

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Sitting Tight: Operators Examine Approach to Video, Waiting on BEAD

Although the anticipation to see what the next steps are with NTIA’s \$42.5 billion BEAD program was palpable during **BCAP’s Pennsylvania Broadband Summit 2025** Wednesday, many attendees continue to deal with combatting a bleeding video ecosystem.

Take **LHTC Broadband**, for example, which is undergoing a migration away from its legacy TV system in favor of an over-the-top solution. While President/CEO *Jim Kail* believes video is still a good way to retain customers, the focus is on finding efficient ways to provide the service.

“We need to reduce the cost so that as you’re losing customers ... you lose cost,” Kail said during a panel discussion. “You want to try to get rid of that legacy equipment as much as you can so that when your revenue goes down, you’re going to [see a] corresponding drop in your expense. That’s the kind of model we’ve been looking at.”

More could join LHTC Broadband in shifting their video models to an internet-based option. **NCTC** pulled the curtain back on an OTT service dubbed Broadband TV in August at **The Independent Show**, offering a skinny package for its members to introduce to broadband-only subscribers.

**Comcast** offers a variety of traditional and internet-based options including X1 TV, the Xumo Stream Box and its \$20/month NOW TV option. It also lets customers pick from a couple of streaming service bundles. But *Ricky Frazier Jr.*, SVP of **Comcast’s**

Keystone Region, sees the battle in video extend beyond TV sets. While some areas like Pennsylvania still have a good customer segment in video in his eyes, there’s a constant battle for the attention of younger demographics that goes beyond the TV set.

“Where are eyeballs really going? It’s not necessarily traditional videos, not just over the top. There are social platforms and different ways that you’re trying to get out there to see content. So, I think again, it takes us back a little bit to connectivity and making sure that we’re doing the best we can from a connectivity perspective,” he said.

For **Armstrong** President **Jeff Ross**, he said the company takes a careful approach to investing in the video segment as it’s a service customers still desire. However, he added that the group gets smaller each year, but certain customers—particularly older ones—still watch TV the old-fashioned way.

“As long as we’re providing it and they’re paying for it, we have to provide excellent service, so we’re just trying to make sure that we invest wisely and try to take cost down,” Ross said.

Though video had its time in the spotlight, BEAD and its possible reforms garnered a chunk of the discussion Wednesday. Ross and Armstrong remain both pro-BEAD and pro-BEAD reform, predicting that more flexibility on technology is coming amid reports that the program may be made friendlier to LEO broadband. While those providers would compete with Armstrong and others, Ross said there are locations that are just too expensive for it to serve. However, he does hope labor-related pain points with BEAD are addressed, noting

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that Pennsylvania grapples with the issue of prevailing wage.

LHTC Broadband's Kail is growing more frustrated the longer the program remains stagnant. "It's been out there for three and a half years and nobody's been connected. That should tell you everything you need to know about another large bureaucracy setup," Kail said, advocating for regulatory red tape to be removed. "Just get out of the way and let the people who know how to do this, do it ... You've got to take care of the customer. We don't need a regulator to tell us how to do that."

Frazier said his division at Comcast is waiting to see what next steps are laid out, but it's on standby to meet any new or adjusted parameters. Outside of BEAD, he hopes more help arrives to remove barriers to rural broadband expansion. The hot topics of permitting processes and pole attachments are two areas Frazier said should receive adequate attention, reiterating a point Kail made earlier about utility companies not having much of an incentive to work with cable operators. That comes into play when it hinders projects that lie outside of a company's traditional territory.

"I think some of it too, is that some of the companies that we're trying to partner with, we're [moving] pretty fast, I think, based on their standards in some cases," Frazier said. "I think the other thing is, they have been successful over the years of being a bit in the background. They like to support whatever is needed out there, but they don't necessarily try to make a splash publicly. Sometimes trying to bring them into the collaborative fold ... I think we could use some help there."

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## JUST RELEASED: CABLEFAX 100

The wait is over. **Cablefax: The Magazine's** annual [CFX 100 edition](#) hit the streets today. **Charter's** *Chris Winfrey* and *Rich DiGeronimo* took the #1 spot in a revamped issue that merged Content Leaders and Operations Leaders into one ranking under the theme "The Great Re-bundling." It's a hat tip to hybrid linear and DTC packages as well as continued experimentation in the video space. This year, we asked our 100 honorees about everything from the last concert they attended (high likelihood it was at The Sphere) to what the definition is of a bundle in 2025. They also offered their takes on whether wireless or LEO is a greater competitive threat and what work culture looks like in 2030. But they aren't the only ones who got to share their hot takes. The magazine features the inaugural CFX Reader Survey with our audience weighing in on hot topics such as linear TV, emerging job trends and more.

