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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Hands Tied: Senate Committee Stuck on Where to Go With ACP

A Senate Communications Subcommittee about the future of the **FCC's** Affordable Connectivity Program and broadband affordability overall took on a larger meaning Thursday as lawmakers from both sides of the aisle wondered how to get a bipartisan agreement on the issue, one with broad support, to the finish line.

Subcommittee Chair *Ben Ray Lujan* (D-NM) knows that the clock is ticking louder than ever when it comes to the ACP's looming shutdown, but he still believes that the bipartisan members of a universal service fund working group, along with others, can pave a path forward for the subsidy program.

"I hope that we can find a way to work together as a bipartisan working group with USF and come up with really strong ideas—Democrat ideas, Republican ideas, thoughts that have come out of studies from the right and the left and from the center," Lujan said. "It's a good methodology that I'm hoping that going forward, programs will work better, that they'll touch the people that they are intended to reach out to... and that where we have a hole and a flaw in American policy, that we can do something about that as well."

There was plenty of talk of the benefits of ACP, and **Community Learning Network** Director *Jennifer Case Nevarez* said the program allows ISPs serving New Mexico to win subscribers in rural and Tribal communities and have a more reliable customer pool. That has only helped their bottom lines and kept

them further away from bankruptcy, she said. **Pew Charitable Trusts'** Broadband Access Initiative Project Director *Kathryn de Wit* said any lapse in the program will have an adverse effect on Americans over 50 and veterans, but there has not been enough data gathered to understand the damage that would come with a shutdown or even ACP reform.

"We need better data and more transparency on enrollment and about the trends in population in order to fully understand how changes to the program would have a negative effect on the vulnerable households that it is attempting to serve," she said.

Economic Policy Innovation Center President/CEO *Paul Winfree* said one of his largest issues with ACP is that it's a one-size-fits-all policy for every household. He'd like to see regional differences taken into account along with the varying circumstances of rural and urban households. "It's a \$30 monthly subsidy regardless of where that person sits, and one of the things that we've seen is that ACP has predominantly covered folks living in urban areas relative to rural areas. So ACP is not a solution for rural areas... which begs the question—but why don't we use this as an opportunity to reform ACP?" Winfree said.

He has a number of ideas for reforms, including tightening the enrollment requirements for the program to ensure ACP funds are only going to low-income populations. "It's probably going to folks who are making much more than two times the federal poverty line," he said. "Another option that the FCC [Inspector General] has explored is requiring social security numbers for the receipt of ACP benefits to make sure that, again, folks who

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are entitled to the program are actually receiving the benefit.”

Senator **Ed Markey** (D-MA) and a number of his colleagues sent a letter to **NCTA** and **CTIA** asking the associations to encourage their member companies to step in and continue offering the full \$30 subsidy for May even though the FCC will only be able to offset \$14 of each of those subsidies. **New Street Research** Policy Advisor **Blair Levin** said he hopes they follow Markey's advice and that such an act would serve as a bridge for those subscribers to figure out what they want to do next, but he also emphasized that it would not in any way replace the need for a long-term solution.

“I was very supportive of initiatives like **Comcast** Internet Essentials and other kinds of things, very helpful. But it was not a solution to get everybody on, which is what we really need,” Levin said.

The hearing would not have been complete without a mention of **NTIA**'s BEAD given the program's requirement that all subgrantees participate in the ACP. Sen. **John Thune** (R-SD) said he spoke to a number of co-ops and independent providers that serve many of the rural areas of his state this week, and not a single one said they could put the BEAD dollars to work.

“The reason is because of all the conditions and rules and regulations that the administration attaches to the program, many of which are completely unrealistic for the kind of service that these folks provide in rural areas of the country,” Thune said. “Sometimes, getting more government involved in some of these issues ends up not being a good solution. It ends up making matters worse.”

SONY, APOLLO GETTING MORE SERIOUS ABOUT PARAMOUNT BUY

Paramount and **Skydance**'s exclusive 30-day period is set to come to a close tomorrow, and **Sony Pictures Entertainment** and **Apollo Global Management** have reportedly teamed up and asked Paramount's special committee to talk about a cash offer totaling \$26 billion. Paramount stock had skyrocketed by more than 13 points on the back of the reports by market close. While Sony, Apollo and Paramount have yet to discuss the details of this particular deal, it is believed that Sony and Apollo seek to purchase the entire company and take it private.

