

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Light it Up: FBA Works to Keep Fiber Front and Center

The uncertainty over the \$42.5 billion BEAD program hangs over the **Fiber Connect** conference in Nashville like an unwanted party crasher.

**Fiber Broadband Association** President/CEO Gary Bolton addressed it head-on in his remarks Monday, kicking off the convention: “We see some new challenges ahead based on the changing priorities to the BEAD program, where the value of a campaign donor can reset public policy. What gives me confidence that we will connect every home with fiber is that I have some friends too—over 5,000 of you here at Fiber Connect.” The association pushed hard to get fiber recognized as the preferred technology in BEAD—now there’s talk of satellite broadband getting a bigger chunk of funding.

On Friday, Senate Minority Leader *Charles Schumer* (D-NY) was joined by Democratic Commerce members *Maria Cantwell* (D-WA) and *Ben Ray Lujan* (D-NM) in a letter urging President *Trump* and Commerce Secretary *Howard Lutnick* to end additional delays and onerous changes. “States must maintain the flexibility to choose the highest quality broadband options, rather than be forced by bureaucrats in Washington to funnel funds to *Elon Musk’s Starlink*, which lacks the scalability, reliability and speed of fiber or other terrestrial broadband solutions,” they wrote.

FBA’s Bolton called out how some states have waited months to put shovels in the ground. Last month, **NTIA** granted a 90-

day extension for states to submit their final proposals for the broadband deployment funding initiative in anticipation of forthcoming programmatic changes. “Some states are being asked to remove fiber locations with fiber awards to make room for LEO satellites. This is more than disappointing. It is unacceptable,” he said. “When government gambles on anything less than fiber, taxpayers end up subsidizing these locations over and over again until they get fiber.”

The theme of this year’s Fiber Connect is “Light It Up,” which could also serve as a rallying cry for BEAD. But the gathering also showcases the often-extreme conditions providers face when delivering fiber to the unserved. Those complications can include everything from remote locations to giraffes. Yes, giraffes.

“We do have some very unique areas that we serve in Texas. We have people who want to collect giraffes and zebras and rhinoceroses,” **Bandera Electric Cooperative** CEO *Bill Hetherington* said during a panel discussion. “What’s funny is giraffes are herd animals. So, you can’t just have one giraffe. You have to have a herd of giraffes. We’ve all had problems with squirrels eating fiber insulation. Well, guess what? Seriously, giraffes actually like fiber too, and they have the structure that they can actually get to the fiber. Ours is all aerial, and so it’s quite an interesting challenge.”

Giraffes might not be the norm, but there are plenty of other challenges, particularly for **Hawaiian Telcom**, which has pledged to be the first fully fiber-enabled state by the end of

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Telecom & Fiber Leaders,  
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2026. The most remote location it has built to so far is an island called Molokai that is half the land mass size of Nashville with a population of about 3,000. “Just to get the fiber itself there, we had to bring a container load of fiber from the West Coast, unload it, put it on another barge that only goes once a week to the island,” said *Jason Thune*, Hawaiian Telcom’s VP, Fiber Strategy & Development. “It’s the same thing with our line trucks. You can only fly there on the Cessna Caravan. So, it’s nine passenger seats on a propeller plane. It’s \$200 round trip. It is not the cheapest place to build. And then in some critical locations, there’s a one-lane road that we can only go on a few hours a day, and have to hike up a mountain to make it happen.”

Hawaiian Telcom used federal RDOF money to build out to the remote island, and so far, the take rate is well above 50%. That’s particularly notable when you consider that many times people who live in extremely remote areas do so because they would like to be disconnected, noted *Andrew Butcher*, President of **Maine Connectivity Authority**. “That also breeds a very resilient ethos and resourceful mindset. So I think all the more reason where you see communities that sort of set their sights on what it means to be connected. It ensures that people can stay and work there, that their kids can stay there,” he said.

The remote Maine island of Isle au Haut recently had a sub-sea cable fiber installed. Butcher described how the community showed up in droves to make sure the project happened, even helping source a different barge operator because it required a special set of equipment.

“Some of these people, they want to live in these remote areas, but at the same time they say they want to be off the grid and at the same time, we get tons of calls saying, ‘When are you going to bring fiber to my community?’” explained Thune. “These people live in the lowest income areas in the state, and a lot of times flights [to leave] get canceled. So, if we can bring telehealth and show them the benefit of it... that’s our commitment to the community.”

