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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Last Bang: FCC Chair Calls Media Petition Actions a First Amendment Stand

The end of FCC Chair *Jessica Rosenworcel*'s term is now far from peaceful. In a move that's riled up both conservatives and liberals, the agency's Media Bureau denied two complaints and two petitions related to broadcast licensees over claims of news distortion in what it called a measure to protect free speech. The actions come following several criticisms made against media outlets from President-elect *Donald Trump*, most recently a social media post in which he [said Comcast](#) "should pay a BIG price."

"Today, I have directed the FCC to take a stand on behalf of the First Amendment. We draw a bright line at a moment when clarity about government interference with the free press is needed more than ever. The action we take makes clear two things. First, the FCC should not be the President's speech police. Second, the FCC should not be journalism's censor-in-chief," Rosenworcel said.

The actions addressed claims of news distortion involving **CBS News**' editing of a "60 Minutes" interview featuring Vice President *Kamala Harris*, accusations that **ABC News** favored Harris during a presidential debate, claims **NBC's** "SNL" violated the equal time rule with Harris' appearance on the show before the election and a long-simmering petition from **The Media and Democracy Project** [MAD] which sought a hearing on the broadcast license renewal of **Fox Corp.**'s Philadelphia station WTXF over Fox's 2020 election coverage.

Gigi Sohn took to LinkedIn on Thursday to criticize Rosenworcel for lumping together the petitions while also recognizing that the facts of the two issues were wholly different. "I've largely held my nose and kept my mouth shut as I saw the Federal Communications Commission become nearly irrelevant in the effort to achieve universal, affordable and robust connectivity, in part because of the courts and in part, frankly, because of the lack of bold leadership and vision. I didn't want it to seem like sour grapes because I didn't get confirmed," wrote Sohn, whose FCC nomination went unapproved for two years before she withdrew and *Anna Gomez* took the seat. "So, rather than, as [CNN's] *Brian Stelter* says here, that this was 'bold action,' I say it was instead a failure of leadership. What a sad way to end one's long tenure at the FCC."

MAD and former Fox/Disney lobbyist *Preston Padden* came together to condemn the decision, saying they look forward to presenting on appeal the multiple court decisions raising serious questions about Fox's character qualifications to remain broadcast licensees. "Our petition is clearly distinct from the other politically motivated complaints," they said in their statement. "It simply will be wrong if the Murdochs and Fox escape any responsibility for their prominent role for the riot at the Capitol on January 6th and the efforts to overturn the results of a presidential election."

Sohn also took issue with the idea that character assessments are contrary to the First Amendment, noting the case on which she owes her career involves the FCC denying the license renewals

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of WLBT-TV and radio because it broadcast racist programming instead of coverage of the civil rights movement.

Incoming FCC Chair *Brendan Carr* was one of the first to [raise](#) equal time concerns about the SNL appearance and he has [suggested](#) that the “60 Minutes” news distortion complaint could be something that arises in the FCC’s review of **Paramount Global’s** proposed merger with **Skydance**. In a [statement](#) to CNN, Carr suggested the agency could reverse course under his leadership: “For the past 18 months, the Biden FCC has maintained that it would serve the public interest to consider revoking a Fox broadcast station license. Along the way, the Biden FCC established new agency precedent and breathed new life into dormant cases. Maybe it regrets doing so. Or maybe it just regrets running out of time. Either way, any partisan, midnight action here can be reversed by new agency leadership.”

The Media Bureau items weren’t the only last-hour actions on Carr’s mind. He complained that the Biden administration forced a vote on new cybersecurity rules in the wake of the Salt Typhoon hack that he views as partisan and counterproductive. A 3-2 FCC vote approved a declaratory ruling finding the Communications Assistance for Law Enforcement Act requires telecom carriers to secure their networks from unlawful access or interception of communications. A proposal has also been introduced to require service providers to submit an annual certification to the agency affirming they have created, updated and implemented a cybersecurity risk management plan to strengthen communications against future attacks.

He said no member of Congress or intelligence community member had encouraged him to vote in favor of the action, calling it counterproductive. But that doesn’t mean the agency shouldn’t be taking action.

“We should be working closely with the intelligence community officials and the network providers that have been targeted by this attack. We should be conveying in real time the remedial steps that are necessary to restore the integrity of our networks—and ensuring that providers are implementing them. And we should be taking a series of actions that will restore America’s deterrence and harden our networks going forward,” Carr said.

