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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

ACP 2.0: Full Speed Ahead on Enrollments Despite Questions Over Future

While there are plenty of questions over whether the Affordable Connectivity Program will be re-funded next year, the push right now is for new outreach efforts to get more Americans signed up for the broadband subsidy offering.

“We need to lay fiber. We need to connect homes. We need to provide literacy training and hardware for folks. But truthfully, we really need to make sure this is all affordable. Because what good is it if you have the internet or your neighborhood has the coverage, but you can’t afford it. For a middle class family, \$100 a month is unaffordable. And for those with lower incomes, any cost at all is too much,” Commerce Secretary *Gina Raimondo* said during a spring White House ACP kickoff press call Monday.

So far, more than 16 million households have signed up for ACP. Congress appropriated \$14.2 billion for the ACP fund under the 2021 Infrastructure Act. Participating providers make available to eligible households a monthly discount on an internet service offering and associated equipment, up to \$30 per month. On qualifying Tribal lands, the monthly discount may be up to \$75 per month. Participating providers receive reimbursement from the ACP for the discounts provided.

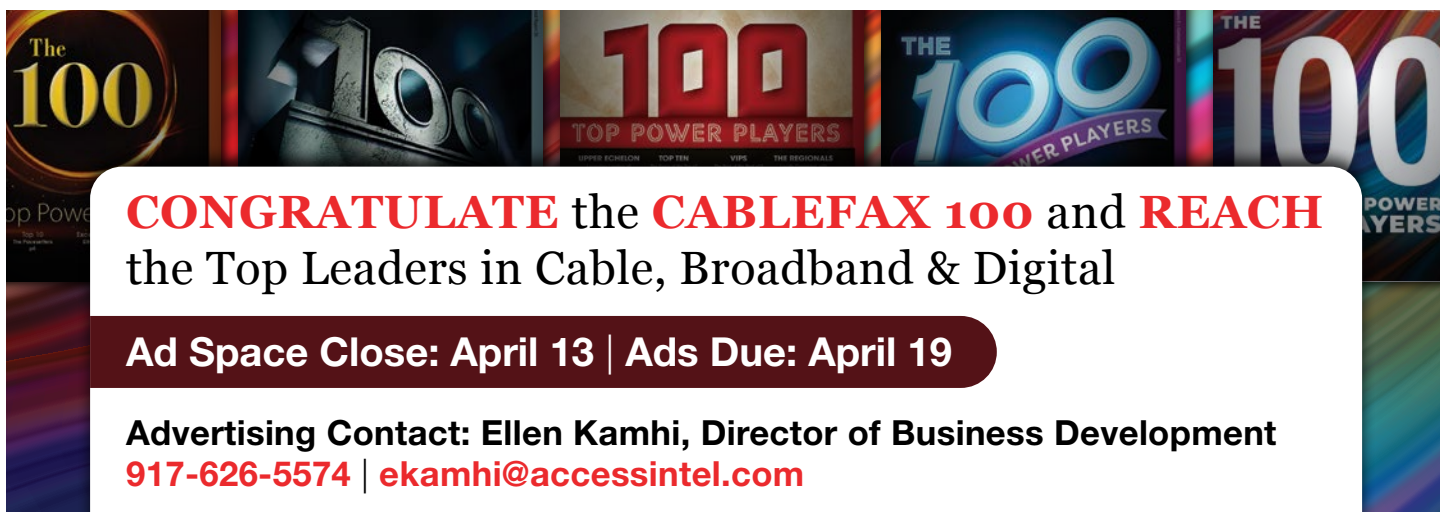
Biden’s proposed fiscal year 2024 budget made no mention of allocating money to ACP, even though it’s predicted to run out of funding sometime next year. That could put ISPs in a tough spot. “If the program is not re-funded, we expect... a

loss of some revenue for ISPs, as well as political pressure from federal and state policy makers for ISPs to come up with other ways of enabling low-income households to afford broadband services at prices below what the market would set,” **New Street Research** said in a note Monday.

New Street analyst Blair Levin has been pessimistic about ACP’s odds of re-funding, while others inside Washington believe it’s too popular a program to sunset—particularly in a presidential election year. Raimondo and White House infrastructure coordinator *Mitch Landrieu* used Monday’s event to thank ISPs for the participation, asking them to double down on the commitment to connect every American. But they offered no insight on the program’s future.

“This is a top priority for the President. As he would say, this is a big deal. And it’s because every American no matter where they live, or how much money they make, or the color of their skin needs and deserves access to quality high speed internet,” said Raimondo.

