

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## No Problems: Newsmax Quietly Inks Carriage Renewals

It's been about a year since a public spat erupted after **Di-recTV** dropped **Newsmax**. The provider ended up returning the network to its lineup in late March, but in the leadup to that deal there were some fiery [comments](#) from several Republican lawmakers and even suggestions that Congress would hold a hearing on the issue. It set the stage for the possibility of more fireworks as the conservative-leaning news network's deals with large MVPDs such as **Comcast** and **Charter** expired later in the year and into 2024. But we haven't spotted even a sparkler.

"By the end of 2023, we have signed renewals with all of our major operators—Comcast, Charter, DirecTV, **DISH** and **Verizon Fios**. When I started this a while back, people said they weren't going to let any new channels on cable any more. And we've basically, I think, been accepted and are now a member of the club. I think we're here to stay."

Getting into the club meant shutting down Newsmax's free OTT simulcast stream on Nov. 1—a necessity as Newsmax sought to move from being carried for free to receiving compensation. No one is talking deal terms, but Ruddy said "we renewed, we are pleased with the result and we think the company will have financial success as a result of this."

Not only are almost all the renewals done, but Newsmax also picked up about 5 million more households. Asked whether it being an election year helped carriage renewals, Ruddy was unsure but he does have thoughts on the impact his longtime

friend Donald Trump has had.

"I think President Trump has added great difficulty to Newsmax because there's so much hostility in the industry and world against him. The media establishment, but also in the cable industry, he's not a really liked figure. We were having more success I felt before he was elected in 2016. I think we probably would have gotten more carriage earlier had he not been elected," he said. "It sort of threw a monkey wrench in because a lot of people felt we were we were going to be Trump TV. I think most of the cable operators took us and renewed us because if they look at the coverage... they'll see that you know we are fair. We try to reach out to both sides. While we have a lot of pro-Trump stuff, we also have people like *Rick Santorum*. He has been you know very critical of him through the years and he's now our leading political adviser... Our night leads with *Greta Van Susteren*, and she's not a polarizing figure."

With the shutdown of its free streamer, **Newsmax+** launched for \$4.99/month or \$49.99/year. "We were projecting 5,000 new subscribers by the end of 2023. We ended the year with about 170,000 subscribers paid. And we're over 180,000 today and they are still coming in," said Ruddy. There is a free streaming offering under the name "**Newsmax 2.**" It currently includes content such as video of conservative radio talk show hosts *Todd Starnes* and *Howie Carr*, with plans in place to ramp it up with docs, specials and even comedy programs, according to Ruddy.

Something to keep an eye on is political advertising. Up until Nov. 1, when Newsmax shifted to a linear only network, advertis-



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ers couldn't buy local system ads. Most cable operators carrying the network are now given two minutes an hour for ads.

Looking at the 2024 campaign trail, Newsmax is looking for ways to stand out. Of interest to Ruddy is holding a debate with *Robert F. Kennedy* and Trump. "We haven't got a firm no from either party at this point," he said. "I think people want something different. Trump, I think, created this whole thing that the old way of doing it is not necessarily a good way of doing it. And *Biden* sort of was a pathfinder last time by sitting in his basement and doing the whole campaign from his home, which is rather unique and he won doing that."

And along the lines of looking for something different, Newsmax is hoping it fits the bill. The network ended 2023 with total primetime viewer of 217,000, up 22% from 178,000 in 2022. Total day was up 20% to 144,000. "I think more and more people are saying they'd like to see an alternative to Fox, and I think and we've done it in a pretty positive way," said Ruddy.

