

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Power of Partnership: ISPs Fed Up with Grant Processes

Those attending **BCAP's Pennsylvania Broadband Summit 2025** weren't afraid to air out their resentment with the stagnation that seems to be attached to federal and state grant programs. While companies are more than welcoming of federal subsidies that chip in with high-cost projects to build to remote locations, what lacks is a general process that's thorough, accurate and most importantly, quick.

**Shentel** VP Programming, Regulatory and Business Development **Chris Kyle** said although the company feels it benefits from state-level funding, in the post-COVID years, it's found federal funding to be a challenging area. And when competing companies in programs get awarded money but fail to fulfill requirements, there's no solid system to reclaim those dollars.

"The government is not in a good place to recapture that money. That is a huge gap right now," Kyle said during a panel. "Effectively, what I would tell everyone is they don't want to deal with the problems that come with this money, especially when it's administered at a federal level, when things go wrong."

Shentel is currently building out \$80 million worth of state-provided funding. At the same time, Kyle has seen numerous companies in states Shentel operates in accept funds because they viewed it as "free money," but they're now "in the process of failing miserably."

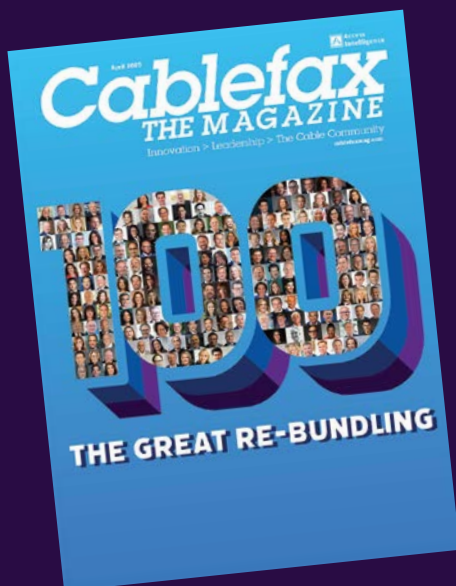
At one time, **Comcast** held the stance that it wouldn't accept government funding for anything and would fuel projects

through private capital. However, the company reversed its position when states began to introduce their own broadband entities and opened the door to billions in funding, but the process of awarding money to companies poses hurdles that lead to inaccuracies.

"You have to have the maps right. You have to make sure you're identifying the right target areas, and then make sure you have a process that enables everyone in this room, as well as many people outside this room, to be able to compete effectively," said **Chris McDonald**, SVP, Government and Regulatory Affairs for Comcast's Northeast Division.

**New Street Research's Blair Levin** published a note Thursday saying data indicates high levels of participation by Comcast and **Charter** in the prequalification process for BEAD funding eligibility. "A review of 19 states shows of the companies New Street covers, CMSCA was on the list for 17 states, CHTR in 12, **T-Mobile** in 9, and **Frontier** (which is being purchased by **Verizon**) appears on the list for 5 states, largely following the state footprint of existing operations," he wrote. "**SpaceX** was on the pre-qualified list for 14 states, while **Amazon's Kuiper** qualified and submitted applications in 10 of the 19 states."

Only four states haven't started the prequalification process. Three have completed it, and 25 have closed their application window with selections pending. Levin said it appears that the **Commerce Department** is targeting mid-May for an update on its rigorous review of the BEAD program. It's not clear what the verdict will be, but New Street thinks the most likely outcome



## JUST RELEASED

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would be that states are forced to rebid and impose a federal high-cost threshold that would shift funds from fiber to satellite or that states would have to eliminate some requirements, but otherwise allow the results of the bidding process to stand with only marginal adjustments.

“Commerce clearly wants to do the first. If it wanted to do the second, it could do so immediately and stop the now nearly 100-day delay caused by the *Trump* Administration,” Levin wrote. “But we think Commerce is developing an increased appreciation of the political, administrative and political risks of doing the first, which experts predict would add at least 12-18 months of further delay to getting shovels in the ground.

