

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Community Minded: Sohn's Persistent Push for Public Broadband Networks

It has been a year since former FCC Commissioner nominee *Gigi Sohn* took on the role of first executive director for the **American Association of Public Broadband**, an upstart coalition of municipal broadband providers. She's committed to spreading the word to communities about how they can benefit from network ownership while [fighting](#) against critics of such arrangements. **Cablefax** chatted with her about what she's learned so far and the impact the loss of the Affordable Connectivity Program could have on efforts to deliver broadband to every American. Sohn will share more of her insights at [Cablefax's American Broadband Congress](#) on June 13 in DC.

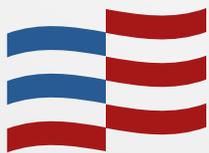
Shortly after joining AAPB, you set a goal of doubling the number of community-owned broadband networks over a five-year period. How is that going?

Let me clarify one thing: after nearly a year on the job, it became obvious to me that doubling the number of community-owned broadband networks in five years was not going to be feasible. So, I've revised our goal to double the number of households served by community-owned broadband in five years. That is still a lofty goal, but one that is certainly attainable. This spring, AAPB published a handbook called: ["Own Your Internet: How to Build a Public Broadband Network."](#) This plain-language primer outlines the decisions a community must make, and the steps it must take, to build a public broadband network. The

handbook is a key part of our strategy to double the number of public networks in the next five years and will encourage more communities to consider building their own networks.

With nearly 650 community-owned broadband networks and co-ops across the United States, we are witnessing a pivotal moment for public broadband. According to the Institute for Local Self Reliance, dozens more community networks are in the pipeline nationwide. State barriers to public broadband are starting to fall and where they still exist, enterprising communities are working around them. There are still 16 states that restrict community broadband, but with all the success stories from across the country, we think that at least some of those state legislatures will change their tune.

Naturally, since public broadband networks are doing so well, incumbent telco and cable companies are doing whatever they can to stop their growth, and in some cases, reverse it. I started as Executive Director of AAPB last June, and in the 11 months since I started, I've helped efforts to thwart half a dozen attacks on community broadband. Efforts to slow or stop public broadband bills can be very costly, both in time and money. And worst of all, the inevitable attacks serve to discourage other communities from choosing public broadband, even if it would be the far better choice for their residents. Without a doubt, there is strength in numbers. Despite their enormous resources, the greater the number of successful public broadband networks, the harder it will be for big incumbents to beat them back. I recently gave a [speech](#) on the state of public broadband that



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I encourage those interested in the topic to read. It goes into much more detail about what I've talked about here.

If ACP ends, how do you see it impacting efforts to close the digital divide and do you see anything taking its place?

Despite its popularity, the ACP will completely run out of money by the end of May unless Congress appropriates billions in additional funds. There is a bipartisan push to extend the program, but we're nearly out of time. This will have devastating consequences on our collective efforts to close the digital divide. The chaos extends well beyond disconnecting tens of millions of Americans from the network that is vital to full participation in modern society. Among other things, it will cause the loss of jobs for those funded by FCC grants to enroll ACP recipients; it will make it harder for smaller ISPs that have relied on the ACP to upgrade their services; and it will undermine the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program by making it more expensive for ISPs to build in rural America.

It's clear that the Congressional appropriations process is ill-suited to funding critical priorities like universal broadband access. I recently gave a [speech](#) at the Broadband Communities Summit, where I discussed the future of affordable broadband and the challenges ahead. Finding a permanent solution will take the kind of leadership and political will that has so far been lacking at the federal level. My money, and that of tens of millions of households, will be on the states and local communities. While I don't expect folks to give up on the feds, I urge everyone to spend more resources supporting state and local efforts to close the digital divide.

What do you think is the biggest myth around community-owned broadband networks, and how do you debunk it?

The myth that has been repeated over and over again by incumbents and their surrogates for the past 20-plus years is that public broadband networks are all failures. This drives me crazy. Almost every example opponents of public broadband cite is about two decades old and taken from a University of Pennsylvania Law School study funded by the cable industry. Were there public broadband failures then? Yes, when demand for broadband was low, and equipment prices were high. Today, however, with the demand for broadband skyrocketing and equipment and other costs much lower, public broadband failures are few and far between. And, of course, private networks fail too. Does anybody remember Adelphia? But the best defense against the "failure" argument are the numerous success stories.

