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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

At Our Deadline: FCC Approves Paramount-Skydance Deal

FCC Chairman *Brendan Carr* spent the earlier parts of Thursday complimenting **Skydance** and its various **Paramount**-related commitments made earlier this week, and it proved to be foreshadowing on his part. The FCC approved Skydance's deal to acquire Paramount in an \$8 billion transaction, granting a series of applications that transfer FCC licenses and authorizations that apply to **CBS'** O&O broadcast stations.

"Americans no longer trust the legacy national news media to report fully, accurately, and fairly. It is time for a change," Carr said in a statement. "That is why I welcome Skydance's commitment to make significant changes at the once storied CBS broadcast network."

Regarding the pledges, of which included commitments to slash DEI and create an ombudsman for CBS, Carr said they would "enable CBS to operate in the public interest and focus on fair, unbiased and fact-based coverage."

In his press conference following Thursday's FCC Open Meeting for July, he said the promises were made on Skydance's own accord, rather than at the FCC's request. Commissioner *Anna Gomez*, however, made her disapproval of Skydance's letter—and the deal's greenlight—clear.

"After months of cowardly capitulation to this Administration, Paramount finally got what it wanted. Unfortunately, it is the American public who will ultimately pay the price for its actions," she said. "Once again, this agency is undermin-

ing legitimate efforts to combat discrimination and expand opportunity by overstepping its authority and intervening in employment matters reserved for other government entities with proper jurisdiction on these issues. Even more alarming, it is now imposing never-before-seen controls over newsroom decisions and editorial judgment, in direct violation of the First Amendment and the law."

Gomez is claiming one victory in that the three commissioners voted on the deal (2-1, natch) instead of Carr having it approved on designated authority by an agency Bureau.

We're still reading through the [order released late Thursday](#). It addresses some of the concerns levied against the deal, including the notion that Skydance would gain increased leverage against MVPDs through an expanded content library. The FCC said that argument assumes it will have such leverage and be able to exert it with respect to all CBS television stations, even as the Commission has never before found that a national market for negotiation of retransmission consent exists. Moreover, the FCC has stated that it does not believe that an increase in retransmission consent rates, by itself, is necessarily a public interest harm.

Paramount and Skydance first agreed to a deal in July of last year. It was the culmination of several months' worth of back-and-forth negotiations (with talks falling through at one point), but it still was only the beginning of the drama—hence why the deal was well beyond the usual 180-day review period.

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NO CAP - NEWSMAX, FCC'S OWNERSHIP TUG OF WAR

As the **FCC** prepares to move forward with its broadcast ownership Quadrennial Review and re-examination of the 39% audience cap, at least one influential conservative is hoping to get Republicans to rethink a deregulatory approach.

Newsmax CEO and Founder *Christopher Ruddy* came out [swinging](#) this week against an FCC proposal that would potentially loosen the national cap. He was making the rounds in Washington on Thursday when **CFX** caught up with him.

"I think as Congress focuses on it, Newsmax is going to open up their eyes. I don't think members of Congress and the Republican side are going to want big national networks coming into their local markets, owning the stations," he said, complaining that it would concentrate media into the hands of a few and squash a diversity of viewpoints. He argues that if a broadcaster is allowed to own stations reaching more than 39% of the U.S. audience, "you're going to have the *Elon Musks* and *George Soros*es of the world coming in and realizing for \$10 billion they can own the whole country." It's not just the cap, with Ruddy also taking issue with a federal court [ruling](#) this week that struck down a rule preventing broadcasters from owning two of the top four highest-rated television stations in a single market.

At a press conference Thursday after the FCC Open Meeting, Chair *Brendan Carr* touted that the Eighth Circuit ruling "makes clear the deregulatory intent that Congress had when it set the FCC down on this path of the Quadrennial Reviews. He said the congressionally mandated 2022 review of broadcast rules will move forward with the Eighth Circuit decision in mind. "We've just had these rules and regulations on the books for far too long. I think it's held back investment in local news, local journalism, in particular," said Carr. "At this point in time, the big North Star for me as a media policy matter is how do we re-empower those local TV stations, particularly relative to a lot of the national programming that's out there?"

Newsmax argues that relaxing the rules could let **ABC**, **CBS** and **NBC** own more stations and have more influence. The programmer also points to **Nexstar** using its leverage through retransmission consent to get carriage for **NewsNation**, a network that it describes as having a liberal POV. "This was something I got involved with in the proposed **Sinclair-Tribune** merger, and we were successful opposing it. It's not good for anybody. They say Republicans somehow support the lifting of the cap and Democrats oppose it, but to me it's a bipartisan issue," Ruddy said.

