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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Not Forgotten: ACA Connects Still Fighting for Retrans Reform

Small and medium independent operators are headed to the Hill today to let lawmakers and regulators know what challenges they face in broadband, mobile and video. It is **ACA Connects'** annual lobbying day, and while most of the association's Summit sessions this week focused on building out broadband to unserved areas, video is definitely not forgotten.

Retransmission consent is still a huge issue for ACAC's members, President & CEO *Grant Spellmeyer* told **CFX**. "I need to do a better job of educating Congress on just what a bad position the '92 Cable Act left my members in," he said.

Under former FCC Chairwoman *Jessica Rosenworcel*, he felt there was this notion that the cable provider is somehow responsible for the blackout. She launched a proceeding to look at requiring cable operators and satellite providers to provide rebates during programming blackouts. While the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking was approved, it doesn't look like it will go any further since now-Chairman *Brendan Carr* strongly dissented to the measure, describing it as a form of rate regulation.

Among the final actions approved during Rosenworcel's tenure was a requirement that MVPDs notify the FCC when a retrans blackout occurs lasting more than 24 hours. MVPDs are generally fine with providing this info, but they don't feel it gets to the root of the problem—ever-increasing demands from broadcasters even as the traditional pay TV universe shrinks.

"My guys and gals are trapped between pay whatever the demand is, or unplug the football game on Saturday, and it's just not tenable. It's a 33-year-old law that needs to be revisited" Spellmeyer said. "Retrans is a priority, but how I get that in front of Congress or win it is a bigger subject."

He suggested one way to fix retrans might be through a Universal Service reform bill. For more than a decade there's been talk of attempting a Telecom Act rewrite, and it's never gotten off the ground. The specter of a telecom rewrite being raised every four years is kind of a joke among the D.C. press corp, but a measure to overhaul Universal Service has more legs and could essentially morph into a Telecom Act rewrite. "If there's a viable opportunity to have a Telecom Act rewrite, and then you get into Section 230... that's where you open up a big bill because you need consensus and crisis to move legislation in Washington," Spellmeyer said.

Crisis could come soon depending on what the U.S. Supreme Court decides when it considers a Fifth Circuit ruling that the FCC's administration of the Universal Service Fund is unconstitutional. Oral arguments are scheduled for March 26 over the fund which provides subsidy support for universal service to telecom services. "Whether you can get to a consensus is the trickier one," Spellmeyer said.

Broadcasters also convened for their annual leadership conference/lobbying day this week in Washington, with modernizing media ownership rules as **NAB's** top priority. That would include eliminating a 39% national audience cap

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that has kept broadcast groups like **Nexstar** from growing any larger. Nexstar currently is challenging an FCC ruling that would have its joint services agreement partner **Mission Broadcasting** divest of **WPIX** because it puts it over that cap—a decision that came after **Comcast**, **Charter** and other operators argued Nexstar was circumventing the audience ownership limit.

ACA Connects has historically opposed raising the ownership cap, but Spellmeyer doesn't seem too invested in the issue at this point. "We like small better than big," he said. "There are, no doubt, a bunch of challenges for the broadcast industry, but I think you will probably see us stick to our historic position of opposition to that, with the caveat that it's not keeping me awake at night as much as other things. I don't sense that it's on the fast track right now."

