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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Speed to BEAD: ISPs Say Proceed with Caution on Program Changes

As broadband providers wait for updates to the $42.5 billion BEAD program that will hopefully remove some regulatory red tape, some are hoping not everything in the broadband infrastructure initiative changes.

"Leave it to the states to decide the alternate technology and the scoring and priorities there," *Jake Baldwin*, CEO, **MBO/Cross Family of Companies**, said at a **USTelecom** panel in D.C. Thursday. "I think the state of Oklahoma has done a good job with that, and I'd like to see that stay with the states. They're closest to the ground." His comment was met with applause by many in the audience.

Totelcom CEO *Jennifer Prather* said there's a place for fiber, LEO satellite and fixed wireless, but it's important not to equate technological neutrality with interchangeability. "It's intellectually dishonest to say when you're looking at fiber vs. fixed wireless vs. satellite, that you're getting the same thing long term," she said. "I also don't know that maybe some of the policy people are necessarily the ones that need to be making those decisions because they're not the ones that have to operate for the long term."

For Minnesota-based **CTC**, the biggest concern is putting in place a cap that would limit how much can be spent per location, CEO *Kristi Westbrook* said. Given that the locations left in the state are high cost areas, she said caps would be terribly detrimental.

The ISP panel was a good reminder of how far apart many of the states are with BEAD plans. With Texas the last state to get its program approved for $3.3 billion in BEAD funding, Prather said it wouldn't be that hard for her company to adapt to some changes given that Texas isn't far down the path. She made a plug for taking away some of the aspects of the program that can make deployments more costly than they have to be. "I think the intent was really good behind a lot of it. We want to pay good wages. We want to make things sustainable. But we've already got a ton of companies that have been doing that for decades with some of those principles," she said.

One caution with a BEAD revamp is that it could further slow down a program. That's why many are advocating for modifications around permitting and environment review as they could actually speed up the program. "We were awarded a Re-Connect Award in 2023 and we're still waiting on environmental review," said Baldwin. Prather agreed, saying there's ripe opportunity to streamline with adjacent locations that have received awards through other programs.

"If there's anything else we could do to keep BEAD moving quickly is to not allow it to get caught up in a lot of rhetoric. I think that goes back to letting the states make decisions," said Westbrook. "If we leave it at a federal level, that's just going to slow it down, and certainly the pause that we're experiencing today."

Internet providers aren't just dealing with uncertainty over BEAD, there's also the pending U.S. Supreme Court decision



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on the constitutionality of the Universal Service Fund (USF). Baldwin said he did some quick analysis of the rural Oklahoma company's annual support divided by the number of current customers, and in one service area it would have to increase rates by more than $200 above current rates just to replace USF revenue. He said it's not as easy as spreading the money over special access circuits, because then you're not only hitting schools, libraries, and rural healthcare facilities, but you're also passing it to cell towers, which will have to make the decision of whether to continue to use fiber or switch to microwave or something else. "There's a ton of downstream effects, and that's not even looking at the Lifeline customers that are losing that credit and going to have an immediate increase to their bill," he said.

Loss of USF would be devastating to rural hospitals and the communities they serve, added *Zil Joyce Dixon Romero*, State Government Affairs Manager for the **National Rural Health Association**. "It's much harder to build something than to take it away. When something's working, it needs to continue to work," he said. "Right now, 50% of all rural hospitals are operating either in the red or in the margins, so taking away even just little bits of credit that they would then have to pass on to individuals would be huge. And that means loss of care and loss of life."

Whatever happens at the Supreme Court, most expect there to be continued conversation around revamping USF. And just like with BEAD, many feel the U.S. is already behind here. "We needed the working group to make decisions last year. Not getting those has caused another major pause," Westbrook said. "It needs to happen quickly and thoughtfully." Not to mention that at a time when BEAD is pushing to get everyone connected, losing USF would result in more unconnected. "You can raise your rates by 200, 300, 400%, but people aren't going to pay it," said Prather. "We can't continue to serve those areas today that are considered served if that goes away."