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## POLICY TALK AT PENNSYLVANIA BROADBAND SUMMIT

If everything that's been transpiring in D.C. this year feels like a vortex of uncertainty, you're not alone. With a new administra-

tion, BEAD idling in reform purgatory and executive decisions being tested through courts, there's a laundry list of issues that both associations and operators themselves are trying to wrap their heads around. But those closest to the action in the nation's capital have been watching a level of federal upheaval that hasn't been seen in quite some time, if not ever. "Much of what we try to do in D.C. is just figure out what's going on, what does it mean and who are the people that are making the decisions. I can't undersell how much has been upended in the last few months. Not necessarily in our world, but it leads into a lot of the stuff that we have to do, and what we have to figure out," *Alex Minard*, VP, State Legislative Counsel for **NCTA**, said during a session at BCAP's Summit. Minard was alongside *Brian Hurley*, **ACA Connects** SVP, Legal and Regulatory Affairs, who echoed Minard's sentiments and added ACAC is still sifting through some of the decisions that have been made in the infant months of President *Trump's* second term. Both he and Minard were surprised at the administration's approach to BEAD and the decision to not pause it because it allowed states to get further down the line in their respective application process. Another topic surrounded with anticipation is spectrum, especially since mobile operators and fixed wireless providers are becoming larger competitors to cable folks. Minard mentioned Congress trying to find ways to cut taxes, and while that sounds great on paper, it means they have to figure out how to offset that—which is where spectrum auction comes into play. "How much money does Congress need to raise? How much do they think they can get out of a spectrum auction, of which there are different varieties?" Minard said. Hurley pointed out broadcasters' ongoing effort to have broadcast ownership rules eliminated, flagging that if the FCC goes down that route, there will be an impact on retrans. "[If] broadcasters consolidate, they get control over two, three, four stations in a market. That increases their leverage in those negotiations, and we see this as higher retrans prices and ultimately, higher consumer prices."

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## MEADOR SWORN IN AT FTC

*Mark Meador* was officially sworn in at the **FTC** on Wednesday. **Digital Progress Institute** President *Joel Thayer* was named as his chief of staff. In addition to founding his own law firm, Thayer served as a legal clerk for **FCC** Chairman *Ajit Pai* and **FTC** Commissioner *Maureen Ohlhausen*. Meador was confirmed by the Senate last week on a 50-46 vote. The FTC's two Democratic commissioners—*Rebecca Slaughter* and *Alvaro Bedoya*—were ousted by President Trump and have filed a lawsuit alleging that their firings were violations of federal law and Supreme Court precedent. On Wednesday, the White House fired two Democratic board members of the National Credit Union Administration, with



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

### Cox Mobile Phone Case Competition

Cox Communications and the Boys & Girls Clubs of America have been partners for almost half a century, and the two organizations recently celebrated the 20th anniversary of Cox Innovation Labs being rolled out in Clubs across the country. The labs help bridge the gap when it comes to equal access to the latest technology and encourage kids to fuel their interest in STEM and beyond. That’s why Cox and BGCA leaned into creativity when they wanted to celebrate the 20-year milestone, doing so through a phone case design contest that donned the theme “A World Within Reach.”



The contest was first unveiled in October and presented a \$25,000 scholarship for the grand prize recipient. In addition to a scholarship, the winning case would then be brought to life by OtterBox before those cases featuring the design were made available to purchase in Cox Mobile retail stores and online. A portion of those proceeds will be donated to BGCA.

“Our goal for this contest is to highlight the importance of digital access in supporting community growth and developing the next generation of leaders,” Tony Krueck, Cox Communications’ SVP, Residential Mobile & Product, told CFX. “The contest specifically highlights the need for young people to have both the opportunity to use technology and the ongoing education around it to be safe and successful.”



After 22 BGCA club members were spotlighted as regional finalists and given a tech package valued at over \$500 as a reward, the contest’s first-ever winner was chosen: Gracie A., who’s part of the Acadiana Boys & Girls Club in Louisiana. She said her case, titled “Hands of the World,” celebrates how people from around the world can uplift one another.



While the \$25,000 scholarship will help Gracie in her pursuit of becoming a forensic scientist, the club she’s a member of will get a boost too. The Acadiana chapter is getting a \$25,000 grant that’ll be used to open a new Cox Innovation Lab. Krueck is excited for members—in addition to Gracie—being able to support their schoolwork, overall digital literacy and personal interests.

The contest isn’t fully wrapped up yet. Twenty-one finalists are up for the Cox Mobile Fan Favorite contest, where the winner will receive a \$5,000 scholarship. [Check out the designs](#) before voting closes on Friday.

– Noah Ziegler

critics, including Senate Banking Ranking Member Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) calling it the latest attempt to undermine independent agencies.