## NY REP. THROWS FLAG ON NFL, NBC SPORTS

Saturday is a major milestone in the **NFL's** broadcasting plan. The league's first-ever exclusively streamed playoff game will be on **Peacock** when the Dolphins take on the Chiefs at 8pm, meaning a vast majority of fans will need a subscription in order to watch. It's drawn criticism from many, and Rep. *Pat Ryan* (D-NY) joined those displeased voices Friday in a letter to **NBC Sports** President *Rick Cordella* and NFL Commissioner *Roger Goodell*. "It's a tradition as American as apple pie," Ryan's letter reads. "For decades, NFL playoff games have been widely available on national TV networks so that Americans can conveniently watch the playoffs at no additional cost. Yet this year, you've decided to rip off fans by exclusively broadcasting tomorrow's Chiefs vs Dolphins wildcard game on Peacock ... Fans already face exorbitant prices to watch every game during the regular season; they don't deserve to be squeezed even further by greedy corporations. This bait-and-switch is particularly egregious for consumers who already pay for NBC as part of their cable package." Ryan requested the NFL and NBC Sports make the game available on broadcast TV, also calling for a permanent end to exclusive streaming deals. He added Congress granting the NFL antitrust exemption for broadcast deals was "clearly a mistake." An NFL spokesperson told **CFX** that while the league understands the first few years of moving certain games exclusively to digital platforms will likely not reach the same ratings as a regular broadcast would, it's part of the league's media strategy to make games available in as many ways possible. "As streaming video becomes commonplace, we are increasingly expanding the digital distribution

of NFL content while continuing a longstanding policy that all NFL games be shown on free, over-the-air television in the markets of the participating teams," the league said. "Bringing the excitement of a wild card game exclusively to Peacock's streaming platform is consistent with this approach." NBC Sports didn't respond for comment by our deadline. Some fans will be able to watch via broadcast TV. The game will air on **NBC's** WTVJ station across Miami-Dade and Broward Counties in Miami, and on KSHB in Kansas City, Missouri.

## EPA FOLLOWING UP ON LEAD CABLE REPORTS

The **Environmental Protection Agency** is requesting meetings with telecom companies to discuss the presence of lead-covered phone cables in their networks. That came in a follow-up [article](#) from the *WSJ* from its initial [investigation](#) in July into possible lead exposure from cables in public locations across three states. The EPA reportedly sent letters to **AT&T** and **Verizon** in December asking their executives to come to the agency's headquarters this month to discuss granular sampling data related to each company's legacy lead cables, and both plan to embrace the opportunity. The wireless carriers have said in the past that their lead cables do not pose any threat to the public, and **Evercore ISI** is cautioning Wall Street from reading too much into the article before hearing more from the companies or the EPA. "From our end, we struggle to see what is actually new in the *WSJ* article as our understanding is that: (1) the Telcos have already been meeting and collaborating with the EPA and other agencies on a regular basis since last summer; and (2) the findings cited in the article seem to relate to existing testing which were already deemed to be below the average levels requiring remediation as opposed to any new test results," it said in a note to clients. "Any incremental impacts, if any, are hard to quantify at this point. As such, headline risk could put a damper on T and VZ sentiment until there's further clarity.

## FIBER FRENZY

**GCI** is getting ready to check one of its New Year's Resolutions off its list as construction crews are nearly finished with network construction in Akutan, Alaska. Company technicians expect to finish deploying the majority of fiber in Akutan by the end of the month, and when it does reach completion, crews will begin to lay fiber directly to homes before testing and turning up 2.5 Gig internet speeds in the following months. That'll mean Akutan joins Unalaska and Sand Point as communities with upgraded internet speeds as part of the first phase of the Aleutians Fiber Project. – **Shentel's** Glo Fiber is

bringing its FTTH broadband services to Springettsbury Township, Pennsylvania, after striking an agreement with municipal officials. Engineering work has begun before the 18-24-month construction process is set to commence in 2025. Glo Fiber is already available to 30,000 residents and businesses in the state, offering symmetrical speeds of up to 5 Gbps as well as Glo TV streaming and phone services.

