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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Hill Hearing: Trusty Vows Not to Weaponize FCC, Seeks Spectrum Unity

As Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) quipped during Wednesday's more than two-hour hearing, *Olivia Trusty* wins the best name prize for a nominee as senators quizzed her to try and determine if she could in fact be trusted to serve as an **FCC** commissioner.

"You have an ethical record. You have a strong reputation on Capitol Hill. Protect it," advised Sen *Ben Ray Lujan* (D-NM). "You have a bright future. We need good Democrats, good Republicans. I don't agree with all your positions. I don't agree with all my Democratic colleagues' positions, but the FCC should be a strong, independent body."

That statement came after he asked Trusty if she thought it was appropriate for President *Trump* to call for the revocation of broadcast licenses based on content and editorial decisions. "I think President Trump has First Amendment rights to express his views. My responsibility, if confirmed, is to focus on the facts, FCC precedent and the law in carrying out whatever the decision-making process is for a proceeding before the Commission," she said.

Lujan also probed her on statements from FCC Chairman *Brendan Carr* threatening to block M&A for companies that don't end DEI programs. "With respect to mergers or transactions, I would look at them through the lens of what advances the public interest. As you know, these are very fact-specific cases that require a thoughtful and thorough review of information in the record. And I would be guided by the statute," Trusty pledged.

She was joined at the confirmation hearing by **NASA** chief

nominee *Jared Isaacman*, who fielded questions about his relationship with *Elon Musk* and stressed that a lunar landing was a top priority over a mission to Mars. Before the nomination hearing the committee voted on *Arielle Roth's* nomination as **NTIA** Administrator. Roth actually gave birth to a 7-pound, 10-ounce baby girl at 12:10am the same day as the hearing. Sen Commerce Chair *Ted Cruz* (R-TX) joked that Roth, who served as his telecom policy director, should consider BEAD as a name for her sixth child. Senators voted 16-12 to advance her nomination to the full Senate. If approved, she will oversee the \$42 Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment [BEAD] program, which has been criticized for not connecting anyone yet to broadband.

Sen. *John Fetterman* (D-PA) was the only Dem to vote in favor of Roth's nomination. Senate Commerce Ranking Member *Maria Cantwell* (D-WA) said she couldn't support Roth because she hasn't committed to honoring the agreements NTIA has made with states and tribes regarding BEAD money and she has concerns over how she'll approach spectrum policy. "These are great concerns on the investments that our Congress has already decided," said Cantwell. "She had the opportunity to continue to answer those questions for the record. We do not see the evidence of that commitment. On the issue of Elon Musk and conflicts of interest and making sure that even potential conflicts of interest were clear—I also have concerns."

Saying she believes local broadcast news is the glue holding us together now, Cantwell asked Trusty if she thinks the FCC

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should re-examine whether broadcasters should be able to negotiate retransmission consent with vMVPDs such as **YouTube TV**. Trusty didn't exactly say yes, but she didn't rule it out: "I think it's incumbent upon the FCC to work with Congress to ensure we have a modern regulatory framework that reflects the realities of today's media marketplace that enables broadcasters to better compete against technology companies for viewers, for ad revenues, for programming—all things that they can generate resources by to reinvest into their news gathering operations and increase the availability of local news."

The FCC nominee was also asked about how to address broadband inequities, with her making the case for promoting more competition, embracing more technologies and removing regulatory barriers. USF came up several times, with Trusty noting that as Congress looks at potential reforms to USF, "perhaps there's an opportunity to make adjustments to better target those services to communities in need."

Having worked on both the **Armed Services** and Commerce committees, Trusty has a unique understanding of the current back and forth over the need for spectrum for national security and the desire for additional spectrum for commercial users. She said she thinks she can help find common ground, acknowledging that one of the key issues that engineers don't agree on interference metrics. Trusty said it might mean a new MOU between the FCC and NTIA and hiring more engineers who have experience in both camps to address the issue. Trusty has the trust of *Roger Wicker* (R-MS), who proclaimed that she "wants to help our country maintain our leadership without risking national security and she's worked to make that happen."

Members have through Friday to submit questions into the record for Isaacman and Trusty, who must respond by Tuesday.

TARIFF TURNABOUT

Trump's announcement of a 90-day pause on "reciprocal tariffs" for all countries except China sent the stock market soaring into record territory Wednesday. While it was welcomed news, there's still plenty of uncertainty over whether the pause will turn permanent. Industry players have been coming to terms with tariffs' potential impact with *David Zaslav* [reportedly](#) halting **Warner Bros. Discovery** non-essential travel due to "market volatility and reduced consumer confidence." Maybe the 20% surge WBD stock saw at Wednesday's close will help him to reconsider. Other big gainers include **EchoStar** (+12%), **Disney** (+12%), **AMC Networks** (+10%), **Fox Corp.** (+9%), **Charter** (+8%) and **Comcast** (+7%). **S&P** noted that the first three months of 2025 didn't bring about the tech M&A many investment bankers had expected because of tariffs and other moves from the Trump administration. Across U.S. tech deal activity, deal value declined about 22% YOY in