COALITION ASKS FOR HEARING ON SPORTS STREAMING JV

A coalition including **Fubo**, **DISH**, **DirecTV** and **Newsmax** is asking Congress to hold a hearing on the future of competition in pay TV and sports rights. In a letter sent to leadership of House and Senate Commerce as well as that of House and Senate Judiciary,

the coalition posits that recent developments in the linear marketplace, including the announcement of a sports streaming JV from **Disney**, **Warner Bros. Discovery** and **Fox**, raise serious concerns that demand immediate attention from those committees. It also estimated the JV will control 80% of all national live sports as well as approximately 55% of all live sports. “However one measures it, the JV will eventually dominate the distribution market for live sports and will drive out competition, leaving consumers captive to the JV for live sports—unless Congress and regulators intervene,” the letter said. “The JV partners demand that their competitors offer ‘big fat bundles’ of programming (as described by Disney's CEO) that include many unwanted but expensive channels, while their own JV service offers a much skinnier package consisting only of ‘must have’ sports channels.” Others signing onto the letter were the **American Economic Liberties Project**, **Sports Fan Coalition**, **Open Markets Institute** and the **Electronic Frontier Foundation**.

ALTICE'S EXPANSION INTO COMCAST FOOTPRINT

Altice USA has always been a little bit different since its entry into the cable business in the U.S. by purchasing **Suddenlink** in 2015 and **Cablevision** in 2016. It's keeping up that reputation under CEO **Dennis Mathew**, announcing last month that it would build out 100% fiber to Montclair and West Orange, NJ, which is served by **Comcast**. The month before, Comcast announced plans to move into Altice's territory of Edison, NJ. There's been a bit of an unwritten rule that incumbent cable operators don't compete against each other, but it's starting to fade as competition and fiber builds increase. “The top 10% of our residential customer base uses more than two terabytes of data per month. This level of growing consumption paired with our unmatched speed and reliability give us confidence in our ability to compete long term against competitors like fixed wireless and we are expanding our network to new markets with strategic edge outs, allowing us to leverage our nearby plants and infrastructure to increase overall returns,” Mathew said during Thursday's 1Q24 earnings call, noting how the company is extending fiber to Montclair and West Orange using existing nodes. Altice has already begun selling mobile into those communities and plans to light up its fiber network later this year. “We're transforming the way we've done it in the past and we're looking at all of these opportunities with a new lens and a new financial discipline,” he said. Not everyone's convinced. “We think it is nuts,” **New Street Research** analysts wrote in a note clients. “We wouldn't compete against Comcast if we could avoid it. **Verizon** is the ILEC and they have FiOS in those markets. With Altice, this

will be a three-player fixed broadband market. Operators won't earn their cost of capital on fiber deployment in markets with three 1Gbps+ providers. Even if the deployment cost is very low because they are extending off existing nodes, and the return is marginally positive, there must be better markets to deploy fiber." The firm adds that the market is small enough that Comcast probably won't respond, but warned that Altice "is risking igniting a contest they can't possibly win."

ALTICE 1Q24 HIGHLIGHTS

Mobile flexed its muscle at **Altice USA** in 1Q24 as broadband shed 30,000 subs (compared to 19,000 a year ago) and video losses accelerated from 62,000 in 4Q23 to 78,000 in 1Q24. Optimum Mobile added 29,000 line net additions, up from 8,000 a year ago. The segment's customer service ARPU grew by \$4.30 YOY with mobile penetration of the broadband base growing from 3.5% in 1Q23 to 5.3%. The operator plans to add tablets, device protections, smartwatches and more to the Optimum Mobile portfolio this year. It launched mobile for B2B during the quarter. On the fiber front, Altice USA had its best quarter for fiber net addition, posting 53,000 up from 38,000 a year ago. "We are improving our fiber migration and installation processes and our customers are already seeing improvements in the fiber experience," CEO Dennis Mathew said. Altice ended the quarter with 130,000 ACP customers, less than 3% of its customer base. Management said that as the subsidy program winds down it has assigned specialized retention agents to these customers that are equipped with AI-powered tools to provide customized offers that include mobile, speed right sizing and its 100 Mbps \$25/month product of qualified customers. Mathew said video is still an important product in the portfolio, with the company set to launch two new video tiers later this year to offer more entertainment optionality for customers. "We have more work to do in the second quarter to really finalize the content and pricing and go-to-market strategy, but I'm confident that we'll just provide more optionality for customers in the second half of the year," he said. At the same time, the company is using data to inform carriage discussions as it looks to drive programming costs down. The Android-based Optimum Stream box has launched across Optimum East and is now launching across Optimum West, with a self-install option being pushed. The box combines linear as well as direct-to-consumer options. For the quarter, Altice's overall revenue fell 1.9% to \$2.3 billion, while it recorded a net loss of \$21.2 million compared to a loss of \$25.9 million a year ago.

