpet Cinema" programming block will celebrate Black actors and actresses who have left their mark on the film world including *Denzel Washington*, *Patti LaBelle* and *Morgan Freeman*. Other series and films will be highlighted in February that feature comedy greats, musical icons and more. That programming will be free all month long on the Ovation NOW app and the Ovation TV Watch website. – "Profiled: The Black Man," a docuseries examining the rise of the stereotypes surrounding Black men in America, will premiere exclusively on **discovery+** Feb 12. New eps will arrive on the streamer every Saturday through March 5.

PEOPLE

NCTI named *Jeff Gibson* Director of Learning and Development following the retirement of *Paul Eisbrenner*. Gibson has more than 30 years of industry experience, most recently serving as VP, College of Technologists at Comcast University. – Former **Sky Television** marketing and digital exec *Arianna Saita* joined London-based global streaming aggregator **ScreenHits TV** as CMO. – **CTI Towers** appointed *Tammy Wolfe* as CFO. She joins from wireless telecom infrastructure provider **ExteNet Systems**.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Still need to get your nominations for the **Cablefax** 100 in? Don't worry! We've extended the entry deadline. Head to www.cablefax100.com and submit your applications by this Friday for a chance at a coveted spot on this year's list of power players.