Of course, with big money involved, challenges are a part of the process for grants. Kyle noted that Shentel hasn’t been keen to submit formal complaints against companies in the past, but it’s something the operator is talking about nowadays. He revealed that Shentel did in fact go to the FCC last month, but didn’t disclose specific details. Overall, the operator has had extensive internal debates about whether to make complaints publicly known in order to preserve relationships with stakeholders, but the necessary reform—including permitting—isn’t coming. “But yet, we’re not meeting our timelines on how we need to go about doing so. That’s what’s happening inside of Shentel right now,” Kyle said. “We’re kind of in an abusive relationship.”

McDonald shared the frustration of one player disrupting the execution of plans, saying those moments are when state broadband offices, local officials and beyond need to step in.

Region *Ricky Frazier Jr.* voiced his excitement about how AI works with managing its network. Comcast has its Projects Janus and Genesis. Janus is an initiative to use cloud and AI/machine learning to help manage issues inside the back end of the network, and Genesis is Comcast’s effort to upgrade networks to deliver multi-gig symmetrical speeds. In a later session, Comcast Cable EVP/Chief Network Officer *Elad Nafshi* talked about taking human error out of the equation. “99.7% of the changes that we make on our network are fully automated,” he said. “To put that in perspective, we’re able to implement over 350,000 software on our network in 2024.” **Armstrong** President *Jeff Ross* focused on the customer service aspects that AI enhances and how quickly it can digest information to become a stronger resource. It’s led to Armstrong’s employees being able to offer solutions at a faster rate, but in Ross’ view, the growth of AI and modern technology in general is just starting. “The amount of processing that is being developed now, to be able to handle these things, are going to generate tools for us that I don’t even think we’re thinking about now,” Ross said. “There’s all kinds of information that we’re able to collect, not in a creepy way, but in how the network is operating, and the ability to process that and proactively find customer problems.” For a smaller operator like **LHTC Broadband**, President/CEO *Jim Kail*—who quipped he doesn’t excited about too many things—is intrigued by the vast areas AI can be utilized in. One area it can’t replace, though, is human touch. “A machine can be polite and everything else, but none of it’s real. None of it means anything, just like when somebody’s reading off the script and you say, ‘Have a nice day,’” he said.

## GET TO RIPPING AND REPLACING

The **FCC** said it has now borrowed the \$3.08 billion it was authorized to borrow from the U.S. Treasury in December through the National Defense Authorization Act for its Rip and Replace program. The money is set to be paid back from an FCC auction of AWS-3 spectrum. “With this further allocation, recipients should be able to move swiftly to fulfill their removal, replacement, and disposal work under the Secure Networks Act and Program rules,” the FCC said. The program reimburses providers for the removal of equipment from **Huawei** and **ZTE** as well as the purchase of replacement goods. It was created in 2021 and funded with \$1.9 billion in appropriations, but it soon became clear that there was a shortfall to cover eligible recipients.

## OPERATORS PUTTING AI TO WORK

It wouldn’t be an event nowadays without discussing AI and the ways it can be integrated into business operations. At **BCAP’s Pennsylvania Broadband Summit 2025**, Comcast SVP, Keystone

## NAB CELEBRATES GOOGLE AD TECH RULING

Broadcasters are among those applauding Thursday’s federal court ruling that found **Google** monopolized the market on some online ad tech that places ads across the web, and reminding folks once again of their view that local stations are hampered by legacy regulations while Big Tech is largely unregulated. “As policymakers and regulators consider the implications of this ruling, we urge them to recognize that the same Big Tech dominance harming digital publishers is also undermining the advertising revenue local broadcasters rely on to serve their communities,” **NAB** President and CEO *Curtis LeGeyt* said in a statement. “We are encouraged that the **FCC**, under Chairman *Carr’s* leadership, is taking steps to modernize its rules and look forward to swift action that begins to level the competitive playing field.” On Thursday, the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia issued a 115-page ruling that found Google had monopolized power in the publisher ad server and ad exchange markets for open-web display advertising. “For over a decade, Google has

tied its publisher ad server and ad exchange together through contractual policies and technological integration, which enabled the company to establish and protect its monopoly power in these two markets. Google further entrenched its monopoly power by imposing anticompetitive policies on its customers and eliminating desirable product features,” Judge *Leonie Brinkema* wrote.