## SPECTRUM ON BLACKBURN’S MIND

Sen. *Marsha Blackburn* (R-TN) might have missed the fact she was at a fiber conference, spending a chunk of her fireside chat Monday pushing for more spectrum to be auctioned. She’s called on **NTIA** to do an audit of how much spectrum the federal government is using, arguing that a lot of it isn’t being utilized. “Now the big beautiful bill... we’re trying to make it more beautiful for you all. It’s got 600 MHz in there for auction. We think that’d be about \$80 billion. I’ve told *Ted*

*Cruz*, who has the gavel at Commerce, we need 1200 MHz, not 600,” Blackburn said. “We need to pull spectrum forward that is not being utilized, and we need to get it out to the private sector so that we can begin to do some build out and create that environment for innovation to take place.” She got the fiber crowd’s attention when she talked about the need to simplify permitting for fiber builds. “One thing we’re looking at doing is to put shot clocks on actions so when a permit is filed, that agency has a designated period of time to take an action, or if they get to the end of the time and the time runs out, then it’s deemed approved. And this way it will speed up the work of these agencies,” Blackburn said. The lawmaker didn’t give any indication when we might see the Senate vote to confirm *Arielle Roth* as NTIA Administrator and *Olivia Trusty* as **FCC** Commissioner, blaming Democrats for dragging out proceedings for **Trump’s** nominees. “We’ve never done this. We would unblock and then we would vote tranches of nominees and get them into positions, but now they’ve decided they want to vote every single one, and it’s a stalling mechanism. It is politicizing a process that has always been a bipartisan approval process,” she said. “You need to allow the will of the people to take place, and so we’re trying to reach an agreement that would allow us to move these nominees forward.”

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## AMG STATIONS UP FOR SALE

**Allen Media Group** has retained the global investment bank **Moelis & Company** as it looks to sell its portfolio of broadcast stations that span 21 markets. *Byron Allen*, Founder/Chairman/CEO of AMG, said the sale proceeds “will be used to significantly reduce our debt.” Moelis will serve as AMG’s financial advisor and evaluate financial and strategic alternatives for the company. AMG has spent more than \$1 billion in acquiring various **ABC**, **CBS**, **Fox** and **NBC** stations over the past six years. However, Allen said the company has gotten “numerous inquiries and written offers” for most of its stations, and with cost-cutting measures being made in the aforementioned effort to bring down debt, he feels now is the time to explore a sale. The announcement follows [layoffs](#) that hit AMG last month, which impacted an undisclosed number of employees.

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## FIBER CONNECT NOTEBOOK

**Fiber Broadband Association** used its annual conference to debut the documentary film “ThoughtWaves,” which chronicles the rise of fiber broadband. The 40-minute film features interviews with 30 luminaries, including **Cisco’s Kirk Lougheed**,

**New Street Research** analyst and author of the 2010 National Broadband Plan *Blair Levin*, former **FCC** Chairman *Ajit Pai* and *Vince Cerf*, the inventor of TCP/IP protocols. There was a **Fiber Connect** screening of the film Monday evening, with FBA planning on entering it into the festival circuit. “It’s a story 50 years in the making, a riveting lifetime capsule of the infrastructure story of our lifetime,” Bolton said. – How do you get attendees to stick around for the last panel of the morning? Make the moderator *Sean Evans*, host of “Hot Ones,” the **YouTube** series where he interviews celebrities as they eat increasingly spicy chicken wings. In the hot seat for the Fiber Connect edition were **TAK Broadband** CEO *Trent Edwards* and **Nokia** VP, Broadband Partners *David Eckard*. They made it through all 10 wings—with only one mild swear word after sampling *Da Bomb Beyond Insanity*. And between bites, the two were able to field questions about innovation, what they’re most proud of and what they wish policymakers understood. “I thought I made it to the top of the mountain sitting across from my childhood idol *Conan O’Brien*, being considered for a Primetime Emmy and parodied on *Saturday Night Live*. But little did I know that one day I would be invited to Fiber Connect 2025,” Evans joked.

## MORE DISNEY LAYOFFS

Another round of layoffs hit **Disney** on Monday, with this iteration reportedly involving several hundred employees globally. The impacts stretch across Disney Entertainment’s film and TV marketing divisions as well as TV publicity, casting and development. Corporate finance positions were included, too. No full teams were shuttered as part of the layoffs.