RIP & REPLACE STILL NEEDS MONEY

FCC Chairwoman *Jessica Rosenworcel* reminded Congress of the more than \$3 billion funding shortfall for the agency's "rip & replace" program to aid in replacing communications equipment and services produced or provided by **Huawei Technologies** or **ZTE Corporation**. Because of the shortfall, the Commission must first allocate funding to applicants

What We're Listening to

Eight-episode podcast "[Who Killed the Video Star: The Story of MTV](#)"

will appeal to two types of people: Gen Xers who grew up with the network and media/cable execs who remember (or helped with) its launch. The title is a nod to The Buggles' "Video Killed the Radio Star," the first music video to play on the channel just after midnight on Aug. 1, 1981.



The last episode hasn't dropped yet, but CFX readers won't need it to understand MTV's journey from a trendsetter to the equivalent of the ubiquitous near-abandoned shopping malls found all across America. Similar to how it's fun to scroll through social media videos of dead malls and reminisce about trips to Sam Goody and Contempo Casual topped off with a slice from Sbarro, this podcast hosted by former MTV VJ Dave Holmes is a fairly comprehensive history of MTV. It takes listeners from the earliest days of "I Want My MTV" to its reluctance to play Black artists (and the irony given the popularity of Michael Jackson's videos and "Yo! MTV Raps" once it did) to its first foray into original programming ("Remote Control" with quizmaster Ken Ober coming at you from the basement of "72 Whooping Cough Lane"). And yes, there's an entire episode devoted to those seven strangers picked to live in a loft and have their lives taped.

While the podcast has a wide assortment of MTV talent interviews, including VJs Alan Hunter and Downtown Julie Brown along with various "Real World" cast members, there aren't many executive voices. Most of the executive viewpoint is through Doug Herzog, former president of Viacom Music and Entertainment Group, with some assists by ex-programming chief Brian Graden, production execs Salli Frattini and Tim Healy and MTV News SVP Ocean McAdams.

Spoiler alert... In episode 6, Graden foreshadows how MTV became a cable network that consists mainly of episodes of "Ridiculousness." "A lot of technology was premiering, but none had upended television. And then television, cable in particular, continued to be a growth business up until 2010 or 2011. So that initially you're quite nervous, but then a few years pass and nothing much seems to happen. And so you lull yourself into thinking, 'Oh, this must be like movies and TV. They can both exist,'" he said "But ultimately, there were profound consequences. The one that was most apparent for MTV was that on YouTube, I could watch just the videos I wanted to watch, and I didn't have to wait for the DJ to tell me what was next.. And there was no way we could ever win in the music video business again on air." - Amy Maclean

with two million or fewer customers, who will receive prorated support of 39.5% of reasonable cost. As of April 22, the FCC has received 20,482 Reimbursement Claims across 122 of the 126 applications approved for a funding under Priority 1. Those funding recipients have deadlines ranging from May 29, 2024 to Feb. 4, 2025 to remove, replace and dispose of equipment. "Most recently, 64% of the status updates filed in April 2024 indicated that the lack of full funding continues to be an obstacle to completing the permanent removal, replacement and disposal of the covered communications equipment and services in recipients' networks. In fact, nearly 40% of the participants reported that they cannot complete the work required under the Reimbursement Program without additional government funding," Rosenworcel wrote.