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OLIVIA TRUSTY GETS FCC NOM

While *Jessica Rosenworcel* led the **FCC** under a 2-2 party line split for much of her tenure (*Anna Gomez* wasn’t sworn in until Sept. 2023), it doesn’t look like *Brendan Carr* is set to face the same challenge. President-elect *Donald Trump* nominated Senate Commerce Policy Director *Olivia Trusty* to fill out the FCC when *Rosenworcel* leaves the agency on Monday. Trusty spent time in policy roles at **Verizon** and **Qwest Communications** before heading to Capitol Hill. She is a former legislative

assistant for Sen. *Roger Wicker* (R-MS), and she earned an endorsement from her longtime boss on her ability to serve as a commissioner. Longtime gymnastics fans may also recognize Trusty from her time at UNC Chapel Hill where she competed in the all-around for the Tar Heels. During her freshman year, she set two personal bests to lead the team to its first-ever EAGL Conference Championship win. The Tar Heels again took home the win her senior year. Perhaps we’ll catch her and **NCTA** President & CEO (and former FCC Chair) *Michael Powell* (a former member of William & Mary’s gymnastics team) somersaulting across Washington in the days to come. “Through her extensive work in Congress at senior level positions, Olivia has deep knowledge of the issues the Commission tackles and will play a vital role in shaping the future of our nation’s digital infrastructure,” NCTA said in a statement. **ACA Connects** President/CEO *Grant Spellmeyer* also offered his congratulations, saying he has followed Trusty’s work for more than a decade and her accomplishments at Senate Commerce and Senate Armed Services speak for themselves. “ACA Connects and all our Members look forward to working with her and Chairman *Brendan Carr* to cut red tape, promote innovation in rural communities, and further empower America’s small and independent broadband providers to close the digital divide,” he said. **Comcast** Chief Legal Officer *Tom Reid* said Trusty’s extensive knowledge of communications policy makes her an exceptional choice, while **NAB** President/CEO *Curtis LeGeyt* described her as “intimately familiar with the vital role local television and radio stations play in communities nationwide and the significant regulatory obstacles our industry faces.

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MEMBERS OF CONGRESS PRESS FCC ON OPTIMUM REBATES

The **MSG Networks-Optimum** impasse has hit the stage where lawmakers are making noise. On Thursday, 16 days after the RSN went dark on Optimum, Reps *Nicole Malliotakis* (R-NY) and *Jefferson Van Drew* (R-NJ) wrote *Jessica Rosenworcel* and *Brendan Carr* at the **FCC** to complain that Optimum owner **Altice USA** isn’t offering automatic rebates for MSGN’s removal. They also briefly mentioned CW affiliate **WPIX**, with **Nexstar** stations currently dark on Optimum after their retransmission consent agreement expired. “Altice USA’s handling of negotiations with MSGN and WPIX appears inconsistent with the Commission’s guidance. Consumers should not pay the same fees for diminished service, and providers should proactively issue rebates when significant content, such as sports or local news, is removed,” they wrote and referenced the FCC’s new blackout reporting requirements, saying they should provide valuable data for solutions. MSGN quickly jumped on the missive, issuing a statement declaring that Altice is “pocketing the money to the

tune of more than \$120 million in annual fees they should be reimbursing customers for the MSG Networks and other programming they are no longer carrying. They have already taken more than \$5M in just two weeks by cutting off MSG Networks and keeping their subscribers' money. This is unacceptable." Optimum fired back by claiming MSGN should be the one to refund customers upward of \$125 million, representing the estimated \$10/month per subscriber it claims MSGN believes its sports programming is valued. It also referenced **Sphere Entertainment's** hand in things and MSGN's possible path toward bankruptcy. "In light of its impending bankruptcy, MSG Networks continues to try and extort consumers for their hard-earned dollars while charging die-hard fans triple the costs, despite airing less games due to a \$76 billion NBA deal that MSG and its owners will benefit from," Optimum said in a statement, which was quickly met with a response from the other side. "In response to Optimum's last release what we have to say is simple: Cut the B.S.—either give us the same deal you gave **YES Network** just a few months ago—OR—give us our old deal which we had with you previously or refund every subscriber what you owe them — \$10 a month. And by the way you already owe them \$5 for the lack of programming they didn't get for the first half of January," MSGN said.

