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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Diss Track: Nexstar Takes Aim at Big Tech, Nielsen

Deregulation, including the hoped-for changes to the 39% national television ownership cap, is top of mind for broadcasters, and none more so than **Nexstar**, which is currently at the limit with its owned stations. All eyes are on **FCC** Chair **Brendan Carr** deleting, deleting, deleting rules so that broadcasters can continue to grow. Nexstar Chairman/CEO **Perry Sook** used his opening remarks during the company's 2Q25 earnings call to argue that dereg was more vital than ever to empower local broadcasters to fight back against fake news and biased national news networks.

"The case for local broadcast ownership deregulation remains strong and extends far beyond competitive fairness," Sook said. "It's becoming increasingly clear that bias acknowledged and now admitted in editorial coverage by legacy national networks, false information provided by AI and social media disinformation are making it almost impossible for Americans to distinguish between fact, opinion and fiction. We firmly believe that Nexstar and the local broadcast industry at large are a solution to these threats."

Broadcasters have long argued, including in media ownership [comments](#) submitted to the FCC this week, that the current cap is antiquated and prohibits the industry from competing with big tech platforms that aren't subject to similar limits. Sook named Nexstar's news operation's coverage of the central Texas floods as an example of how local broadcasters serve

communities in need of a trusted source of information in the age of social media. "Meanwhile, on big tech social media platforms, charlatans chasing clicks circulated misleading videos, some AI-generated and others recycled from unrelated disasters in different states or countries, falsely claiming to depict the central Texas floods...Unfortunately, this is just another clear example of big tech's unchecked reach and prioritization of engagement over accuracy fuels the rapid spread of fake news."

Sook also had words for **Nielsen's** monthly The Gauge reports, which have shown broadcast and cable TV viewing is shrinking in the U.S. vs streaming's steady growth. The June report marked the first time broadcast's share of TV viewing had fallen below 20% since Nielsen began publishing The Gauge. There was some silver lining, as the **NBA** Finals on **ABC** delivered the top seven telecasts in June, but Sook isn't having any of it.

"According to a 2024 TVB survey, audiences of all ages and demos are turning to our local news and to other programming, with nearly half of Nexstar's 2024 station viewership coming from non-network programming. That last point is important," Sook said. "The data reflected in that [Nielsen Gauge] report only includes information from Nielsen's national panel. It completely excludes local station viewership of local content, which we know to be substantial. If you look exclusively at national viewership of long-form ad-supported programming, the metric that matters most to advertisers, broadcasting



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and cable together account for 70% total impressions,” Sook added.

Nexstar’s net revenue was down at \$1.23 billion, a decline of \$40 million compared to the prior year quarter, or 3.2% YOY. To blame was a 9% drop YOY in ad rev, primarily due to a \$36 million decrease in political advertising to \$9 million, as well as an \$11 million reduction in non-political advertising. Sook said that softness was expected due to it being a non-election year, but that the company remained optimistic about capitalizing on the 2026 midterm election.

“Though we have yet to see a definitive turnaround in video subscriber trends, we are encouraged by consistent early signs of improvement, with good reports in recent weeks from two of our largest MVPDs,” Sook said. A bright spot for Nexstar’s cable business in June was that Nielsen ranked NewsNation the No. 1 basic cable network for YOY growth with overall viewership growing nearly 50% and by 67% among adults 25-54. “We believe NewsNation’s programming and unique, fact-based reporting is resonating with viewers who are looking for a refreshingly balanced and impartial take on the news.”

On the subject of growth and future M&A plans, Sook applauded Carr for his “vocal support” of the Eighth Circuit’s decision to vacate the duopoly rule that prohibits broadcasters from owning two of the Big Four stations in a single market. But when asked directly about Nexstar’s M&A strategy now that the conditions at the FCC seemed to be more favorable for broadcasters, Sook declined to go into details about any specific acquisition targets.

“As far as acquisition opportunity, growing our national footprint probably has more strategic importance to the company than simply doubling up in markets where we have a single station. We’re already kind of doubled up in about half of our markets,” Sook said, offering that M&A activity will depend on the best use of the company’s cash and balance sheet. “From our perspective, there are a number of conversations going on. I would just say broadly that everybody is talking to everybody. Out of that, we hope to find a love connection that would allow us to create shareholder value well beyond what would be created by simply buying back our own stock.”

One area Nexstar wants to continue to grow is its sports portfolio, including on **The CW**. Regarding plans to expand the company’s sports offerings further, “There are other opportunities out there, and we absolutely are interested in pursuing them,” said President/COO *Michael Biard* on the call. “If you look broadly at categories, college sports is one that we’re interested in. Certainly had some success with the ACC and Pac-12 [and] we have ongoing discussions with some others in that space right now, but nothing I can announce today.”