The FCC's lone Democrat commissioner called the Eighth Circuit ruling a mixed bag. "These issues have been clearly on the table for consideration by this administration. To me, ensuring that broadcast licenses are used in the public inter-

est to further localism, viewpoint diversity and competition needs to remain our North Star as we consider these and related issues," *Anna Gomez* told reporters Thursday. "I will work with the chairman as we move forward to make sure that we continue to make that our primary focus."

Given Ruddy's close relationship with President *Trump*, one has to wonder what sort of influence he could have on the issue. He said it's purely informational. "The President is not familiar with all of these issues, and I've always found that when he gets a lot of information, he makes really good decisions," Ruddy said. "If he doesn't know, he delegates it. And there's different points of view on a lot of issues. He should be aware of those different issues. I'm not telling him he should do one thing or another. I'm just saying here's our point of view on it. You decide."

When news broke last month that Trump met with **EchoStar** CEO *Charlie Ergen* and Carr to urge a deal on the company's wireless spectrum, both Ruddy and Newsmax were mentioned as playing some sort of role. The CEO said he's no expert on spectrum issues and isn't taking a side, but he's had a good relationship with Ergen and **DISH** over the years. So when they asked to have a meeting with Trump, he recommended them to the president. "That was it. There's nothing more to it."

Newsmax has an obvious interest in the outcome here, but it also has struck multiple carriage deals with MVPDs who fret that retransmission consent negotiations could get even more painful if stations are concentrated among a few owners. Ruddy said no MVPD has asked for his involvement on the issue, stating that retrans has a negative impact on independent networks like his. "NewsNation typically has a third of our ratings, but it gets more cable license fees than we do," he said. "Why? They have an unfair market competitive advantage and leverage over the operators, and that hurts us, but it also hurts consumers because they're able to get fees that then have to be passed on to consumers."

Ruddy is sounding the alarm at the same time Carr is telling legacy media to clean up its act. "Legacy media really needs to reorient, or they're going to continue to run into issues like Colbert, where it just doesn't make economic sense to run a partisan circus," Carr told **Fox News'** *Bill Hemmer* Thursday in an interview on "America's Newsroom."

FCC HOSTS JULY OPEN MEETING

The **FCC's** July Open Meeting on Thursday featured a busier docket than in recent months, starting with the agency voting to approve updates to its pole attachment rules in efforts to accelerate the deployment of broadband networks. Chairman *Brendan Carr* said the adjustments encourage greater collaboration between com-

munications providers and pole-owning utilities, while also forming more concrete timelines for large batch projects. “The updated rules are a good step toward establishing efficient timelines and increasing collaboration with utilities. We thank the Commissioners for their focus on empowering broadband providers,” **ACA Connects** President/CEO *Grant Spellmeyer* said in a statement. “This work will help ensure more resources are spent on building broadband infrastructure—and not on expensive and unnecessary bureaucratic delays.” **NCTA** chimed in by noting the new rules “will benefit communications providers’ broadband deployment efforts to reach unserved and underserved areas, furthering the goal of connecting every American.” Speaking of accelerating, the three-headed Commissioners’ bench decided to open a proceeding that aims to speed up the transition of copper line networks to more modern technologies. The FCC claims it’d potentially free up billions of dollars for new networks. **Public Knowledge**, on the other hand, isn’t a huge fan of the vote on transitioning away from copper networks, citing negative ramifications on providing all Americans access to 911 services. It also thinks the item would remove protections pertaining to the continued availability of basic voice service. The FCC voted to update its bidding rules for the upcoming auction of AWS-3 spectrum licenses. However, it declined to include a separate Tribal Licensing Window. “While I believe that it could have been possible for the FCC to conduct both a Tribal Licensing Window and an AWS-3 auction within the timeframe that Congress indicated, I understand that the Commission’s interpretation of Congress’s directive in this Act was to move to auction expeditiously. For these reasons I approve in part and concur in part,” Commissioner *Anna Gomez* said. The FCC also adopted rules to require wireless providers to transmit data that enables text messages sent to the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline to be routed to the closest local crisis center based on a person’s general geographical location. It moved to remove 11 rule provisions—another action **Public Knowledge** has expressed concerns about—and will seek comment on whether the FCC’s regulatory requirements are still necessary to combat telephone slamming.