## PARAMOUNT+ ROLLING OUT TWO ADS FOR NFL PLAYOFFS

**Paramount+** is introducing two new ads during the **NFL** post-season. The first will come this Sunday for the Steelers-Bills game and continue the “A Mountain of Entertainment” campaign as the ad is set on a mountaintop. Bills quarterback *Josh Allen* stars in the spot along with announcers *Tracy Wolfson*, *Jim Nantz*, *Tony Romo*, and characters from Paramount properties like *Dora the Explorer*, *Decepticon Scourge* from the “Transformers” franchise and *Peppa Pig*. The second ad will feature live during the Super Bowl on Feb. 11. It’s no surprise Paramount is keeping details of that one guarded, but we do know it’ll have “a humorous mismatch of legacy characters, star athletes and iconic announcers.”

## IOWA AND NEW HAMPSHIRE KICK OFF PRIMARY SEASON

The Iowa Caucus and New Hampshire primary are set for Monday and January 23, respectively, and **C-SPAN** is already on the ground in Iowa as Republican candidates wrap up campaigning. The network will go live each night from Friday-Monday with remarks from candidates, campaign analysis, calls from viewers and reactions from social media. On Monday, live coverage will begin on C-SPAN and **C-SPAN2** at 7:30pm. The same format will be used for the New Hampshire primary starting January 16, with live coverage running from January 20-23. Additionally, the morning call-in guest program “Washington Journal” will air from Iowa and New Hampshire in the leading days before the events. – **NewsNation**’s coverage of the Iowa Caucuses will begin Monday at 6pm. *Chris Cuomo*, *Dan Abrams* and *Elizabeth Vargas* will co-host “Decision Desk HQ 2024: The Iowa Caucus” from 8-11pm. A special edition of “On Balance with Leland Vittert” will lead into that at 7pm, with an additional special episode coming Friday. – **Fox News**’ coverage of the Iowa caucuses started Thursday and runs through Monday. Special episodes of “Fox & Friends Weekend,” “Fox News Sunday,” “America’s Newsroom,” “The Story,” “Your World” and “Special Report” will air on Sunday before “The Faulkner Focus: Iowa in Focus” airs at 10pm with commentary from Gov. *Kim Reynolds* and Sen. *Joni Ernst* (R-IA). “Fox & Friends” will kick off Monday’s events as the network’s normal weekday lineup takes control. A two-hour special “Democracy 2024: Iowa Caucuses” will start at 10pm. *Trace Gallagher* will take post-caucus analysis from midnight-2am.

## NTIA DOLES OUT \$80M IN WIRELESS GRANTS

**DISH Wireless** snagged a \$50 million grant from **NTIA** to establish the Open RAN Center for Integration & Deployment, which will allow participants to test and validate their hardware and software solutions against a complete commercial-grade Open RAN network deployed by DISH. The grant is part of nearly \$80 million in the third round of grants from the Public Wireless Supply Chain Innovation Fund’s first Notice of Funding Opportunity. The round includes the first awards in the Testing & Evaluation category. The second largest grant, nearly \$22 million, went to **VIAMI Solutions** to establish a hybrid physical lab infrastructure and cloud-based testing lab-as-a-service dedicated to Open RAN interoperability, performance and security.

## RATINGS

**ESPN**’s “Sunday NFL Countdown” had its best season since 2019 after scoring 1.34 million viewers per show. That’s up 8% from the 2022 season and a 15% jump from 2021. Sunday NFL Countdown also saw improvements in certain demos including 6% in P18-49, 3% in P18-24 and 5% among females. Other ratings figures from the network’s NFL studio shows include “NFL Live” garnering 406,000 viewers this season, “Monday Night Countdown” averaging 1.4 million viewers on ESPN only (with 4.2 million additional viewers for the five shows on **ABC**) and “NFL Matchup” on Saturdays recording 320,000 viewers. – It was a year of growth for AEW wrestling on **TNT** and **TBS**. Overall AEW programming reached nearly 4 million viewers each week across the two nets, with viewership reaching 15.6 million viewers in 4Q23—a 3% YOY increase. AEW programs also ranked in the top 10 of all cable programs among adults under 50 72 times and in the top 5 50 times for that same group. – The second chapter of **Investigation Discovery**’s “The Curious case of Natalia Grace” has surpassed 10 million viewers across linear and streaming since its Jan. 1 release. It was the No. 1 series on Max in its premiere week as well.