CARR MEETS WITH CHICAGO BULLS, WHITE SOX OWNER

Looks like **FCC** Chairman *Brendan Carr* is a pretty big baseball fan… He posted photos on social media of some of his Thursday meetings and one drew our attention given the possible implications for an ongoing carriage agreement impasse. Carr posted on **X** that he met with *Jerry Reinsdorf,* who not only owns the Bulls and White Sox but has partial ownership of **Chicago Sports Network**. CHSN is currently at odds with **Comcast** as the two have lacked an agreement since CHSN went live in October. The teams were previously on the shuttered Comcast-owned **NBC Sports Chicago**. Earlier this week, Reinsdorf's son and Bulls President *Michael Reinsdorf* publicly aired out his frustrations and claimed Comcast was negotiating in bad faith. Carr and Jerry Reinsdorf's meeting is noteworthy considering the FCC chief was keeping an eye on the fight Comcast had with **YES Network**, encouraging the two to reach a resolution and declaring that the agency can step in upon claims of discriminatory conduct. Comcast and YES resolved their issue the day after his comments. We'll see if CHSN and Comcast issue a press release in the near future.

PROJECT KUIPER LAUNCH DELAYED

The countdown to **Amazon** launching its first 27 **Project Kuiper** satellites into orbit has been put on pause for now. The launch that was originally scheduled for Wednesday night was delayed due to unfavorable weather conditions around Florida's Cape Canaveral. It had a two-hour launch window from 7-9pm, but United Launch Alliance—the manufacturer of the rocket being used—said the clouds and winds were beyond safety limits, thus prompting several delays. At 8:41pm, the decision was made to scrub the mission. A new launch date will be announced when approved.

SENATE CONFIRMS MEADOR TO FTC

The U.S. Senate confirmed President *Trump*'s pick for the third **FTC** seat, despite complaints about the ouster of the agency's two Democratic commissioners. *Mark Meador* was confirmed on a 50-46 vote Thursday. He was nominated on January 20 by Trump to a term that will expire in September 2031. Meador most recently was a visiting fellow at the Heritage Foundation Tech Policy Center. Prior to that, he served as Deputy Chief Counsel for Antitrust and Competition Policy for Sen. Mike Lee (R-UT) and was a trial attorney in the **DOJ Antitrust Division** during Trump's first administration. Ousted FTC Commissioners *Rebecca Slaughter* and *Alvaro Bedoya* have filed a lawsuit against President Trump, FTC Chair *Andrew Ferguson*, FTC Commissioner *Melissa Holyoak* and FTC Executive Director *David Robbins* that alleges that their firings were violations of federal law and Supreme Court precedent. "We would like to thank Sens. *Schumer*, *Cantwell* and the rest of the Senate Dems for having the courage to champion an independent FTC by voting 'no' on Mr. Meador's nomination," *Sara Collins,* **Public Knowledge** Director, Government Affairs, said in a statement. "In order for the FTC to be effective, it needs to have five independent commissioners doing the work."

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MLB EXPLORING MLB.TV OPTIONS

The recent drama around **MLB**'s game distribution has mostly centered on where it'll go after mutually opting out of its deal with **ESPN**, but that's not the only negotiation the league is having. According to *The Athletic*, which cites sources briefed on discussions, **MLB** has held talks to potentially license **MLB.TV** to networks and/or digital platforms. MLB.TV lets fans watch every out-of-market game for $29.99/month or $149.99/year, but it also has in-market offerings with 10 teams, including the teams that MLB controls the rights for as well as **SNY** (Mets) and **SNLA+** (Dodgers). Last season, MLB.TV had a record 14.5 billion minutes watched, a 14% improvement compared to the 12.7 billion minutes recorded in 2023.

CLOSING UP NAB SHOW

The **2025 NAB Show** came to a close Wednesday. The association said 55,000 registered attendees from 160 countries were on hand in Las Vegas, with 26% traveling from outside of the U.S. and 53% being first-time participants. However, total attendance was down from the 65,000 recorded for last year's NAB Show and the 64,600 who went in 2023. It's an even bigger drop from the 91,460 attendants in 2019, the last show before the COVID-19 pandemic came to be. This year's event had nearly 1,100 global exhibitors (125 being first-timers) and over 550 sessions discussing anything from ATSC 3.0, to AI, streaming/OTT and beyond.