Here again, I'll tout our newly launched public broadband handbook. There are half a dozen examples of successful public networks. And they are not one size fits all. Some are utilities, some are open access networks, where multiple private ISPs can provide last mile service, and some are public-private partnerships where

a community owns the infrastructure, but a private ISP provides the services. Given the opportunities for incumbent ISPs to provide service to community-owned networks, I really wish they would stop trying to fight the model and join us. Because public broadband networks are inevitable, and the model will continue to grow.

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NAME, LOGO UNVEILED FOR SPORTS STREAMING JV

Cablefax [asked](#), and the sports streaming jv answered. The impending **Disney, Fox and Warner Bros. Discovery** product announced its name and logo at long last Thursday, dubbing it **Venu Sports**. It's donning an orange, navy blue and white color scheme. The streamer also unveiled its [website](#), which once again confirms a general fall release date—but with a caveat at the bottom of the page. "Launch is conditional on receiving regulatory approval and is expected for Fall 2024. This site is owned and operated by a subsidiary of FOX Corporation," the banner reads. It's particularly interesting after Disney [included a disclaimer](#) in its 2Q24 earnings presentation last week stating a final agreement for the service hasn't been signed yet. Nonetheless, Venu Sports CEO *Pete Distad* is still going full speed to beat that fall target. Now the question is when the exact release date will be determined. "We are excited to officially introduce Venu Sports, a brand that we feel captures the spirit of an all-new streaming home where sports fans outside of the traditional pay TV ecosystem can experience an incredible collection of live sports, all in one place," Distad said. "As preparations for the platform continue to accelerate, we are singularly focused on delivering a best-in-class product for our target audience, built from the ground up using the latest technologies to engage and entertain discerning sports fans wanting one-stop access to live games."

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ROSENWORCEL ADAMANT THAT TITLE II IS THE RIGHT DECISION

FCC Chair *Jessica Rosenworcel* is standing by her decision to lead a vote for the reclassification of broadband as a Title II service. During a **House Appropriations** hearing Thursday, she fought back against lines of questioning over the need for the Title II regulatory framework and if the order would fall under the major questions doctrine. "I think it is apparent that the nation's communications expert authority should have oversight over broadband and what the FCC did with that rule was return oversight over broadband," Rosenworcel said. "It's somewhere between silly and ridiculous that the nation's communications authority should only oversee long distance voice service... This is a policy that 80% of the public supports. I don't think it's out of step with what the public wants, with the history of communications policy or with the law."

Cablefax Daily (ISSN 1069-6644) is published daily by Access Intelligence, LLC | www.cablefax.com | 301.354.2101 | Editorial Director: Amy Maclean, 301.354.1760, amaclean@accessintel.com | VP/Group Publisher, Cablefax and Cynopsis: Robbie Caploe, 917.974.0640, rcaploe@accessintel.com | Managing Editor: Sara Winegardner, 301.354.1701, swinegardner@accessintel.com | Associate Editor: Noah Ziegler, 301.354.1704, nziegler@accessintel.com | Director of Business Development, Cablefax: Ellen Kamhi, 917.626.5574, ekamhi@accessintel.com | Production Manager: Joann Fato, jfato@accessintel.com | Kerry Smith, Divisional President, Marketing & Media Group, ksmith@accessintel.com | Group Subs/Subscription Questions, Client Services: 301.354.2101, clientservices@accessintel.com | Annual subscription price: \$1,999.00/year | Access Intelligence, LLC, 9211 Corporate Blvd., 4th Floor, Rockville, MD 20850



A Cablefax feature highlighting marketing and media efforts spotted in the real world.

Upfronts are a time for business-heavy conversations, but there were plenty of jokes and jabs at events. Maybe it was all in the spirit of Netflix’s recent “The Roast of Tom Brady,” but companies rolled out comedians who spared nobody—even the companies they were representing. Here are some of their best lines.

Jimmy Kimmel at Disney:

“We are bundling, and while from the outside this may look like an act of desperation, from the inside, it also looks like that ... You’ve seen our churn rates. This is not just churn. It’s Chernobyl.”