**HASTINGS SHIFTS NETFLIX ROLE**

And away we go with 1Q25 earnings reports. **Netflix** kicked things off Thursday by posting \$10.54 billion in revenue, good for a 12.5% increase YOY. Operating income settled at \$3.35 billion, net income was \$2.9 billion and Netflix finished the quarter with \$2.66 billion in free cash flow. This quarter, Netflix released series such as “Adolescence” as well as films “Back in Action,” “Ad Vitam” and “Counterattack.” It also deployed its ad tech platform in the U.S. and remains on track to introduce it to other international markets in the coming months. No sub numbers were disclosed after Netflix previously announced it was no longer reporting paid memberships on a quarterly basis, opting to make announcements as it crosses key milestones. Snuck in at the end of Netflix’s shareholder letter was news that *Reed Hastings* moved from Executive Chairman to Chairman of the Board and a non-executive director. In a separate move, Netflix’s longest-standing independent director *Tim Haley* notified the company he won’t stand for re-election. Haley had been with Netflix since 1998. Next quarter, Netflix expects \$11.04 billion in revenue, \$3.68 billion in operating income and \$3.06 billion in net income.

**INDIANA FEVER STICKS WITH TEGNA**

**TEGNA**-owned **WTHR** still has the Fever, the Indiana Fever, that is. The Indianapolis **NBC** affiliate inked a multi-year extension of its broadcast agreement with the **WNBA** team. **WTHR** and **WALV**, **TEGNA**’s **MeTV** affiliate, will air 18 games locally. **TEGNA** said last season’s Fever games on **WTHR** were watched in nearly two-thirds more homes than nationally televised matchups, boasting a 63% household ratings increase over national network games. The Fever recently announced it will have 41 of 44 of its games appear on national television. With all but three games airing nationally, the total marks a franchise high for most national TV games in Fever history as well as the most for a single team in **WNBA** history.

**FIBER FRENZY**

More than 2,000 households in the rural communities of Wells and Winnebago, Minnesota, now have access to multi-gig and symmetrical speed broadband via **Mediacom**. The operator is offering a 300 Mbps downstream/100 Mbps upstream tier, as well as a 1000 Mbps symmetrical plan and a 2000 Mbps down and/1000 Mbps up offering. **Mediacom** will also continue to offer a low-cost broadband plan for qualifying low-income households that provides speeds of 100 Mbps down by 20 Mbps up for \$14.99/month. – **Fybe** introduced on-the-go WiFi in downtown Edenton, North Carolina. It installed designated hotspots that can be accessed via QR codes in surrounding areas at no cost. – **Bluepeak**’s fiber services are now live for its first group of customers in Okmulgee, Oklahoma. Additional neighborhoods in the area will go online as construction continues, but residents can get up to 5 Gbps speeds while businesses can get 10 Gbps.

**SPORTS RATINGS**

Maybe **MLB** and **ESPN**’s opt-out sparked heightened fan interest in Sunday Night Baseball, or it could just be the *Shohei Ohtani* effect. This week’s Cubs vs Dodgers game had an average audience of 1.95 million on **ESPN**, making it the most-watched **MLB** game across all platforms so far this season. It’s also up 30% compared to Sunday Night Baseball’s full-season average last year and up 50% for the P18-49 demo in particular. Ratings peaked with 2.45 million viewers at 9:30pm. Also on **ESPN** this week was the **WNBA** Draft, which averaged 1.25 million viewers. While that’s down from the 2.45 million who tuned into last year’s event, it’s the second most-viewed **WNBA** Draft of all time and still a 119% improvement compared to the 2023 Draft. Additionally, Monday’s show was the most-viewed program across all TV among M18-34, M18-49 and P18-34, in addition to being the top cable program for M25-54, P18-49 and P25-54. “**WNBA** Countdown” led into the Draft with 647,000 viewers.