HALLMARK ADDS CHANNEL BUILT FOR SPANISH AUDIENCES

Hallmark Media is expanding the way it serves Spanish-language audiences with a new FAST channel. **Hallmark en Español** features more than 130 Hallmark original movies as well as the first six seasons of "When Calls the Heart," all dubbed in Spanish. The channel will be available on **HITN** and on streaming platforms including **Pluto TV**, **Tubi**, **Xumo Play** and **Canela.TV**.

VAB PANEL DISCUSSES NEW ADVERTISING OPPORTUNITIES

Fragmentation is an opportunity, not a problem. That was the optimistic theme displayed during **VAB's** recent "The State of Streaming: What's New, Now and Next" panel part of its spotlight series. It specifically pertained to advertisers and how shifting viewership habits open the door for more optionality. *Rose Anna McGovern*, Head of Programmatic and Digital Ad Sales at **DirectTV Advertising**, used an internal term at DirecTV called content rage, which describes a viewer becoming frustrated by many options that make it difficult to settle on one thing to watch. While each MVPD and streamer has search options to try and alleviate those pains, she noted that it's important to offer advertisers the same streamlined standardization around user IDs. "Pulling that inventory into a programmatic platform with an ID that's interoperable, that you can use for targeting and managing frequency across a bunch of different streaming services, and then on top of that, having the standardization, the content signals all there, I think that's how you have the flip side of content rage," McGovern said. Fragmentation may remain as the streaming landscape changes, but another trend emerging now that **LiveRamp** Head of Industry Strategy, Media and Entertainment *Tara Franceschini* sees continuing is centered on measurement. "The idea of we've been using Nielsen for however many years, now the ecosystem is broadening to have other players in there. So it's more of a currency conversation, if you will, and that's coming fast and furious ... to have that really foundational piece of our business shift as strongly as it's shifting, I think is quite fascinating," Franceschini said.

JUST VOTE!

Fuse Media is encouraging folks to get out and vote this election season. The company partnered with the youth voting organization NextGen America to amplify its "Just F— Vote" campaign. You can assume the censored word, but the campaign seeks to use humor in order to target young adults between 18-30 years old. Fuse originally launched the non-partisan initiative in January, and its partnership with NextGen America will see a series of Fuse-produced PSAs encouraging viewers to visit NextGen America's website. The PSAs will air across Fuse, FM, **Fuse+**, Fuse's **YouTube** channel as well as its social media profiles. Fuse will also create issue-related programming stunts and feature factoids in the bottom thirds in addition to man-on-the-street interviews with young voters across the U.S.

ON THE CIRCUIT

Happy trails to *Joe Leonard* who is set to retire after 40 years in the industry and more than a decade at **Charter**. He will remain in his role as SVP, Marketing & Creative Strategy at Charter through June 30 with a search for his successor gearing up. Leonard joined the operator from **Cablevision** in 2013 and quickly made a mark by leading the launch of the Spectrum brand in 2014 and expanding it when Charter acquired **Time Warner Cable** and **Bright House Networks** in 2016. He also helped launch Spectrum Mobile, Spectrum One and Spectrum One Stream. "Joe has been instrumental in shaping and evolving our brand identity, enhancing our reputation and driving revenue growth... Under Joe's leadership, we've been introduced to the Spectrum brand through memorable characters including the lovable Monsters, Mobile spokesperson John Hoogenakker and social media content creator Daniel LaBelle," wrote EVP, CMO *Sharon Peters* in an internal memo.

PEOPLE

Jessica Casano-Antonellis was tapped to head communications for the **Warner Bros. Discovery**, **Fox Corp.** and **ESPN** planned sports streaming jv. She most recently was SVP, Communications at **Sirius XM** and previously served as VP, Communications for **Disney+** and **Hulu**. Casano-Antonellis will oversee all communications aspects for the upcoming platform, reporting to CEO Pete Distad. – **A+E Networks** elevated *David Banks* to CFO. He formerly held the role of EVP, Chief Strategy & Corporate Development Officer. *Art Vomvas*, who has served as interim CFO at the company for the past year, will retire after a nearly three-decade tenure. Bank joined A+E in 2019 after previously serving as EVP, Head of IR for **CBS Corp.** – *David Emig* is joining **Ritter Communications** as its VP, Enterprise Sales. He'll oversee planning, directing and implementing all facets of the company's strategic sales for new and existing business customers. Emig arrives after a 14-year stay at Windstream and has also made stops at **AT&T** and **Deltacom**.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