## PROGRAMMING

**Apple TV+** and **MLS** continue to expand on their partnership. An all-access, eight-part docuseries that looks at soccer in North America over the course of the 2024 season is coming with access to players, coaches and teams as they navigate the MLS season and the pursuit of an MLS Cup. – **Reelz** is giving “On Patrol: Live” a third season, ordering 90 additional episodes to run through Jan. 2025. – It’s the game all football fans wait for: The Puppy Bowl. The event returns for its 20th anniversary on Feb. 11 at 2pm. It’ll be simulcast across **Animal Planet**, **Discovery**, **TBS**, **truTV**, **Max** and **discovery+**, featuring 131 puppies, 73 shelters and rescues across 36 states and territories.



## DOING GOOD

**NBCUniversal Telemundo Enterprises, Comcast's Project UP** and the Hispanic Heritage Foundation are teaming up to donate 2,500 free laptops to Latino youth and community organizations. It brings the total number of laptops donated by the organizations to 10,000, which will be used to help close the digital divide in Hispanic communities across the U.S. -- Applications are now [open](#) for **Charter's** annual scholarship program **Spectrum Scholars**. Deadline is March 1. The initiative for underrepresented college students with financial needs gives a \$20,000 scholarship to rising college juniors to use for their junior and senior years, also getting a 10-week paid internship at one of Charter's offices in Charlotte, St. Louis, Denver or Stamford, Connecticut. Additionally, recipients will get the chance to complete a two-year professional development program and a three-day Scholars Summit event. Spectrum Scholars has been established for four years, having awarded over \$1 million in scholarships so far. -- Applications for the **Sinclair Diversity Scholarship** program are now open for the 2024 school year. The deadline is April 30. The program aids students from diverse backgrounds in completing their education and entering the broadcast journalism, digital storytelling or marketing fields.

## PEOPLE

Former **AMC Networks** mainstay **Ed Carroll** was promoted to President of the media company **Kino Lorber**. He'll report to Chairman/CEO **Richard Lorber**. Carroll first joined Kino Lorber in Jan. 2023 after a three-decade career at AMCN, holding leadership roles such as President of **Bravo** and COO of AMCN. He's credited with overseeing the development of series like "Mad Men," "Breaking Bad," "The Walking Dead" and "Killing Eve."

## EDITOR'S NOTE

**Cablefax Daily** will not publish an issue Monday in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Your next issue will hit your inbox on Tuesday, Jan. 16.

## CABLEFAX DASHBOARD

## Social Media Hits



## Research

(Source: [Dell'Oro Group Blog](#))

- Total spending on broadband equipment in 2023 is expected to show a decline of around 10%.
- Early projections for 2024 indicate an additional 5% YOY decrease as the lagging impact of interest rate increases to curb inflation will be felt more acutely. That would put total spending at around \$16.5 billion, roughly equal to 2021 spending levels.
- Very early signals regarding 2024 show a return to growth as BEAD and other subsidization efforts trickle down to suppliers.

## Up Ahead

**JAN. 16-18:** [NATPE Global](#); Miami

**JAN. 29-FEB.1:** [Realscreen Summit](#); New Orleans

**FEB. 8:** [Regional Fiber Connect](#); Richmond, VA

**FEB. 25-27:** [NCTC Winter Educational Conference](#); Las Vegas

**MARCH 5-7:** [ACA Connects Summit](#); D.C.

## Quotable

"One of the reasons the FTC and its counterparts in other jurisdictions have been focused on AI and competition is because what we want is to unlock the potential of this technology and have it grow in the markets through good innovation and businesses coming to market with great products and not be limited by a few gatekeepers who control access to some of the core inputs, both whether it is data or compute or other elements of generative AI. That's an important one to remember because sometimes we get the view or the assumption that enforcers are hostile to new technology. If we were hostile to the technology, we would not care about gatekeeper control. We would be happy to have it limited and locked up."

– **FTC Commissioner Rebecca Slaughter speaking at CES on how the agency views AI**