

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Money Talks: Rural Associations Support \$75 High-Cost ACP Subsidy

The **FCC's** Affordable Connectivity Program's rules went into effect Thursday, and associations representing rural providers are fully supporting a proposal that would up the program's subsidy in communities **NTIA** has deemed high-cost areas.

Should a provider qualify for the high-cost areas benefit, qualifying households that subscribe for its service would be able to receive a \$75/month subsidy towards their monthly bill. That's more than double the standard \$30/month subsidy offered to most program participants. **ACA Connects** suggested in its comments that such a provision would be a major incentive for providers in high-cost areas that weren't able to participate in the Emergency Broadband Benefit program to join ACP, or for those that were a part of EBB to keep offering subsidies.

Should a provider want to receive the higher subsidy, ACA Connects suggested a two-part test to determine whether or not it should be considered for the increased subsidy. First, it should show that its start-up and ongoing costs of participating in ACP would outweigh revenues or cost savings incoming as a result of program participation. For providers that participated in the Emergency Broadband Benefit program, ACA Connects believes those costs could also encompass potential non-payment from or loss of subscribers who found broadband no longer affordable when the subsidy amount dropped from \$50/month to \$30/month.

Should providers pass the first test, they would then be required to demonstrate that the net loss from participating in the ACP with a \$30/month benefit would impact its financial profile to the point where its ability to maintain segments of its network would be impacted. "In other words, the provider would need to show that even when viewed in the context of its overall financial position, it is the 'particularized' effect of a benefit limited to \$30 per household per month that would cause it economic hardship such that it may not be able to maintain existing levels of operation of all, or even part, of its broadband network," ACAC said.

NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association argued in its comments that it makes sense to tie the availability of the higher subsidy to whether or not a provider receives High-Cost USF support. "In the end, the 'enhanced' ACP subsidy can make up for this 'gap' between 'reasonable comparability' and 'affordability' that the High-Cost USF program does not close on its own due to the operation of the latter program's rules," NTCA said. It added that there will be other situations where providers not receiving High-Cost USF support should be considered for the higher subsidy, and the FCC should put in place specific standards for the kinds of evidence they would need to produce to be considered.

The association also argued that the availability of the benefit should not be limited to unserved areas. Should the FCC adopt such a limit, there's a high possibility that consumers in high-cost areas with strong broadband networks would be unable to

ANNOUNCING Cablefax's TOP OPS Nominations

The Top Ops categories recognize excellence in a variety of areas, including marketing, technology, finance, lifetime achievement, customer service and community involvement. Nominations are open to all operators.

Help Cablefax choose the MSO and Independent Operator of the Year!

Submit Today at: www.CablefaxTopOps.com

Questions: Contact Mary-Lou French at mfrench@accessintel.com or 301.354.1851.



It's free to enter – but you must submit your entries by April 1, 2022!

The Independent Operator of the Year Award (IOY) is presented in conjunction with ACA Connects and NCTC

subscribe to a service plan, even with a \$30/month subsidy.

“Furthermore, as unserved areas come online as ‘served,’ there is no indication that the services will become magically affordable of their own accord absent enhanced subsidy such that providers will not need an additional ‘tool in the toolkit’ to tackle the affordability hurdle that the ACP exists to address,” NTCA said.

AMAZON CLOSES \$8.5B MGM DEAL

With the deadline for challenging **Amazon’s** acquisition of **MGM** passing at a 2-2 deadlocked **FTC**, the internet giant closed on its purchase of the movie studio Thursday. “MGM has a nearly century-long legacy of producing exceptional entertainment, and we share their commitment to delivering a broad slate of original films and television shows to a global audience,” **Mike Hopkins**, SVP, **Prime Video** and **Amazon Studios**, said in a statement.