1Q25, according to data from **S&P Global Market Intelligence**. "The decline stands in contrast to what tech M&A advisers had expected directly after U.S. President Donald Trump's election in late 2024. At that time, advisers were looking to a more lenient antitrust environment, lower taxes and less regulation," said S&P's report. "Now, some of those expectations have shifted as the Federal Reserve stopped its interest rate-cutting cycle and the Trump administration prioritized federal spending cuts and tariffs on imports. But there is still a sense that the regulatory pressures felt under former President *Joe Biden* have eased, allowing for more tech M&A." S&P sees some positive M&A signs: **Google's** deal, announced last month, to buy cybersecurity firm **Wiz** for \$32 billion is the first large transaction announced by Big Tech since 2022 when **Microsoft** acquired **Activision Blizzard** for \$66 billion. Additionally, fintech represented 25% of the 30 largest deals in the quarter, while AI is attracting bidders willing to pay higher prices.

PROJECT KUIPER ON LAUNCH PAD

If all goes according to plan, **Amazon's** first 27 **Project Kuiper** satellites will be in orbit tonight. The launch is scheduled for a two-hour window that opens at 7pm ET and can be watched live [here](#). The inaugural launch is using United Launch Alliance's Atlas V rocket with liftoff to occur from Space Launch Complex-41 at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station, Florida.

SCRIPPS ISN'T STOPPING WOMEN'S SPORTS INVESTMENT

Scripps Sports may already have the **NWSL** and **WNBA** in its portfolio, but that doesn't mean the company isn't continuing to bolster its women's sports offerings. Scripps held its annual upfront presentation in Brooklyn on Wednesday, and it was guided by two new additions that'll arrive on **ION** this year. The first is the Sports Illustrated Women's Games, a biennial all-star competition featuring athletes from "Team Americas" and "Team World" competing across basketball, gymnastics, tennis, volleyball and combat sports. That'll take place this fall. Then, ION will welcome the Fort Myers Tip-Off, an early-season women's college basketball tournament that'll take place Nov. 28-29. The network will be the tournament's home for the next five years. "Us adding the SI Women's Games and Fort Myers is the perfect complement to this foundation that we've built with the WNBA and NWSL. But make no mistake, we are still focused on serving our audiences with a great women's sports product, and so the balance of working with these leagues, WNBA and NWSL, fits in really nicely with these other sports properties," Scripps EVP/CRO **Brian Norris** told **CFX**. He noted that ION previously didn't

In The WILD

A Cablefax feature highlighting industry doings spotted in the real world.

Adaptive Spirit Celebrates 30 Years

Another Adaptive Spirit event is in the books, but this one is a bit special. The gathering this past weekend in Vail Colorado marked the organization's 30th anniversary.



Hundreds of industry execs have attended the annual event which features networking and education while directly supporting the U.S. Paralympic Ski and Snowboard Team. The event includes industry sessions, a silent auction and even a race on the slopes.



"Adaptive Spirit is a powerful example of what's possible when industries come together with a shared commitment to inclusivity and opportunity. By investing in adaptive athletes, the event helps create a world where physical limitations don't define potential—a vision that closely aligns with Cisco's Purpose to Power an Inclusive Future for All," John Dorval, Cisco SVP, Americas Service Provider, wrote in a recent blog.



Organizers are still finalizing how much money was raised this year for the athletes.

- Amy Maclean

have any women's sports programming in 4Q. With how crucial the NWSL and WNBA have become for ION, the network hopes to keep both in the long term. It's entering its final season of the current agreement it has with the WNBA, and Norris said they're in ongoing conversations related to renewing its Friday night franchise. "We value our relationship and our partnership with the WNBA, and believe that it's helped to unlock additional value for both the league and for Scripps, and so we'd be very excited to continue on with them," Norris said. Scripps still has a few seasons left on its NWSL deal, so no formal talks have begun yet.

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MARCH MADNESS RATINGS

After a month of mayhem, it's the Florida Gators and the UConn Huskies who were crowned the Kings and Queens of college basketball this season. The **NCAA** men's basketball tournament finished with an average of 10.2 million viewers across **TBS**, **TNT**, **truTV** and **CBS**, up 3% compared to last year's tournament. Monday's title bout between Florida and Houston garnered 18.1 million viewers on CBS and peaked with 21.1 million during the game's conclusion. That 18.1 million is the most-watched since 2019 and a 22% improvement from last year's championship. Men's Final Four weekend finished with 16.4 million viewers across three games, marking its best viewership in eight years. On the women's side, **ESPN** said Sunday's UConn-South Carolina contest reeled in 8.6 million viewers across **ESPN**, **ESPN+** and **ABC**, peaking at just under 10 million. That's up 75% from the same matchup in 2022, but if you're wondering why ESPN cited that year for comparison, 2023's title game had 9.9 million viewers while 2024 had 18.9 million—showing how powerful the *Caitlin Clark* effect was on college hoops. UConn's semifinal game vs UCLA had 4.2 million viewers on ESPN and ESPN+, with S.C. and Texas garnering 3.7 million on the same platforms. Additionally, "The Bird & Turasi" simulcast posted 716,000 viewers on ESPN/ESPN+.