**EDITORS’ NOTE**

**Cablefax Daily** will not publish Friday, April 18, and Monday, April 21. Your next issue will be delivered on Tuesday, April 22. In the meantime, check out **Cablefax: The Magazine**’s recently released **CFX 100**, showcasing the industry’s power players amid the great re-bundling. Stay tuned to [Cablefax.com](http://Cablefax.com) as well for any breaking news updates.

BASIC CABLE		
P2+ PRIME RANKINGS*		
(04/07/25-04/13/25)		
MON-SUN	MC	MC
	US	US AA
	AA%	(000)
<b>FNC</b>	<b>0.840</b>	<b>2664</b>
<b>MSNBC</b>	<b>0.379</b>	<b>1201</b>
<b>ESPN</b>	<b>0.247</b>	<b>782</b>
<b>HGTV</b>	<b>0.197</b>	<b>624</b>
<b>CNN</b>	<b>0.181</b>	<b>574</b>
<b>FOOD</b>	<b>0.154</b>	<b>489</b>
<b>HIST</b>	<b>0.150</b>	<b>475</b>
<b>TBSC</b>	<b>0.148</b>	<b>468</b>
<b>INSP</b>	<b>0.143</b>	<b>455</b>
<b>TNT</b>	<b>0.140</b>	<b>445</b>
<b>HALL</b>	<b>0.128</b>	<b>405</b>
<b>USA</b>	<b>0.126</b>	<b>400</b>
<b>TLC</b>	<b>0.126</b>	<b>400</b>
<b>DISC</b>	<b>0.117</b>	<b>371</b>
<b>TVLAND</b>	<b>0.105</b>	<b>332</b>
<b>NWSMX</b>	<b>0.091</b>	<b>289</b>
<b>ID</b>	<b>0.088</b>	<b>279</b>
<b>GSN</b>	<b>0.087</b>	<b>274</b>
<b>HALLMY5</b>	<b>0.086</b>	<b>272</b>
<b>BRAVO</b>	<b>0.083</b>	<b>264</b>
<b>AMC</b>	<b>0.081</b>	<b>258</b>
<b>WETV</b>	<b>0.077</b>	<b>243</b>
<b>LIFE</b>	<b>0.076</b>	<b>242</b>
<b>A&amp;E</b>	<b>0.075</b>	<b>237</b>
<b>REELZ</b>	<b>0.065</b>	<b>206</b>
<b>FX</b>	<b>0.064</b>	<b>203</b>
<b>PRMNT</b>	<b>0.062</b>	<b>197</b>
<b>NAN</b>	<b>0.061</b>	<b>193</b>
<b>NATGEO</b>	<b>0.058</b>	<b>185</b>
<b>OXY</b>	<b>0.055</b>	<b>174</b>
<b>ADSM</b>	<b>0.054</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>COM</b>	<b>0.051</b>	<b>161</b>
<b>BET</b>	<b>0.050</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>SDNCE</b>	<b>0.047</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>LMN</b>	<b>0.046</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>TRAVEL</b>	<b>0.046</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>SYFY</b>	<b>0.046</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>FETV</b>	<b>0.046</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>MTV</b>	<b>0.045</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>CNBC</b>	<b>0.044</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>GOLF</b>	<b>0.042</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>HLN</b>	<b>0.042</b>	<b>132</b>
<b>FRFM</b>	<b>0.041</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>HBO</b>	<b>0.041</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>ESPN2</b>	<b>0.039</b>	<b>124</b>
<b>APL</b>	<b>0.038</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>IFC</b>	<b>0.036</b>	<b>114</b>

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