AFFILIATES WANT RETRANS DEALS WITH VMVPDS

The heads of the Big Four broadcast associations for local affiliate stations met with **FCC** commissioners this week to push for virtual MVPDs (vMVPDs) to be treated like traditional MVPDs. The vMVPDs, including **Hulu + Live TV** and **YouTube TV**, aren’t governed by the same FCC rules as traditional pay TV operators. That means they don’t have the same obligations on accessibility, emergency programming, EAS, equal employment opportunities—or retransmission consent. The FCC opened a docket in 2014 to consider whether to classify vMVPDs as MVPDs, but it didn’t go anywhere. “Local broadcasters’ service to the public continues unabated, even as shifts in the video programming ecosystem have challenged local broadcasters in ways that could not have been anticipated in 2014,” the heads of the **ABC**, **CBS**, **FOX** and **NBC** affiliate associations said in meetings with FCC Chair **Jessica Rosenworcel** and Commissioner **Brendan Carr**, according to an ex parte. When it comes to retrans deals with vMVPDs, the network affiliate stations feel left out in the cold. They complained that the networks (ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC) have “near-total control” over carriage negotiations with vMVPDs. “A Big Four network (or, more accurately, its parent entity) will fully negotiate an agreement with a given vMVPD for carriage of network-owned stations as well as network-owned cable channels and other less popular programming—without any meaningful input from its non-owned affiliate stations,” the groups wrote. That’s not the only challenge in the network-affiliate relationship. The affiliates said network-owned direct-to-consumer platforms, such as NBCU’s **Peacock** and Disney/ABC’s **Hulu**, often feature desirable content and frequently carry the same network programming that historically had appeared exclusively on broadcast stations. That loss of exclusivity “hinders their ability to negotiate fair compensation” for retrans, the filing

said. The affiliates also complained about losing advertising revenue to Big Tech platforms that distribute broadcast stations’ news content.

FTC AND DOJ TO HOST FORUMS

The **FTC** and the **Department of Justice** are hosting four listening forums to hear from workers, entrepreneurs, start-ups, farmers, investors and independent businesses about the effects of mergers and acquisitions. The forums will be held virtually and led by FTC chair **Lina M. Khan** and Assistant Attorney General **Jonathan Kanter**, focusing on impacted industries and markets. The events will take place March 28 at 3pm ET, April 14 at 2pm, April 27 at 1:30pm and May 12 at 2pm.

COMCAST INVESTS IN RURAL CALIFORNIA

Comcast is investing \$1 million to bring high-speed broadband to Biola, CA. The company will open three new Lift Zones, donate \$102,000 to community organizations for digital literacy programs and provide free laptops to 250 families. Residents will have access to all **Xfinity** services and qualified families or individuals can get internet for \$9.95/month. Comcast is

Cablefax Executive Round Up

Why does the true crime genre seem to so consistently resonate with viewers?



Rod Aissa

EVP, Entertainment Unscripted Content
NBCUniversal Television and Streaming

“True Crime resonates because the stakes are the highest of any content—it’s life or death. In an uncertain world, people want to know that justice will prevail. All too often, the stories hit home because they are relatable. It’s real people caught in extraordinary circumstances.”



Steve Cheskin

SVP, Programming
REELZ

“True crime fits squarely in the REELZ brand of real lives and real stories and the genre has always performed well for us. Viewers want to learn more about what really happened, and, in many of the shows, how law enforcement solved the case and caught the criminals involved. Stories of the victims bring real humanity and empathy to what just seems like lurid headlines when covered by the news.”



Jason Sarlanis

President, Crime & Investigative Content, Linear and Streaming
Discovery Inc.

“With so much fear and uncertainty in people’s day-to-day lives, true crime programming offers viewers a cathartic outlet to see real-life examples of good triumphing over evil. At our best, ID’s content can even challenge viewers to do their part in helping right injustice in the world... something no other genre offers.”

also making the **Affordable Connectivity Program** available for all speed tiers of Xfinity Internet.

GEO-TARGETING GIRL SCOUT COOKIE SALES

Forget going door-to-door to peddle Thin Mints and Samoas—try programmatic advertising. *Mike Woods*, founder and CEO of advanced ad tech firm **OrkaTV**, helped his five-year-old with her Girl Scout cookie sales this year by micro-targeting friends and family in his neighborhood. We heard about the former **WURL** and **Maker Studios** exec's delicious plan from **Herring Networks** President *Charles Herring*, whose office in San Diego was also targeted with ads with a QR code that led straight to little Hannah's cookie sales website. Herring said Hannah makes frequent appearances on Woods' Zoom calls, so he recognized her immediately. "When I saw a programmatic targeted advertisement pop-up on my streaming TV service, with Hannah saying, 'These are really, really, really, really, really good cookies' it caught my attention. I was impressed and couldn't stop laughing. I had to buy 10 boxes," said Herring (all Peanut Butter Tagalongs, for the record).