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SPORTS EMMYS NOMINATIONS

The countdown has begun for the 46th Annual Sports Emmy Awards after nominations were revealed. **ESPN** led the pack for a 12th straight year with 63 nominations. Its college football programming earned six nominations across various categories while **NFL** content nabbed five, including "Monday Night Football" for Live Series. **ESPN Deportes** contributed six nominations as well. **NBCUniversal** had its most nominations since 2013 (58) after being attached to 48 this year. The Paris Olympics will vie for 28 Emmys, including Outstanding Live Special and The George Wensel Technical Achievement Award. "Sunday Night Football" came in with 10 noms, and personalities including *Mike Tirico*, *Noah Eagle*, *Scott Hanson* and *Andrés Cantor* are up for awards. Speaking of Eagle, he's going to battle his dad and **CBS Sports** analyst *Ian* for Outstanding Personality/Play-by-Play. **Fox Sports** has 31 nominations primarily thanks to **Super Bowl LIX** getting 10 and **MLB** coverage notching seven. This year's Sports Emmys will take place May 20 in NYC. A full list of nominations is available [here](#).

NAB SHOW 2025 FROM AFAR

Just hours ago, the NAB Show 2025 in Las Vegas officially closed. By and large, industry trade shows are helpful for in-person attendees to see and hear firsthand about the latest and greatest technology. But for those of us focused on policy, shipping off to Vegas was not a necessity to explore the policy goals discussed at the Show. That's because America's television broadcasters have already laid out a massive agenda for the Trump Administration and Congress to consider, including NextGen TV, media ownership relaxation and reforming the affiliate/network relationships.

Looking at the scope of the asks, it's going to be an interesting year for these broadcast issues. Given the diversity—and not in a “woke” way—of interests, finances, history and market positioning, a particular broadcaster may have vastly different goals than another. To some degree, unity amongst broadcasters only holds until it impacts an individual broadcaster's own perspective.

Interestingly, there is a semi-decent case to be made that all of the policy issues are somewhat intertwined. Do broadcasters want to buy more stations if they wouldn't see increased audience support under NextGen or potential additive revenues for non-broadcast services? Can NextGen TV be successful if broadcasters can't achieve scale through consolidation? Can the economics work if the networks sell broadcast stations and seek greater distribution over other platforms? The future of television broadcasting may be contingent on multiple reform slices fitting together like a puzzle. The problem is that it's unlikely that the entirety of the agenda can or will be enacted, meaning policy wishes will meet reality at some point.

With media ownership, the current discussion is really about eliminating the statutory ownership cap and the TV duopoly rule. Generally, that puts television broadcasters in two camps: those who want to grow nationally to compete with other platforms and those who want to grow within their markets. It seems like a decent chance that the national ownership cap will be eliminated given the vast video marketplace changes since its codification. If the duopoly limitations can't be eliminated, maybe a clear rule could be drafted that allows for certain top-4 combinations (e.g., a 2 and 3 or 4) that avoid undue impact on consumers. Any changes will inevitably affect broadcasters differently.

On NextGen, the policy options are more delicate with a few large champions of the technology. As

much as people might want to give it a chance, the government mandates needed won't be super popular. Requiring television manufacturers to install an advanced tuner in television sets is challenging. Further, turning off the old signal without offering off ramps, like dealing with other distributors or the cost of new equipment for over-the-air or cable viewers, is a heavy lift. The Trump Administration has been leery about touching Social Security or Medicare. Will it want to interfere with the traditional television most popular among older Americans? We'll see if advocates can carry the weight of NextGen when only select broadcasters really care about it.

The affiliation relationship disputes are not uniform among broadcasters. This suggests that government intervention in the form of new rules or law isn't in the cards, but probably best and likely to be left to the market and private contracts. Perhaps local broadcasters' venting about networks gets them something in the contractual negotiations side without the government. Certainly, the idea of expanding cable rules to streamers is not wise or legally sound. Instead, reducing regulations on all distributors makes the most sense.

Over the next many months or more, it's possible or maybe even likely that some part of NAB's agenda is enacted. That signifies some broadcasters could benefit and some would lose. Determining which companies fall into which category will depend on their vision of the respective future for their company and which form of desired relief was achieved.

P.S. To my fellow **Cablefax** columnist, Steve Effros, who critiqued my March [column](#): the actual text did not mention the people or specifics suggested. It was a general piece on how mergers could be different compared to the last Administration.

(Michael O'Reilly is a former FCC Commissioner and congressional staffer who serves as President at MPO-Rielly Consulting. His views do not necessarily reflect the views of Cablefax.)