On Friday, FCC Chairwoman *Jessica Rosenworcel* shared with colleagues a Report and Order proposing a second, more targeted Notice of Funding Opportunity to raise awareness and promote the Affordable Connectivity Program as part of the FCC’s broader consumer outreach efforts. The proposal would open the door to more organizations to receive support to increase participation among eligible, low-income households in need of an internet connection. The agency already has bestowed \$60 million in outreach grants to community



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partners to increase ACP participation. The FCC and **USAC** will release an updated application within the next few weeks to help to continue to enhance the consumer experience with the program.

Monday's event featured several advocacy groups that are helping spread the ACP word. **Civic Nation** is gearing up to launch the "Online for All" initiative in conjunction with the administration's spring ACP enrollment push. It is based off the group's model for its recent COVID-19 vaccine equity campaign, "Made to Save," which granted almost \$7 million to 100 community organizations across 24 states.

Civic Nation ran a pilot program over the past 12 weeks that provided small grants to five local community partners that in turn educated nearly 40,000 people about ACP, helped start 400 applications and got 200 people fully enrolled. "As we are starting to do some analysis on the work of our pilot, we found that 15% of the folks we enrolled did not have internet prior to enrolling in the ACP," said Civic Nation Managing Director *Jalakoi Solomon*.

Civic Nation is launching a unified national ACP enrollment coalition with **Education Superhighway** and **NDIA—National Digital Inclusion Alliance** signing on as core partners. "Earlier this year, we approached our state partners about the importance of increasing ACP adoption. I'm happy to say that we have 28 governors from bipartisan states who've made ACP adoption a priority in their state and 17 states that are now launching ACP awareness campaigns focused on activating local partners as well as earned and social media," said Education Superhighway Founder/CEO *Evan Marwell*.

BUDGET TALKS

Agencies and organizations have had some time to digest *Biden's* proposed FY 2024 budget, and they have some things to say. **America's Public Television Stations** is pleased with the recommendation of \$575 million in advance funding for public broadcasting and a \$40 million increase for the **Corporation for Public Broadcasting**—particularly given a decade of flat federal funding for CPB. Of course, we're a long way from *Biden's* proposal or an alternative from the Republican House Study Committee being approved. Still, it's a start. *Biden's* proposal would allocate \$400 million to **USDA's** ReConnect broadband loan and grant program. The **FCC** has released its FY24 budget estimates, requesting \$410,743,000 in budget authority from regulatory fee offsetting collections. That's 5.4% more than the FY23 appropriation. It's seeking \$136,167,000 in budget authority for the spectrum auctions program, up

3% from FY23. As of January 31, 2023, the Commission's spectrum auctions program has generated over \$233.5 billion for government use; at the same time, the total cost of the auctions program has been less than \$2.5 billion or 1.1% of the total auctions' revenue. Among the line items is a 5.2% increase for personnel compensation and benefits, putting compensation at just over \$14.2 million. The **FTC's** budget requests a program level of \$590,000,000, an increase of \$160,000,000 from the FY23 enacted appropriations level. That request includes more than \$70 million for an additional 310 full-time employees, with the bulk of those hires anticipated for the Bureau of Competition. The **FTC** wants \$30 million for IT systems modernization and infrastructure upgrades to support a larger decentralized and remote workforce.

NEXSTAR, YOUTUBE TV EXPAND DEAL TO INCLUDE CW STATIONS

Nexstar and **YouTube TV** shook hands on a multi-year distribution deal that will see 59 stations launch on the platform. That includes 29 **CW**-affiliated television stations, 26 **MyNetworkTV** affiliates and four independent stations in Chicago, D.C., Oklahoma City and Baton Rouge. The agreement also extends the deals for retransmission consent of all of **Nexstar's** **CBS** affiliates on YouTube TV as well as carriage of **NewsNation**. It's a rare bit of positive news between a broadcaster and a vMVPD at a time when tensions between the two groups are running at a high. **Sinclair's** **ABC** affiliates went dark on **Hulu + Live TV** last week. It looked like that meant no Oscars for **Hulu vMVPD** customers Sunday, but *NextTV reports* that a national feed was offered up just of the awards telecast. Neither side offered up comment, but it appears to be confirmed by **Hulu's** Twitter [account](#). In other vMVPD-affiliate fireworks, a retrans proposal that was negotiated by **Paramount** and **FuboTV** was rejected by the **CBS** affiliate board. That led to **Sinclair**, **Nexstar**, **TEGNA**, **Cox Media Group** and more pulling their station's signals from the service's channel lineup. A new carriage deal has reportedly been negotiated and approved by the **CBS** affiliate board, opening the door to a potential resolution.

REPORT: MLB TO TAKE BROADCAST DUTIES FOR SOME TEAMS

With the state of RSNs in flux ahead of Opening Day on March 30, **MLB** is stepping in to broadcast four teams' games for free, according to a *NY Post report* quoting unnamed sources.