RECORD-BREAKING RATINGS, BRACKET SIGNUPS

truTV's First Four telecasts delivered the most-watched Tuesday and Wednesday coverage in NCAA March Madness history, with a gross average viewership of 6.9 million (+28% from 2019). Indiana-Wyoming ranks as the most-watched Tuesday game ever with 2.2 million viewers (+47% in 2019). – **ESPN** raked in 17.3 million completed brackets for this year's Men's Tournament Challenge. The game set a single-day record for signups Tuesday and Wednesday before brackets were locked in Thursday afternoon. The ESPN Tournament Challenge app was the No. 1 free application on the Apple App Store, beating out TikTok, Snapchat and **YouTube**. The Women's Tournament Challenge is also trending toward record numbers before Friday's official tipoff.

BLUEPEAK BUILDS IN OKLAHOMA

Bluepeak is building a high-speed fiber network in Lawton, Okla., that'll reach more than 40,000 homes and businesses in the city. The project will cost approximately \$40 million—the largest made by Bluepeak in Oklahoma—and will give residential customers up to 5 Gbps of symmetrical bandwidth. Businesses can get up to 10 Gbps and beyond of symmetrical bandwidth.

PROGRAMMING

"The Flight Attendant" returns to **HBO Max** for a second season on April 21. The eight-episode season will begin with two episodes the first and second weeks before going to one episode per week. – Starting Saturday, **AMC** will air a "Breaking Bad" marathon for five straight Saturdays leading up to the sixth season premiere of "Better Call Saul" on April 18. The marathon will include behind-the-scene interviews and bonus content. – "Harry Potter 20th Anniversary: Return to Hogwarts" is headed to **Cartoon Network** on April 10 at 6pm. The special looks back at the film franchise and reunites the cast of *Daniel Radcliffe*, *Emma Watson* and others. An encore presentation will be on **TBS** the same night at 8pm. – **We**

TV greenlit "Kold x Windy," a scripted drama about Chicago's south side and its culture. The series begins this fall on We TV and **ALLBLK**.

INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCES SEEK MEDIA DIVERSITY

Diverse representation in media isn't just an important topic in the U.S. With 52% of global respondents in a recent **Starz** survey with the Center for Scholars & Storytellers at UCLA saying they feel it's important that women are represented behind the camera and only 35% of women outside the U.S. saying they feel their identity is well represented in media, it's clear there's much progress to be made. Starz continues to ask the tough questions, hosting its latest "Transparency Talk" this week with a focus on international audiences. "Everything we do in the DNA of Starz... internationally is really making sure that we are telling stories that are authentic and so they can only really come from people that have lived or really understand the story," Starz International Networks President *Superna Kalle* said during the most recent installment of the table-talk series, part of the programmer's #TakeTheLead initiative that aims to amplify diverse voices. According to the Starz-UCLA survey, more than 75% of international audiences want to see multicultural content and 65% said seeing people from different backgrounds in media makes them feel more empathetic toward others. "2.4 billion women around the world... don't have the same legal rights as men and boys... [and] the pay gap [between men and women] has remained stubborn for decades," *Michelle Milford Morse*, President, Girls and Women Strategy at the **UN Foundation**, said during the video conversation.

PEOPLE

Tom McDonald was named EVP, Global Factual/Unscripted Content for **National Geographic**, effective in June. He'll be responsible for the development and production of all global unscripted series and specials that feed Nat Geo's linear channels and **Disney+**. He joins from **BBC Studios** where he oversaw the creative and commercial strategy for factual productions.

SAY YES TO THE PROM RETURNS

Discovery, Inc.'s charity initiative to help underserved students find their prom outfits "Say Yes to the Prom" is returning for a 10th year. The program will donate thousands of dresses to **Becca's Closet**, an organization dedicated to giving prom dresses and accessories to girls who couldn't afford them, and is working with partners **Altice USA** and **Mediacom**. In-person shopping days for Say Yes to the Prom are returning as well, with the first held in Washington, D.C. on Wednesday.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Have you submitted your entries to the **FAXIES**? Friday is the final deadline to enter the awards program celebrating excellence across all areas of PR and marketing. Categories include PR Executive of the Year, Retail Store Experience & Engagement and so much more. Head to [TheFaxies.com](https://www.thefaxies.com) for more information! – **Cablefax Daily** will not be publishing on Friday, March 18. Your next issue will hit your inbox on Monday, March 21.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