'Dance Moms' Stars All On Top of the Pyramid

The stars of **Lifetime's** "Dance Moms" are all grown up, and they're finally able to speak on not only what they experienced under the tutelage of *Abby Lee Miller* and the bright spotlight that came with the reality show. "Dance Moms: The Reunion" (aired 8pm ET on Wednesday) was a chance for the young women who grew up on the show to finally speak up for their younger selves (with some commentary from their mothers, of course). For *Chloe Lukasiak*, that meant acknowledging how Miller's words devastated her and led to self-esteem issues and destructive behaviors until a year before filming the reunion. *Brooke and Paige Hyland* finally opened up to each other about the impact a physical fight between mother *Kelly Hyland* and Miller had on them, and Kelly revealed the guilt she has held for a decade over ruining her daughters' dance dreams. It wasn't all bashing the infamous dance teacher, with uber-popular *Jojo Siwa* noting that she now believes that every time she was yelled at by her instructor, Miller was right. "One thing that I've learned really working insane in Hollywood is that that's normal. It's scary that that's normal, but it taught me how to survive," she said. There were notable faces missing, *Maddie and Mackenzie Ziegler* as well as *Nia Sioux*. And of course, Miller was not on the soundstage. It felt in many ways like a therapy session, not just for the young women who grew up in that environment and their moms, but for viewers who have watched them for over a decade and rooted for them every step of the way. Their stories all have led to fairly happy endings, but I couldn't stop thinking about **Investigation Discovery's** "Quiet on Set" while I watched. That special changed the lives of the child comedians, for better and worse, and I couldn't stop asking myself whether any of it is worth it. With the kids impacted now finally able to speak out against those that caused them harm, real movement can be made in creating safe environments for children in entertainment. – *Sara Winegardner*

REVIEWS

"The Veil," streaming on **Hulu** (new episodes on Tuesdays). A series can succeed or fail based on the talent chosen as the lead. Often networks insist on a star. Sometimes they are convinced that an unknown is worthy. When that gamble works, the actor becomes so entrenched in the part it's difficult to envision anyone else in the role. **HBO** did this with a veteran character actor named *James Gandolfini*, who's now inextricably linked to the character of Tony Soprano. Similarly, **AMC** took a shot on a largely unknown Missourian to lead its "Mad Men" cast. *Jon Hamm's* career has not been the same since. A Mad Men actor who's arguably had the busiest and most successful career since that series ended, in 2015, *Elisabeth Moss*, has another laurel for her resume with **FX's** "The Veil" on Hulu. These days Moss qualifies as a series' star. Indeed, while the limited series, a thriller centered on global spy agencies, is good, Moss is stellar. Moss plays a chameleon with a good British accent who earns the trust (sort of) of her target, *Adilah (Yumna Marwan)*, also a woman of mystery. While Moss, as agent Imogen Salter, must bring Adilah to France, she takes the sort of circuitous route James Bond would appreciate. Perhaps Bond might appreciate 2 women carrying a TV series. – *Seth Arenstein*

BASIC CABLE

P2+ PRIME RANKINGS*

(04/22/24-04/28/24)

MON-SUN	MC US AA%	MC US AA (000)
TNT	0.786	2479
ESPN	0.735	2316
FNC	0.602	1897
MSNBC	0.441	1391
CNN	0.240	756
HALL	0.237	746
HGTV	0.233	735
HIST	0.199	627
TBSC	0.186	587
INSP	0.165	521
USA	0.157	496
FOOD	0.156	490
TLC	0.147	464
ID	0.141	443
DISC	0.131	413
TVLAND	0.128	402
HALLMYS	0.115	364
GSN	0.113	357
NFL	0.108	341
REELZ	0.101	319
OXY	0.096	303
WETV	0.094	297
FX	0.091	286
TRUTV	0.088	279
A&E	0.087	275
BRAVO	0.085	267
AMC	0.079	249
LIFE	0.078	246
NWSMX	0.077	242
NAN	0.074	234
NATGEO	0.074	234
ADSM	0.070	219
FETV	0.067	212
PRMNT	0.064	201
COM	0.062	196

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

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