“Now, finally, our users can turn on their TV and get all the channels in one package for one price all supported by ads. We call it ‘basic cable’ and it’s gonna blow your mind.”



“I have to say, I haven’t seen this much corporate camaraderie in this business since last summer—when they all worked together to starve the writers.”

Seth Meyers at NBCUniversal:

“What a joy to be back in Radio City Music Hall. I asked an NBC executive, ‘Why do you hold upfronts here every year?’ They said, ‘I like looking at the marquee and thinking sure, it’s a tricky time for TV, but it could be worse. We could be radio.’”

“NBC is launching a new adventure competition series called ‘Destination X.’ Destination X, or as it was originally titled ‘The Linda Yaccarino Story.’”

“With the name like upfront, you think we can be honest and upfront about everything, but that tends not to be the case. For example, I’m gonna let you guys in on something: not every branding opportunity is unique.”



Conan O'Brien at Warner Bros. Discovery:

“We had to be here. You chose to be here. That’s on you. None of the statistics given today are real. Have a good time!”

The hearing was largely focused on the FCC’s requested budget for FY25, which saw the agency request more than \$448 million. That represents a 14.8% increase from the FY24 Annualized Continuing Appropriations Act level of approximately \$390 million, which shocked some members of the committee. Rosenworcel said one reason for the ask is a need for more staff at the agency, which is operating with the lowest level of employees it has had in 20 years. The staffing increase would equate to approximately 75 new employees to work on initiatives related to satellite technologies, 6G, identifying greenfield spectrum, robocall enforcement and cybersecurity in IoT. “All we’ve done now that we’ve exhausted those funds is annualize them in the baseline, and the reason you should want to continue to support them is that Congress just spent tens of billions of dollars on broadband deployment and the bipartisan infrastructure law and other COVID-era legislation. The only way you hold the folks who took that money accountable for where they spent it is you put it on this map... and we’d make a mistake if we don’t continue it,” Rosenworcel said. Commissioner *Brendan Carr* was also on hand, and he disagreed with the request for a 5.1% increase in the agency’s spectrum auctions program. He doesn’t see a need for the increase at a time when the FCC does not have spectrum auction authority and the spectrum pipeline has largely dried up. He also took issue with a stated FCC goal of using funds to support DEI and remove barriers that hurt underserved individuals that did not come with specific uses of funds or a specified amount of dollars that would be devoted to the cause.

DISH, HUGHES TEAM UP FOR INTERNET AND VIDEO BUNDLE

Echostar is bringing together **DISH** and **Hughes** to offer a video and internet bundle, specifically positioning the offering to customers in rural America. The offering will combine DISH’s Hopper system with Hughesnet powered by the Jupiter 3 satellite. Broadband download speeds of up to 100 Mbps are available from the satellite service. New customers who take advantage of the bundle will receive a \$5/month discount off each service. DISH packages start at \$84.99/month while Hughesnet plans begin at \$59.99/month.

CLARK’S RECORD DEBUT

Caitlin Clark’s WNBA debut and the Indiana Fever’s season opener against the Connecticut Sun garnered 2.1 million viewers across **ESPN2**, **ESPN+** and **Disney+**, making it the most-watched WNBA game—playoffs or regular season—ever on **ESPN** platforms. The broadcast peaked at 2.3 million viewers in the 7:45pm-7:59 window. “WNBA Countdown,” which led into the game, averaged 680,000 viewers across the same platforms. That’s a 126% improvement compared to last year’s average across **ABC** and **ESPN**. Additionally, the following Phoenix Mercury vs Las Vegas Aces game had 464,000 viewers, good for a 5% improvement YOY. The two games combined to average 1.28 million viewers—up 192% compared to last year’s regular-season average on ESPN platforms.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