LIV GOLF HAS A NEW HOME

It hasn't been an easy round so far, but **LIV Golf** hit its best shot Thursday after landing a multi-year media rights deal with **Fox Sports**. Fox Sports will air live coverage of LIV Golf League events throughout the U.S. on Fox's portfolio of networks starting next month. Over half of the league's 14 events will be on Fox or **Fox Sports 1**, and select rounds will be put on **Fox Sports 2**, **Fox Business** and the Fox Sports app, which will stream all LIV Golf coverage along with **LIV Golf+**. Broadcasts will remain handled by LIV Golf's in-house team led by on-air talent *Arlo White*, *David Feherty* and *Jerry Foltz*. LIV Golf is entering its third season since being formed in October 2021 and will tee off the 2025 season in Saudi Arabia on Feb. 6-8.

CARRIAGE

A few more details from that carriage agreement **Charter** struck with **NBCU** in October. The operator will be adding **Bravo**, **CNBC**, **CNBC World**, **E!**, **MSNBC**, **Oxygen** and **Syfy** to its OTT offering Spectrum TV Stream around Jan. 31 this month. Still, no NBCU broadcast/

sports on Stream TV. Charter also will be giving **Universal Kids** the boot around March 6.

COMCAST LIKES ITS ODDS

Comcast is leaning into the growing popularity of sports betting. The company is adding odds from **FanDuel** into the Xfinity Odds Zone on Xfinity X1, letting viewers see odds for top leagues like the **NFL**, **NBA**, **NHL**, **MLB**, **WNBA**, **NCAA** football and basketball and more right next to live game coverage. A bet can then be initiated by scanning a QR code that'll add the wager to a FanDuel bet slip on the viewer's mobile device. Xfinity Odds Zone is available to all X1 customers and will soon be made accessible through a new sports betting hub on X1 as well.

RATINGS

While **Fox News** often finds itself at the top of the weekly primetime and total-day ratings among cable nets, the network has embarked on a dominant period post-election. From the 2024 election to date, Fox News had the top 500 individual cable news telecasts, according to **Nielsen**. Fox News also had the top 400 most-watched telecasts in overall viewers for December. What was No. 401? "The Rachel Maddow Show" on **MSNBC**. – *Tiger Woods'* new indoor golf league marched into its second week. Match No. 2 for the **TGL** reeled in an average audience of 1 million viewers on **ESPN**, up 9% from the 919,000 that was recorded for the inaugural outing Jan. 7. That was likely due to the fact Woods made his TGL debut this week, which helped viewership peak at 1.1 million from 8:30-45pm.

PEOPLE

Kroenke Sports & Entertainment (KSE Media) promoted *Tim Boell* to EVP, Content Distribution and Affiliate Marketing. He's been with the company for 10 years, previously holding distribution roles at **Paramount Global**, **Sundance Channel** and **Showtime Networks**. KSE Media's portfolio includes **Altitude Sports and Entertainment**, **Outdoor Sportsman Group** and **KSE Radio**. – **A+E Networks** EVP, Chief People Officer *Ravena Valentine* was voted in as President of **Content & Connectivity Human Resources Association (C2HR)**. The industry HR group selected **Charter** VP, Executive Compensation *Nick Dunlap* as its VP/President-Elect, while **Vyve Broadband's** SVP, HR *Angela Conklin* was confirmed for a second term secretary. *John Wilson*, SVP, People and Culture for **Warner Bros. Discovery**, stepped into the role of treasurer.

BASIC CABLE		
P2+ PRIME RANKINGS*		
(01/06/25-01/12/25)		
MON-SUN	MC	MC
	US	US AA
	AA%	(000)
FNC	0.777	2464
ESPN	0.240	763
MSNBC	0.226	717
HALL	0.201	636
HGTV	0.199	630
CNN	0.154	488
TBSC	0.151	480
INSP	0.151	479
TLC	0.149	472
DISC	0.143	452
HIST	0.142	451
USA	0.132	419
ID	0.121	383
FOOD	0.119	377
HALLMYS	0.103	326
TNT	0.101	319
TVLAND	0.096	304
A&E	0.095	301
BRAVO	0.092	293
GSN	0.090	286
LIFE	0.090	284
NWSMX	0.082	261
WETV	0.076	242
OXY	0.073	232
REELZ	0.073	232
ESPN2	0.072	228
NAN	0.071	224
BET	0.069	218
AMC	0.068	214
NATGEO	0.067	212
NFL	0.066	209
FX	0.063	200
ADSM	0.059	188
MTV	0.052	164
TRAVEL	0.050	157
PRMNT	0.049	156
FETV	0.049	155
SYFY	0.048	153
COM	0.048	151
MGNLA	0.047	150
FRFM	0.044	141
MOTOR	0.044	140
IFC TV	0.044	140
FXX	0.044	140
GAF	0.042	132
TWC	0.042	132
HLN	0.041	130

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



BEYOND THE BANDWIDTH

Keeping Fans Connected

It wasn't too long ago that the chances of capturing and uploading a video online while at a packed arena were slim to none, and that even may be generous. But **Verizon** is among those who've addressed in-stadium connectivity in recent years as venues look to maximize the fan experience, especially when data consumption at stadiums continues to rise. While there's still work to do, the ultimate goal is to make it as seamless as possible for fans to arrive, attend and depart.