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SDCC EXPERIMENTS

San Diego Comic-Con, the largest pop culture convention of the year, kicks off today, bringing with it tons of comic book and genre nerdiness as well as a hearty helping of highly anticipated TV shows. “*Alien: Earth*,” the DC Universe, **AMC**’s *Anne Rice* adaptations, “*The Walking Dead*,” and “*Star Trek*” are all of course accounted for, but as much as 2025 might seem like par for the course in terms of what programmers are bringing to the con, there are some notable standouts who are trying new things. **Hallmark**, for example, is for the very first time hosting a panel Thursday dedicated to its cozy, feel-good programming, highlighting both upcoming series and movies as well as past hits, including popular Christmas titles. While Hallmark has a very dedicated fanbase, and its collectibles have featured at the con for years, its content isn’t normally considered the traditional “nerdy” entertainment that’s front and center at the show. But the “Hallmark Hallstars” panel

makes a case by spotlighting channel stars who also have sci-fi, fantasy and superhero cred, including *Chyler Leigh* (“Supergirl”), *B.J. Britt* (“Marvel’s Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.”) and *Holland Roden* (“Teen Wolf”). “SDCC is the hub of all things fandom, making it the perfect place to unite our existing brand superfans and show that Hallmark belongs in the conversation of beloved, legendary IP,” Hallmark Chief Communications Officer *Annie Howell* told **CFX**, adding that the brand wants “this panel to show SDCC guests who might be new to our programming that Hallmark Channel is the place where their favorite actors from different backgrounds come together.” Among the titles at the panel is “*The Way Home*,” a series that features time travel, the kind of genre trope that makes congoers’ ears perk up. Meanwhile, Paramount is putting on a panel for upcoming “*NCIS*” spinoff “*Tony & Ziva*,” which is interesting when you consider *NCIS* programming tends to attract an [older audience](#) while the SDCC crowd skews a bit [younger](#). So why bring *NCIS* to San Diego? We’d guess it has something to do with the fact that this latest series offering isn’t occupying the traditional CBS primetime slot but is instead streaming exclusively on Paramount+, where more than half of users are aged 18-44 and only about 20% are 55+, [according to](#) data analytics firm Similarweb. If Paramount wants to create awareness and excitement for *NCIS*: *Tony & Ziva* with that younger streaming audience, giving it a panel and including it in the company’s annual The Lodge activation at SDCC is a good start.

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REPORT: NBCU CONSIDERS NEW SPORTS NET

Time is a flat circle, isn’t it? According to the *Wall Street Journal*, **NBCUniversal** is [looking](#) into launching a cable network centered on sports, citing people familiar with the matter. Maybe they’ll call it **NBC Sports**. It would simulcast sports content that’d also be streaming on **Peacock** and “be offered to cable and satellite distributors as part of specialty packages of similar channels” (in other words: skinny bundles). Since NBCU would view the network as a complement to Peacock, it wouldn’t offer it in widely distributed video packages. Beyond the irony of NBCU looking into launching a sports-specific cable network—NBC Sports was shut down at the very end of 2021—it’d expand the company’s platforms to showcase its live sports offering, for better or worse. While it’s another tool for promotion, another network means more fragmentation for its portfolio containing college football and basketball, **NBA** and the **Premier League**.

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C-SPAN EXEC REALIGNMENT

C-SPAN announced a senior leadership realignment as well as a new addition to the executive team, moves that the network says are “aimed at enhancing organizational focus, fostering innovation and strengthening C-SPAN’s public service in a dynamic media environment.” *Richard Weinstein* has been appointed SVP, Chief Content Officer to oversee content strategy and acquisition across the TV networks and digital platforms, develop new

programming and guide editorial innovation. *Peter Kiley* will become SVP, Chief Revenue and Product Offer to spearhead new product offerings, expand multi-platform distribution and build sustainable revenue streams. *Matt Deprey* has been promoted to SVP, CFO to lead financial operations and represent the network on its Board's Finance Committee and Audit Committee. Finally, *Heather Date* is joining the company on Aug. 4 as VP, Strategic Initiatives and Chief of Staff to coordinate high-priority strategies and projects on behalf of CEO *Sam Feist*, who said all of these changes will "ensure the long-term vitality of our mission to provide the public with trusted, nonpartisan content." C-SPAN confirmed to **CFX** that there were no departures from the company as a result of the realignment. The shakeup comes as C-SPAN continues its fight to get carriage on vMVPDs such as **YouTube TV** and **Hulu + Live**, which have yet to open their doors to the network.

XFINITY STREAMSTORE LAUNCH

Comcast launched its new StreamStore for **Xfinity** TV and Internet customers this week. A “one-stop shop” for Xfinity’s collection of streaming apps and channels as well as its catalog of movies and TV shows, the StreamStore is designed to make it easier to find, purchase and manage content on the platform and Xfinity.com. It’s also the place to find streaming bundles like StreamSaver, which includes **Apple+**, **Netflix** standard with ads and **Peacock** for \$15/month. Comcast said more streaming bundles, apps and “enhanced subscription management and activation capabilities” are coming to the StreamStore later this year.