Raw Food and a Rotten Relationship

When life seems to be perfect, there's always potential for an epic downfall. In docuseries "Bad Vegan: Fame. Fraud. Fugitives," which premiered Wednesday on **Netflix**, *Sarma Melngailis* takes center stage as the previously known "Queen of Vegan," running a popular raw-food vegan restaurant in New York called Pure Food and Wine. The opening scene plays a phone call of a man unhappy about the docuseries, foreshadowing the deception and intricate web of lies. Melngailis bought the business when it was in debt, and she had little money. Enter *Shane Fox*, a man she met on Twitter who promised to use his substantial wealth to keep the restaurant above water. "He could always make me laugh. He was very goofy and funny," she explains in the first episode. "I felt like I had fallen in love with him before meeting him ... I wanted him to be this big strong guy that was gonna come in my life." The pair met in person in 2011 and married in 2012, and Melngailis started funneling millions from the restaurant to her then-husband, who used it to fund his gambling habits. More promises came that if Melngailis was able to complete certain tests, Fox would be able to give her everything she wanted, including her dog's immortality. Little did she know that Fox's real name was *Anthony Strangis* and he'd spent time in prison for grand theft. The two went on the run when the restaurant closed and employees hadn't been paid, leaving them wanted by police for fraud among other things. They were arrested in Sevierville, Tennessee, being found after ordering a pizza and chicken wings from Domino's. The series largely focuses on Melngailis's view of the situation, and she maintains hope that one day the New York restaurant scene will welcome her back. Bad Vegan shows Melngailis is human and was susceptible to impure influence, but fails to fully investigate why she went along with everything. When fellow Sevier County Jail inmate *Melissa Cagle* asked Melngailis why she allowed somebody to control her that much, she offered a poignant answer: "You do some weird things when you think you love somebody." – *Noah Ziegler*

REVIEWS

"The Tourist," streaming, **HBO Max**. Mix the earthy elements of the *Coen* brothers' film "Fargo" (1996), the camera's love of geography from season 1 of **HBO's** "True Detective" (2014), a bit of the film "Memento" (2001) and the Australian outback and you'll have an idea of what this little gem of a mystery offers. Here, the vastness of the Aussie outback fills in for the swamps of Louisiana from True Detective. And viewers quickly will feel parched watching *Jamie Dornan* seeking refuge at a desert spot whose last coat of paint was applied centuries ago. Yet keep your eyes peeled, "The Tourist" offers a great second scene, courtesy of some great camera work and stunt driving. After that traces of Memento arise. And meanwhile you may think more than once that you're watching Fargo. *Danielle Macdonald* as a somewhat unsure rookie police officer assumes elements of the *Frances McDormand* role from Fargo. Though her character has some similarities with McDormand's Oscar-winning chief Marge Gunderson, we see much more of officer Helen Chambers's private life. In short, it's a doozy. Could director *Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck* have told the story in a shorter version, perhaps as a feature film? Probably. And, as we said above, it's somewhat derivative. But we quibble. Lean in and enjoy. The trip is worthwhile. – *Seth Arenstein*

BASIC CABLE P2+ PRIME RANKINGS* (03/07/22-03/13/22)		
MON-SUN	MC US AA%	MC US AA (000)
FNC	0.775	2413
ESPN	0.384	1198
MSNBC	0.336	1046
CNN	0.318	990
HGTV	0.310	966
HALL	0.244	760
FOOD	0.226	703
INSP	0.220	684
HIST	0.219	681
TLC	0.217	677
TNT	0.216	672
DISC	0.190	591
TVLAND	0.159	496
ID	0.156	485
LIFE	0.146	456
TBSC	0.145	451
A&E	0.141	438
WETV	0.125	391
HMM	0.125	389
BRAVO	0.117	366
SYFY	0.116	362
NATGEO	0.113	351
USA	0.109	340
AMC	0.109	338
GSN	0.103	321
NAN	0.100	310
OXYGEN	0.095	294
BET	0.094	292
NICK	0.089	277
PRMNT	0.087	271
FX	0.087	270
APL	0.084	261
COM	0.083	259
ESPN2	0.082	254

*P2+ L+SD rankers are based on national Nielsen numbers, not coverage.

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