FOR THE RECORD

YES Network filed notice on April 1 to withdraw its **FCC** program carriage complaint against **Comcast**. The two got into a public spat ahead of an April 1 carriage deadline, but were able to reach an agreement without a disruption for viewers. When a deal is reached, FCC complaints are typically removed. But not always. For example, **DirecTV** and **Disney** reached a carriage deal last fall after a two-week blackout. DirecTV didn't remove its retransmission consent good faith negotiation complaint. **Hawaiian Telcom** also didn't remove a good faith complaint against Nexstar after the two struck a deal, with the FCC proposing a forfeiture of $720,000 for Nexstar's handling of retransmission consent negotiations. The broadcaster is appealing the decision.

LIBERTY LATIN AMERICA TAPS CSG

Liberty Latin America is going with **CSG** to help improve its wholesale business and unify operations across 21 countries and multiple lines of business. The operator is using CSG's digital wholesale suite to consolidate and bolster wholesale rating, charging and settlement processes, reduce operational spending and streamline its partner agreement and business relationship management. That'll allow Liberty Latin America to expedite time to market while improving B2B partner relationships.

FIBER FRENZY

Astound Broadband finished a 108-mile underground fiber route along Oregon's Highway 6, bringing internet service to more than 270 homes in rural Tillamook County for the first time. The route runs from a submarine cable landing station that passes through Tillamook. Astound will begin connecting homes throughout the remainder of 2025. – **FOCUS Broadband**'s third expansion project in Duplin County, North Carolina, wrapped up, meaning residents and businesses across Beulaville, Chinquapin and Maple Hill can sign up for speeds of up to 5 Gbps. The project was fueled by a $3.8 million grant awarded in 2022 by NC's Department of Information Technology as part of the Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology (GREAT) program. FOCUS contributed an additional $535,755 in matching funds in addition to Duplin County supporting the build.

RATINGS

Paramount+ might have another series on the rise. The premiere of "MobLand" nabbed 8.8 million viewers in the first seven days after its March 30 debut. Viewership improved by 298% from premiere day, making it Paramount+'s biggest global series launch week ever.

NAMIC VISION AWARDS

The nominations for the 2025 **NAMIC** Vision Awards are now out. The association said it received "an unprecedented number of submissions" for this year's awards, which highlight programming that reflects diverse cultures, voices and perspectives within today's audiences. Now it's up to a panel of 130+ judges from the media and entertainment industry to determine the winners of the 16 categories. NAMIC will announce the winners next month, though an exact date is to be determined. A full list of nominations can be found here.

PROGRAMMING

As "The Last of Us" gets prepared to debut its second season, **HBO** renewed the series for a third running. Season 2 is set to start Sunday at 9pm on HBO/**Max**.

BASIC CABLE
P2+ PRIME RANKINGS*
(03/31/25-04/06/25)

MON-SUN	MC US AA%	MC US AA (000)
FNC	0.871	2761
ESPN	0.417	1321
MSNBC	0.390	1237
TNT	0.192	609
HGTV	0.190	604
CNN	0.179	567
TBSC	0.154	489
HIST	0.148	470
FOOD	0.144	458
HALL	0.143	455
INSP	0.138	438
USA	0.138	436
DISC	0.122	388
TLC	0.122	386
ID	0.101	321
TVLAND	0.101	321
BRAVO	0.091	288
GSN	0.088	279
HALLMYS	0.083	264
NWSMX	0.083	262
A&E	0.082	260
AMC	0.078	248
FX	0.077	244
LIFE	0.076	241
WETV	0.073	232
NAN	0.069	220
NBA	0.069	217
NATGEO	0.067	214
OXY	0.060	190
FRFM	0.055	175
ADSM	0.051	162
MTV	0.051	162
COM	0.048	152
PRMNT	0.047	149
SYFY	0.046	147
SNDNCE	0.046	147
BET	0.046	145
HBO	0.044	139
TRAVEL	0.044	138
MLB	0.043	136
LMN	0.043	136
REELZ	0.042	133
HLN	0.039	125
TRUTV	0.039	125
FETV	0.039	123
E!	0.038	122
TWC	0.037	117

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