VERSANT BOARD SET

Comcast announced the members of the first board of directors of **Versant**, the spinoff company comprising most of **NBCUniversal's** cable networks and several other digital assets. On the board are Versant CEO **Mark Lazarus**, former **Disney** Chairman of International Content and Operations **Rebecca Campbell**, **Creighton Condon** of law firm **A&O Shearman**, former **Starbucks** CEO **Michael Conway**, **Kanza AI** Founding Advisor **David Eun**, former Chairman/CEO of **The Bank of New York Mellon Corporation** **Gerald L. Hassell**, **Peter Millar** Chairman/CEO **Scott Mahoney**, **Wildcat Capital Management** founder **Len Potter** and **Maritza Montiel**, formerly Deputy CEO/Vice Chairman of **Deloitte & Touche's** U.S. Business. **David Novak**, former CEO of **Yum! Brands**, will serve as Chairman.

EVERPASS NOW ON XUMO

The **EverPass** app, a live sports streaming platform for commercial businesses, launched on Xumo Stream Box for **Spectrum Business** TV customers. The app gives businesses that subscribe to the Spectrum Sports Fan TV package seamless access to **NFL Sunday Ticket** and **Peacock** Sports Pass subscriptions via their Xumo device. EverPass is the first commercial sports streaming app to launch on Xumo.

CW BULL RIDING DEAL

The CW and Professional Bull Riders entered a multi-year agreement to make the network the exclusive broadcaster of PBR Camping World Team Series events on Saturdays and Sundays. The first broadcasts will air on Aug. 9 at 6:30pm and Aug. 10 at 2pm, with events scheduled for 10 additional weekends, concluding with the league's final championship tournament on Oct. 25-26. The live sports deal comes on the heels of **Fox Nation** inking a deal to become PBR's exclusive Friday night broadcaster, beginning Aug. 8.

FIBER FRENZY

Astound Broadband announced a \$81 million investment to upgrade and expand its fiber network infrastructure in the Lehigh Valley and northeast Pennsylvania. The ISP plans to bring multi-gig speeds to more than 315,000 households and nearly 25,000 businesses through the project, while also paving the way for future internet speeds of up to 10 Gigs. The network upgrade starts this summer, with over 185,000 addresses set for access by EOY.

CARRIAGE

Swerve TV is unveiling a women's sports-focused offering on **The Roku Channel** and **Pluto TV**. **Swerve Sports** will offer 24/7 access to content covering women's football, basketball, soccer, volleyball, softball, gymnastics, rugby and more. Swerve TV said the launch derives from two primary reasons: interest from Gen Z, and the fact that its other FAST channel—**Swerve Combat**—has a weekly women's fight night that “consistently outperformed the other six nights of the week since launching in April 2024.” Other programming on Swerve Sports will include highlights, series and films about women athletes.

BASIC CABLE		
P2+ PRIME RANKINGS*		
(07/14/25-07/20/25)		
MON-SUN	MC US AA%	MC US AA (000)
FNC	0.738	2340
ESPN	0.376	1193
MSNBC	0.283	899
HGTV	0.183	582
CNN	0.155	493
HALL	0.143	454
TBSC	0.141	446
HIST	0.135	427
INSP	0.134	424
DISC	0.133	421
USA	0.128	407
FOOD	0.116	368
GSN	0.107	338
TVLAND	0.106	338
TLC	0.105	332
HALLMYS	0.096	304
A&E	0.095	302
ID	0.089	283
LIFE	0.079	251
WETV	0.077	245
FX	0.075	237
TNT	0.073	232
BRAVO	0.069	217
NWSMX	0.064	203
NAN	0.063	199
OXY	0.062	197
ADSM	0.062	196
BET	0.061	192
REELZ	0.060	191
AMC	0.056	178
FRFM	0.054	172
COM	0.052	164
PRMNT	0.051	163
MTV	0.047	148
ESPN2	0.047	148
NATGEO	0.046	147
MGNLA	0.046	146
APL	0.046	145
TRAVEL	0.044	140
SNDNCE	0.043	137
FXX	0.042	132
FETV	0.041	132
SYFY	0.041	130
IFC	0.040	125
E!	0.038	122
LMN	0.036	113
CMT	0.034	108
*P2+ L+SD rankers are based on national Nielsen numbers. not coverage.		