GROUPS REACT TO BEAD REFORMS

Organizations are still digesting all of the activity around the BEAD program that occurred in Washington yesterday. **INCOMPAS** CEO *Chip Pickering* posted a blog post Thursday advocating for Congress and the Trump Administration to focus on four key principles when they're considering BEAD reform: ensuring all resources are allocated directly to the deployment of networks, embracing a tech-neutral approach to deliver quality broadband to the unserved, removing barriers to deployment and ensuring BEAD and other deployment-related grants are not taxed. "These reforms will help ensure every dollar goes to building out networks capable of gigabit and above broadband service and will also make the program more attractive to participate in, creating a more competitive process," he said. **NCTA** also spoke out, commending House Communications Subcommittee Chair *Richard Hudson* (R-NC) for introducing the SPEED for BEAD Act, which looks to enact many of the same reforms **INCOMPAS** is seeking. "This legislation properly focuses on improvements to eliminate onerous requirements that impede broadband deployment efforts and improve efficiencies needed to reach all Americans with broadband service," the association said in a statement. "By concentrating BEAD on this crucial mission—deploying broadband networks to unserved and underserved communities—we can more effectively use scarce resources to deliver this essential infrastructure to communities so long in need." **FCC** Commissioner *Anna Gomez* warned that the demise of the Affordable Connectivity Program last year makes it even more urgent that affordability is a top priority for the program. "We must remain committed to prioritizing affordability and equal access. After all, BEAD without equity is just BAD," she said in a statement.

NETFLIX STILL STAYING OUT OF LARGER SPORTS RIGHTS TALKS

Netflix CFO *Spencer Neumann* isn't interested in transforming the platform into a live sports giant. During an appearance at an investor conference Wednesday, he reiterated what Netflix has previously said about its live strategy, which is that it is meant to deliver varied content when it makes sense for the platform and audiences. Live content is still ultimately a small part of Netflix's overall business, and it wants to be careful in how it grows the division. "It's a relatively small percentage of our spend and is also a small percentage of our view hours, but not all view hours are created equal. And when we do it right, it works well for us, but not all live content works for us," Neumann said. "It has to be those big live events that also work for our business and work for our shareholders. Being in the business of regular seasons, full seasons of big sports, we haven't found that yet to be something that we necessarily need to deliver more entertainment value and can do it in a way that's a good business for us and for our shareholders." He also offered some commentary on Netflix's partnership with the **WWE** which brought the weekly show "Raw" to the streamer in January. That program is available exclusively on Netflix in the U.S., U.K., Canada and Latin America, and the platform is also the home of all WWE shows and specials outside of the U.S. "Following the launch, the viewing has been steady. It's obviously a bit bigger in that first week, but it's kind of leveled out and been steady in a way that's actually slightly ahead of what we expected," he said. "We believe it's expanded their audience a little bit."

ESPN, MAAC RE-UP

The **Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference** is sticking with **ESPN** following a multi-year media rights extension. The new deal will kick in at the start of the 2025-26 academic year and includes select regular-season men's and women's basketball games and Olympic sporting events being aired on **ESPN**, **ESPN2** or **ESPNU**. The MAAC men's basketball championship game will be in a primetime slot on **ESPN** or **ESPN2** on Tuesday of Championship Week, and the women's basketball title bout will become a standalone event on Monday on **ESPNU** or **ESPN+**. The men's and women's hoops semifinals will take place on those Saturdays on **ESPN+**, with the first rounds and quarterfinals also available on the streamer. Over 500 total MAAC events will stream each year on **ESPN+** and the **ESPN** app.

FREEWHEEL, VIDEOAMP COLLAB FOR ATTRIBUTION

Comcast's ad tech company **FreeWheel** is joining forces with **VideoAmp** to integrate the media ratings firm's advanced audience measurement and currency solutions into FreeWheel's Strata platform. VideoAmp measurement data will now be available to clients using Strata, enabling them to transact and analyze the delivery of ads. Some already are taking advantage of the partnership, with **Horizon Media** being the first agency to put the integration into action.

FLOSPORTS RIDES WITH USA BMX

FloSports is set to add **USA BMX** to its portfolio, signing a multi-year agreement to bring USA BMX Pro Series races to **FloBikes**. The partnership will begin later this month when the first race of the 2025 season takes place March 28. FloSports and FloBikes will host live coverage of every Pro Series event, including full race day broadcasts, behind-the-scenes content, rider interviews and analysis. FloBikes subscriptions currently run at \$29.99/month or \$150/year.

T-MOBILE WRAPS AD TECH BUYS

T-Mobile closed another acquisition Wednesday with the completion of its purchases of digital out-of-home advertising firm **Vistar Media** and **Blis**, a provider of privacy-focused advertising solutions. T-Mobile will utilize the assets to bolster its T-Mobile Advertising Solutions unit to ultimately create solutions that lead to more relevant ad experiences for consumers and opportunities for marketers to get more value out of their campaigns.