## GRASSLEY, KLOBUCHAR CALL FOR CARRIAGE OF C-SPAN 2

The call for vMVPDs to carry **C-SPAN** has grown recently from legislators, but Monday’s focus was on its secondary network **C-SPAN 2**. It marked 39 years since airing its first Senate broadcast, and to commemorate, Sens. *Chuck Grassley* (R-IA) and *Amy Klobuchar* (D-MN) penned a resolution urging all TV providers—including streaming services—to carry C-SPAN 2. “Transparency brings accountability, and C-SPAN’s coverage of the Senate has certainly brought transparency to the people’s business. Our resolution celebrates C-SPAN 2’s nearly 40-year commitment to give Americans a front row seat in the Senate, all without accepting a dime of taxpayer dollars,” Grassley said. C-SPAN 2 has hosted more than 43,830 hours of Senate proceedings since launching in 1986. That includes over 169,000 speeches and 23,493 roll call votes. Monday’s resolution may be an effort to get C-SPAN more aligned with modern viewership dynamics, but the network also rolled out new on-air graphics to start the week. “Modern and built with viewers in mind. New look. Same C-SPAN,” the network [wrote](#) on **X**.

## NEWSMAX JOINING RUSSELL 2000

As **Newsmax** continues with its journey on the **NYSE**, the network said it expects to list on the U.S. small-cap Russell 2000 Index later this month. The move will go into effect once the market opens on June 30, coming as part of the 2025 Russell indexes reconstitution. The Russell 2000 Index is made up of the 2,000 smallest companies that are part of the broader Russell 3000 Index, which includes about 98% of the overall stock market. Approximately \$10.6 trillion in assets are benchmarked under Russell’s U.S. indexes. Membership for indexes is determined primarily by objective, market-capitalization rankings and style attributes. Newsmax [first went public](#) on the NYSE in March.

## CABLE PIONEERS CLASS OF 2025

Thirty-three new members are set to be inducted into the **Cable TV Pioneers** Class of 2025 at its 59th Annual Banquet. The event will take place Sept. 28 as it returns to the nation’s capital, spotlighting leaders and trendsetters across broadband, new media, content, technology, distribution and allied fields who have made sizeable impacts on the growth of the industry. This year’s honorees are: **Mediacom**’s *Joseph Appio*, *Sheila Hall* and *Jerold Lambert*; **Comcast**’s *David A. Eng*, *Melinda Lindsley*, *Ron Orlando*, *Dan Rice*, *Kevin Taylor*, *Christine Whitaker* and *Tom Wlodkowski*; **Optimum**’s *Kristin Malaspina* and *Vic Pascarelli*; **SCTE** (EU)’s *Dr. Anthony Basham*, **All West Communications**’ *Marty Carollo*; **CableLabs**’ *Jeff Chen*; **BCAP**’s *Todd Eachus*; **Evolution Digital**’s *Chris Egan*; **Belden**’s *John Egan*; **C-SPAN**’s *Sam Feist*; **Astound Broadband**’s *John Gdovin*; consultant *Lorenz Glatz*; **Broadpeak SA**’s *Doug Hull*; **Cable One**’s *Ken Johnson*; **TV One/Urban One**’s *Alfred Liggins*; **Influential Voices**’ *Kimberly Maki*; **GTS**’ *Mike McCracken*; **INVIDI Technologies**’ *Chris O’Toole*; **Buckeye Broadband**’s *Geoffrey Shook*; **CRS Recycling Services**’ *David Showalter*; **Power & Tel**’s *Jennifer Sims*; **Stern Digital**’s *Jeremy Stern* and **Commscope**’s *Guy Sucharczuk*. *Vernon R. Gill*, who founded multiple cable companies, will be honored posthumously.

## AWARDS

The **WICT Network** revealed the Top Companies for Women to Work across content, distribution and, for the first time, technology. The companies are selected based on their score in WICT’s annual PAR survey, which measures pay equity, advancement opportunities and resources. This year’s distribution honorees are **Cable One**, **Charter**, **Comcast**, **Cox Communications** and **Midco**, while winners in the content category include **AMC Networks**, **NBCUniversal**, **REVOLT Media & TV**, **TV One** and **Warner Bros. Discovery**. **CSG** was the lone recognition among technology groups. PAR’s Survey is conducted alongside **NAMIC**’s AIM Survey and is underwritten by the **NCTA** Education Foundation, with PWC helping administer the study. The companies will be recognized at the 2025 Touchstones Luncheon, which is scheduled for Oct. 20 in NYC during WICT’s Leadership Conference.