### FIBER FRENZY

Texas-based **FiberLight** has a definitive agreement to acquire **Metro Fiber Networks**, a fiber provider serving Richmond and Virginia Beach. The transaction will expand FiberLight’s footprint with a high-capacity fiber route connecting the Virginia Beach cable landing station—a major subsea hub supporting TransAtlantic and US-LATAM traffic—directly to Richmond, a growing hyperscale and government data center market. FiberLight is owned by a consortium led by global infrastructure investment firm Morrison, together with co-shareholders Australian Retirement Trust and a managed client of UBS Asset Management.

### RATINGS

**Paramount+** has been racking up the ratings wins, with “1923’s” S2 finale delivering 14 million global viewers in its first seven days. It joins “Landman” and “Tulsa King” as the top three global series of all time for Paramount+ and the full season is up 46% in comparison to S1.

### ON THE CIRCUIT

Tune in tomorrow at 5pm ET for the **Spring 2025 Interactive Case Competition**. Top graduate school teams from Pace University, Drexel and NYU will present their case solutions to promote broadband equity. The panel of judges includes our own *Amy Maclean* as well as longtime media and tech leader *Nomi Bergman* and **Charter** SVP, Business Planning *Paul Woelk*. RSVP to watch the virtual competition [here](#).

### PEOPLE

**Charter** promoted *Chris Fulton* to SVP, Customer Operations and Experience for Spectrum Business. He succeeds *Greg King*, who is retiring after 30 years in the industry. Fulton, who was previously Regional VP, Field Operations, for Spectrum’s Northwest Region begins the role immediately and will be based in Stamford.

Think about that for a minute...

Stepping Back

Commentary by Steve Effros

Sometimes it's a good idea to step back and take a broader view of an issue, policy, regulation or, yes, even a belief and consider whether it still has validity. To be sure, in all of those cases someone thought there was a valid reason to adopt it in the first place. But that may no longer be the case. Reconsideration can be valuable, so long as it's measured, not dogmatic, and honest.

I have to admit that the FCC's "Delete, Delete, Delete" mantra in its latest rulemaking proceeding does not seem to suggest a "measured" approach, but we can hope. The first set of comments in the proceeding just flooded the Commission. Not surprisingly, everyone has a great idea of what regulations should be gotten rid of. My favorite, from the cable point of view, is "must carry." I've been doing battle with that one for over 40 years! Do I think the Commission will actually do that? No. They probably can't, since it's part of a statute that only Congress could change. But they certainly could articulate why it's no longer in the public interest, and why it actually, from a policy perspective, is damaging.

Leaving aside the Constitutional arguments, "must carry" just doesn't make sense anymore. Requiring cable (but not "streaming") carriage of all local broadcast stations upon demand, and requiring consumers to buy a "basic tier" that includes those channels is simply unworkable. A consumer who has a cell phone (the vast majority of us) can get "tornado warnings" far more efficiently than the government relying on multiple local broadcast station weather reports. Local news is now far more prevalent on social networks than on local broadcast stations. Yet there is still in place a massive regulatory structure that protects those local broadcasters, who are using free "beachfront property" public spectrum. Why not reclaim some of that spectrum for other needed uses? Step back.

Of course, the broadcasters are proposing eliminating restrictions on mergers and the size of telecom conglomerates. The argument is they need to get bigger, and use "their" spectrum for non-broadcast (read "data") revenue generation to compete with

the new reality of us being awash in video program availability. But the current administration appears to have a different view: very large is bad. The policy objective may now be in the direction of breaking up the "big guys," like Google, or Facebook which is currently in court with the administration actively pursuing an antitrust action saying it has gotten too large and powerful, quashing innovation. They may be right on that.

Other policy decisions are also certainly ripe for reconsideration. I have no love for self-dealing, conflicts of interest, or the like, all of which Elon Musk has now been potentially accused of, but, hey, step back. His Starlink satellite service is, indeed, far more efficient at delivering broadband to the small subset of folks who still do not have reasonable availability of that service in very rural areas. It just makes no sense to allocate public funds to "build out" fiber connections that could cost more than \$50,000 per home! Satellite delivery of broadband in those instances makes sense. Step back.

Sure, satellite broadband may not be as fast, and the LEO satellites will require constant expensive replacement, but where is the policy logic that says that everyone, including folks who choose to build a cabin on the top of a remote mountain, must have a fiber superhighway, built at public expense, to their doorstep?

All of this is going to be hotly debated as we engage in re-looking at lots of prior regulatory assumptions (many still valid) in the new light of telecommunications reality today. That's

good. But let's step back and make sure we see the whole picture.



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(Steve Effros was President of CATA for 23 years and is now an advisor and consultant to the cable industry. His views do not necessarily reflect the views of Cablefax.)

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