CARRIAGE

NBCUniversal is bringing a litany of FAST channels to **Plex**. They span entertainment, national and local news, sports and Spanish-language genres. Plex additions include **Bravo Real Housewives Vault**, **SNL Vault**, **NBC Sports NOW**, **Dateline 24/7** and **Telemundo Romance** in addition to **NBC** affiliates in New York, L.A., D.C., Chicago and several others.

FIBER FRENZY

All West Communications unveiled plans to bring its fiber offerings to Bluffdale, Utah. The engineering and design process is complete and construction is underway. No timetable for when residents would start to receive service was given. All West offers symmetrical speeds of up to 8 Gig for homes and 10 Gig for businesses.

RATINGS

It may have been a long one, but **Fox News** led the way in ratings for President **Donald Trump's** address before a joint

Congress with 10.7 million viewers P2+ and 1.93 million A25-54 from 9:15-11pm. Tuesday night's speech saw Fox News eclipse the broadcast nets as well as its cable competitors, with **MSNBC** recording 1.92 million P2+ and 585,000 A25-54 (**CNN** ratings weren't disclosed). Fox News also led during the democratic response with 6.37 million viewers P2+ and 1.07 million A25-54 from 11-11:30pm. MSNBC had 2.21 million P2+ and 233,000 A25-54, while CNN checked in with 1.43 million P2+ and 362,000 A25-54. – **ESPN** had its most-watched February since 2018 after it averaged 575,000 viewers every minute of the month, good for a 21% YOY improvement. That was primarily thanks to the 4 Nations Face-Off and its championship game that became the most-watched hockey game in the network's history with 9.3 million viewers. Additionally, ESPN accounted for a 30% share of sports viewership across all networks, joining **Fox**—who carried the Super Bowl—as the only competitor network with a double-digit share.

PROGRAMMING

An **ESPN** afternoon staple is coming to a close in a couple of months. "Around the Horn," which first premiered Nov. 4, 2002, will air its final episode May 23 at 5pm. The weekday sports discussion show that pits panels of journalists and pundits against one another as they try to score points with **Tony Real** will finish with more than 4,900 episodes. Real has helmed the show since 2004 after he took over for then-host **Max Kellerman**. Temporarily filling in the 5-5:30pm slot will be a 30-minute edition of "SportsCenter" until ESPN decides on a permanent replacement. Some reports have pointed to the network toying with expanding "Pardon the Interruption" to a full hour. – **Telemundo** and Universo announced a deal that'll see them become the official broadcasters of Premios PLATINO, the international awards for Spanish- and Portuguese-language cinema and series. This year's event will take place April 27 in Madrid. Coverage will include the awards' broadcast, interviews with nominees and arrivals on the red carpet. More details will be revealed soon. – **AMC+**'s original drama "The Last Anniversary" will premiere March 30 in the U.S. and Canada. New episodes of the series based on the New York Times bestseller from **Liane Moriarty** will drop on Sundays.

PEOPLE

Charter is upping **Keith Dardis** to EVP, Spectrum Business. The 10-year Spectrum veteran will manage all sales and business operations, including customer service, product, HR and business planning for Spectrum Business. It's been a quick climb up the ladder for Dardis, who was most recently named SVP, Business Sales & Operations in December and oversaw Spectrum's combined business units for SMB customers and large enterprise companies. Dardis will begin his new role immediately and remain based in Stamford, Connecticut.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