Last year's Super Bowl in Las Vegas continued the upward trend of data consumption at high-profile events. Verizon reported that its customers used 52.34 TB of data in and around the stadium—the equivalent of playing HD video continuously for 3.3 years—which was a 9.4% increase over the 47.8 TB used at the 2023 Super Bowl. Approximately 50.5% of attendees were using Verizon's network, having recorded a median download speed of 1,704 Mbps and upload speed of 138 Mbps. Seventy percent of customers were using 5G Ultra-Wideband as well, a 63% increase YOY.

It's not just the Big Game having high data usage either. The NFL's opening weekend this season saw 50.3 TB of data consumed on Verizon's network across stadiums, up 7.2% from 2023, and average data usage per game jumped by 14.4% to 3.4 TB. Not to mention the managed private wireless solutions the NFL had Verizon deploy in 30 stadiums in 2023 to help improve in-game coach-to-coach communications.

Verizon has worked closely with the NFL since 2010 on wireless solutions at stadiums, having re-upped their partnership in 2021 with a 10-year deal to have Verizon install its 5G Ultra Wideband service in parts of 25 NFL stadiums. "When you're designing the network, you want to think about things like, 'I have a row of seats that are in the front of the stadium. How do I make sure that person that has that great seat that's right at the edge of the field is getting a great experience versus somebody that's further up in the seats?'" *Andrea Caldini*, Verizon's VP, Product Engineering, Platforms and Software Development–Global Network and Technology, told **CFX**. "We do things like, in some cases, under-seat radios, so that if you don't have a way to cover overhead, you can cover from under the seats. We also have these massive things called MatSing balls, which are up in the ceiling—if there's a ceiling at the stadium—that provide a huge amount of coverage as well."

The advancement of 5G has been a catalyst in improving

the in-stadium experience, Caldini noted. Combined with the different types of spectrum Verizon has, it's enabled it to better handle events that might experience huge upload or download. The 1700 MHz Verizon has of mmWave spectrum is what allows the company to build these high-speed networks designed for large crowds.

"The changes have really been drastic, especially when we look at 5G, because it gives us this huge uplink," Caldini said. "We've changed things where you might have had a portion of the spectrum, like if you think of it in four parts, three parts set for down and one part set for up. We've changed that so that we really have equal amount down and equal amount up so people can start streaming the experience out to whatever social media they're using. It's certainly a game-changer."

Verizon feels like it's in a good position with the spectrum it has and the capabilities

5G supports regarding a venue's experience, but there are still challenges that come with the process. When designing the network for the upcoming Super Bowl in New Orleans, for example, Caldini said time constraints are a limiting factor. Verizon needs time to finish the design, complete balancing, performance test and more.

Verizon's goal is to have enhancements beyond how fast someone can upload to Snapchat or Instagram. "You would be able to just walk into the stadium. You wouldn't have to have the ticket. That would be part of your biometrics to get in there, which would also help with security to make sure that the people that are coming into the area are ticket holders," Caldini said.

Verizon isn't the only provider with event connectivity on its mind. **Cox Communications** has provided the advanced network infrastructure for CES since 2014. Last year's event saw over 660 TB of data crossed on the Las Vegas Convention Center WiFi during the CES' four days, which is equivalent to the amount of data the Hubble Telescope would collect over 80 years. CES 2024 had a total verified attendance of 138,789, and this year's show brought in over 141,000 folks. Stay tuned for how much data was consumed at CES 2025.

Cox is growing its Hospitality Network portfolio as well. In November, the provider unveiled a partnership with the Baltimore Convention Center to introduce a suite of client-centered technology enhancements. That included the installation of WiFi 6 Access Points, which offer tri-band coverage (2.4, 5 and 6 GHz) to high-traffic areas like exhibit halls, meeting spaces and lobbies, in addition to complimentary guest WiFi in pre-function areas and meeting rooms.