Those teams include the Cincinnati Reds, Cleveland Guardians, San Diego Padres and Arizona Diamondbacks, all of which have their home broadcast rights owned by a financially-troubled **Diamond Sports Group** that could be [headed for bankruptcy](#). The games that MLB will take over duties for will be free for those in the respective local market, but MLB doesn't have a finalized plan yet for out-of-market viewers. If DSG does file, it would likely use the proceedings to reject the contracts of at least four teams that the company pays more in rights than it obtains revenue in contracts and ads. The report also revealed that MLB tried to obtain the broadcast rights to all 14 teams DSG holds, but the approach was rejected. DSG has the rights for 16 **NBA** teams and 12 **NHL** teams as well.

SPECTRUM MOBILE DEAL FOR SMBS

Charter is offering one free line of unlimited Spectrum Mobile service for a year to new and existing Spectrum Business customers. New customers who sign up for the Spectrum Business Internet and Business Voice or Business Connect can get the free line that usually comes at \$29.99/month for 12 months. Current customers can qualify when they add Business Internet or Voice, or get a second line for free if they add Spectrum Mobile to their existing internet plan.

FIBER FRENZY

Clearwave Fiber has started construction of its network in Gardner, Kansas, continuing the company's buildout of nearly 6,000 route miles of fiber in the Southeast and Midwest. The network will enable over 5,000 locations for fiber services in Gardner. Clearwave has its sights set on reaching more than 500,000 homes and businesses in the U.S. by the end of 2026.

RATINGS

"The Last of Us" Season One finale delivered 8.2 million viewers Sunday across **HBO Max** and linear, based on **Nielsen** and first party data. That's some pretty strong growth from its 4.7 million debut in January. The first ep is approaching 40 million viewers outside the U.S., making it the most-watched show in the history of HBO Max in both Europe and Latin America. – **ID's** three-part docuseries "Jared From Subway: Catching a Monster" helped the network be the No. 1 cable net excluding sports among P25-54 and W25-54 on March 6 in the 9pm-midnight slot. It became ID's highest-rated limited series telecast in more than two years, garnering 3.7 million viewers on premiere night. The docuseries also averaged a .83 live plus three-day rating among P25-54 and a 1.02 live plus three-day rating among W25-54. – "Rock the Block" on **HGTV** had its highest-rated season premiere among W25-54 in series history. It's debut on March 6 at 9pm scored a 1.04 live plus three-day

rating, up 89% over the prior six weeks in the demo. It had over 5.7 million total viewers, helping it get a .70 L3 rating among P25-54 and .84 L3 rating among upscale P25-54.

CARRIAGE

The livestream shopping channels **QVC** and **HSN** are now available on **Redbox's** Free Live TV service. The two will bring around 40 hours of live programming a day and join Redbox Free Live TV's lineup of more than 160 channels, which can be watched on **Roku** devices, CTVs, gaming platforms and iOS and Android devices.

CONNECTED TV CORNER

Existing **Sony TV** users can snag a free 30-day trial to **Vidgo's** premium package, a value of \$79.95/month. Vidgo's lineup features more than 150 networks, including 35 sports networks such as **ESPN**, **FS1** and **Pac-12 Network**.

PROGRAMMING

The **USFL** is nearing the beginning of its second season, and **Fox Sports** and **NBC Sports** will team up to televise all 40 regular-season and three post-season games. Fox and NBC will have 29 games between the two, with Fox taking 18 and NBC/**Peacock** with 11. There will be 13 total primetime games across Fox, **FS1** and NBC, and the season gets underway April 15 at 4:30pm on Fox. The championship game will take place July 1 at 8pm on NBC and Peacock.

PEOPLE

Sonia Coleman was named to the top HR role at **Walt Disney**, succeeding *Paul Richardson*, who is leaving the company after more than 15 years. Richardson will become Senior EVP and Chief Human Resources Officer effective April 8, reporting to CEO **Bob Iger**. She most recently served as SVP, Human Resources for **Disney Entertainment** and **ESPN**. – **INCOMPAS** appointed **DC BLOX** Chief Commercial Officer *Debra Freitas* and **Segra** CEO *Kevin Hart* to the association's board of directors. Both will serve as representatives for their respective companies. Freitas was previously CEO/Co-Founder of Light Source Communications and is currently responsible for managing network route planning, pricing and packaging, marketing and government relations for DC BLOX's dark fiber projects. Hart became Segra's CEO in Jan. 2022 and has more than 30 years of experience in telecommunications, previously serving as CTO for **Cox Communications**. – **New York Interconnect** tapped *Andrew Kandel* as its CEO effective March 20, succeeding *Ed Renicker* who retired at the end of 2022. Kandel was previously CRO of **Waze** at **Google, Americas**, where he oversaw sales, business development, acquisition and partnerships for enterprise, self-service and SMB channels.