Nine Bodies and a Maclean in A Mexican Morgue

When your favorite mystery novelist has a new television series that features a character with your exact same name, it kind of feels like a message from the universe. So, I started my interview with *Anthony Horowitz* with the question on everyone's mind—or a least on mine: Why name a character Amy Maclean in his new **MGM+** thriller "Nine Bodies in a Mexican Morgue"? "I don't like names that are too peculiar. My own name—Anthony Horowitz—I always think it's such a complicated name to put your head around. I don't really remember how I came up with the names, but it is a thrill to be talking to the real Amy Maclean," he said. Well, that's one mystery solved, but there are nine more to go. *Nine Bodies* slowly spools out the tale of an aircraft with nine passengers that crashes in the Mexican jungle. Everyone survives, but then—with a tip of the cap to Agatha Christie's "And Then There Were None"—one-by-one, they die violent and mysterious deaths. Horowitz, who serves as writer, creator and executive producer, is known for his Hawthorne detective novels as well as his television series such as "Foyles War," "Magpie Murders" (also a book) and "Alex Rider." While he's fuzzy on Amy Maclean's name origins, he distinctly remembers coming up with the show's memorable title. "I pitched it to a few places. The first time I think it was called 'The Last Survivor'. And as I was going into a meeting and thought, 'Look, this is a show like no other. It is so full of surprises. There are so many deaths, so many twists and turns. The location is so strange. It's got Mexicans in it. It's got Brits, it's got Americans, it's got Canadians. It's sort of out there. I've got to give it a name that is bigger than that, a name that you cannot ignore,'" recalled Horowitz. "So, when I walked into the room, I said, 'This is a show called'—and I took a breath—'Nine Bodies in a Mexican Morgue.' Executives never give very much away, but they couldn't stop themselves smiling. And that's what I want for this show. It's dark and it's violent, but it also has a smile at the heart of it." And it's a fun whodunnit—made better with an Amy Maclean. Highly recommend. *Nine Bodies in a Mexican Morgue* premiered on MGM+ on Sunday. — *Amy Maclean*

REVIEWS

"Prime Target," streaming, **Apple TV+**. Again, television provides a sumptuous, diversionary buffet for our extraordinary times. That's great for viewers, not so for reviewers. Where to begin? With just-completed "Paradise" on the smorgasbord and returning seasons of "1923," "Reacher," "Paradise" and "Bad Sisters," who has room for just-released "Deli Boys" and "Toxic Town"? Somewhat arbitrarily we've decided on "Prime Target" and "The White Lotus," which feature unusual characters. Prime centers on a socially awkward math genius at Cambridge. One of Britain's hottest actors, *Leo Woodall*, plays Ed with such cold indifference you may need subtitles to understand what he's saying. Still, Ed's purity and naiveté make him a mirror image of *Matt Damon's* genius Will Hunting in "Good Will Hunting" (1997). Unlike that film, Prime loads us with plot lines, not all of them important or believable, culminating in a lagging finale, though it leaves Ed and gifted partner Taylah (Quintessa Swindell) set up perfectly for a second season. — "The White Lotus," 9pm, Sunday, **Max**. As in previous iterations of this series, "Lotus" is a visual delight, replete with exotic scenery, terrific music and 5-star spa accommodations and service. And again, the intriguing characters are either filthy rich or modest Lotus staff. The plot? Not sure yet. — *Seth Arenstein*

BASIC CABLE

P2+ PRIME RANKINGS*

(02/24/25-03/02/25)

MON-SUN	MC US AA%	MC US AA (000)
FNC	0.956	3032
MSNBC	0.383	1215
ESPN	0.302	957
HGTV	0.208	659
CNN	0.183	581
HALL	0.166	526
HIST	0.166	525
USA	0.165	523
INSP	0.156	495
TNT	0.154	490
FOOD	0.140	444
TBSC	0.115	364
DISC	0.114	362
TLC	0.107	338
BRAVO	0.098	310
TVLAND	0.096	305
GSN	0.090	285
HALLMYS	0.085	270
LIFE	0.085	268
NWSMX	0.084	268
ID	0.083	264
ESPN2	0.081	257
A&E	0.080	253
WETV	0.074	235
OXY	0.072	228
AMC	0.071	225
FX	0.068	214
NAN	0.065	205
BET	0.064	204
REELZ	0.063	200
ADSM	0.057	179
FRFM	0.054	171
COM	0.052	165
PRMNT	0.050	160
APL	0.050	159

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

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