Peacock Drops a Bronx Bombshell

The New York Yankees are the most storied franchise in all of baseball. You could talk about its league-high 27 World Series titles, the many Hall of Famers that have worn the pinstripes or how much of a staple the franchise is in baseball and beyond. But with that rich tradition also comes periods of controversy. “Bronx Zoo ’90: Crime, Chaos and Baseball,” which premiered on **Peacock** today, looks at one of the not-so-glamorous years for the Yankees. The city of New York in 1990 was enduring tough times with record-high crime and a drug epidemic. The Yankees sought to be a beacon of hope, but it didn’t exactly go that way. The team went 67-95, which remains one of the franchise’s worst records ever. But what makes the docuseries unique is the balance of highlighting the issues on the field as well as the off-the-field problems that plagued the team. For example, the film features *Chastity Easterly*, who at the time was 15 years old and involved with then-player *Mel Hall*, who at one point moved in with Easterly’s family. Hall is now serving a prison sentence for aggravated sexual assault of a child. “You have to be respectful to the person, especially Chaz—I felt this responsibility to Chaz Easterly, who’d come out of this strong,” director *DJ Caruso* told **CFX**. Though the storylines make for an intriguing documentary, the aforementioned on-the-field portion of the doc was a little challenging for the production team. “Major League Baseball basically said ‘We don’t want you to tell this story,’ and that right away means that we have to go find footage from collectors and find things and interviews,” Caruso said. “We had to really, really comb through because we didn’t have the key to the vault of Major League Baseball and their footage.” It was a low period for the Yankees, but they’d eventually find a way after claiming the 1996 World Series. “I want people to go, ‘You know what? This is crazy. There’s insane personalities, there’s insane egos, but at the end of the day, no matter how bad your life gets, you can actually come out on top,’” Caruso said. – *Noah Ziegler*

REVIEWS

“The Girls on the Bus,” streaming on **Max**. There are several industries where excellent visual depictions of them suffer. For instance, there are few strong TV series or films about musicians or writers. The professions don’t lend themselves to visual storytelling. It’s relatively dull watching a journalist type a story or a musician practicing. Perhaps that’s why “The Girls on the Bus,” which ostensibly is about political journalism, spends much time away from nuts and bolts, though series co-creator *Amy Chozick* is a veteran journalist whose 2018 book, “Chasing Hillary,” chronicles her presidential campaign coverage experience. Instead, Chozick and co-creator *Julie Plec* spend a lot of energy on the personal lives of the series’ four female protagonists, all journalists covering a campaign. And, yes, the series title is intentional, a tip of the cap to *Timothy Crouse*’s campaign journal, “The Boys on the Bus.” Even one of the bus’s boys, the late *Hunter S. Thompson*, appears (you’ll see). Fortunately, the stories of the four journalists are engaging mostly, though there’s quite a bit of soap, too. Another plus, the actors playing these characters are strong, particularly *Melissa Benoist*, who plays a print journalist whose objectivity is questioned after it’s exposed virally, and the always strong *Carla Gugino* as a veteran investigative journalist. The Girls is entertaining and escapist, not deep political journalism. – *Seth Arenstein*

BASIC CABLE		
P2+ PRIME RANKINGS*		
(05/06/24-05/12/24)		
MON-SUN	MC	MC
	US	US AA
	AA%	(000)
TNT	0.850	2678
ESPN	0.683	2154
FNC	0.624	1967
MSNBC	0.378	1193
HALL	0.222	699
HGTV	0.207	653
INSP	0.178	562
HIST	0.166	522
USA	0.163	513
CNN	0.160	505
TBSC	0.155	488
FOOD	0.138	434
TVLAND	0.127	401
DISC	0.125	394
TLC	0.118	374
ID	0.117	370
TRUTV	0.111	351
GSN	0.107	337
BRAVO	0.104	326
FX	0.096	304
HALLMYS	0.095	301
AMC	0.090	284
REELZ	0.088	277
A&E	0.083	263
OXY	0.079	250
WETV	0.078	244
SYFY	0.075	237
NWSMX	0.073	229
NATGEO	0.070	220
COM	0.070	219
NAN	0.064	203
ADSM	0.063	200
FETV	0.057	181
TRAVEL	0.057	179
BET	0.055	174

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



JUST RELEASED: The Cablefax 100

It's time to celebrate the trailblazers who have propelled the media, cable, and broadband industry to unprecedented heights. We're thrilled to unveil the distinguished individuals who have earned a coveted spot in the 2024 Cablefax 100.

[VIEW HONOREES](#)