No conversation about sports goes very far without someone in the chat bringing up **Fox One** and **ESPN**, two DTC streaming services set to release on Aug. 21 and that will lean heavily on live sports, including those airing on local broadcasters. Echoing past comments, Biard remained confident that there will be harmony between broadcasters, MVPDs and these new streamers.

“We’re optimistic that they’ll be neutral and potentially a net positive for the Pay TV business,” Biard said. “Both Disney and Fox remain highly invested in the success of Pay TV, and they’ve both expressed intentionally designing their respective DTC products and business models to make them complementary to Pay TV rather than cannibalistic...Further, both have bundled these products with their Pay TV deals, making them an added feature for Pay TV subs,” a business model that Nexstar believes is a “good thing for the health and viability of Pay TV, including our business,” just as it did when Disney and Charter cut a streaming bundle deal in 2023.

He added that Nexstar “hoped Fox is successful in targeting the cordless audience because the 24/7 feeds of our Fox stations, the largest group of Fox affiliates, will be included in Fox One. Subscribers of that product in all of our Fox markets will enjoy Fox just as Pay TV subscribers do today, and that is via our stations.”

WBD'S DISCOVERY GLOBAL VISION

Warner Bros. Discovery said in its 2Q25 shareholder letter that it was “very pleased with the progress” made by its Global Linear Networks segment in “optimizing its global content portfolio and distribution profile to drive value to our distribution partners and consumers,” but the numbers on the linear front didn’t look so rosy. Total revenue for the Global Linear Networks business, which is largely made up of cable assets (not including **HBO**) that are being spun off into a separate company called **Discovery Global** in 2026, was down by 7% YOY at \$2.4 billion, with ad rev down by 12% YOY at \$1.9 billion. The company blamed the linear advertising decline on a 23% drop in domestic audience as well as the absence of **NCAA** March Madness broadcasts this year and the **NHL** Stanley Cup Finals. WBD CFO *Gunnar Wiedenfels*, who will head up Discovery Global once the split happens, discussed the vision for the new company during the Q&A portion of an earnings call Thursday. He said that on the entertainment side, “we are reimagining the U.S. networks portfolio as a content engine around very strong unscripted brands and not so much as sort of just traditional linear networks. As part of that, all modernization forms will play a greater role, and content

licensing is definitely one tool in the box here.” Re sports, he said that portfolio is “going to be even more important” as Discovery Global becomes its own entity. “We will continue to be looking at investments with the same discipline that we have in the past,” Wiedenfels said, adding that it’s unlikely that the company will sub-license sports rights out, naming its investment in college football specifically. “I do believe that there are very significant pockets of growth and opportunity, and we’ll work really hard over the next half year to identify those and get in position to deliver what I think is going to be a business with much more longevity than what the market sees right now,” Wiedenfels answered when asked about growth opps for Discovery Global. WBD delivered very modest total revenue growth of 1% YOY at \$9.8 billion in 2Q25. Distribution revenues were relatively unchanged from the prior year quarter at \$4.8 billion, as growth in global streaming subs was offset by continued linear pay TV sub declines. Ad rev was down by 9% YOY to \$2.21 billion, with ad-lite sub growth offset by domestic linear audience declines. Net income available was \$1.6 billion, with Total Adjusted EBITDA coming in at \$2 billion, a 9% increase YOY, primarily due to growth in the Streaming and Studios segments, partially offset by linear.

GOMEZ: ‘I DON’T KNOW WHY I HAVE NOT BEEN FIRED’

With a handful of independent federal agencies like the **FTC**, **NLRB** and **EEOC** having their Democratic leaders removed from their posts by President *Trump*, **FCC** Commish *Anna Gomez* has been asked more than once if she thinks she’s next. Gomez often points to the agency’s requirement of having a quorum as the primary reason for her title remaining untouched, but she’s still treating the scenario as if it could transpire at any moment. “I check my email every day to see if I’m still coming into work that day,” she said during the FCC’s Open Commission Meeting on Thursday. “This administration has fired the Democratic commissioners and some non-Democrats throughout independent agencies throughout the administration. I don’t know why I have not been fired. I suspect it might have something to do with the requirement to have a quorum, but [I] can’t tell you why.” As for what Commissioner *Brendan Carr* would do in that situation, Gomez said, “You’d have to ask him that.”

SKYDANCE-PARAMOUNT CLOSES

The **Skydance-Paramount** merger reached journey’s end with the closing of the \$8 billion transaction. It only took months of back and forths with the **FCC**, a commitment to slash DEI initiatives and a \$16 million Paramount settlement of a *Trump* lawsuit to get here for New Paramount Chairman/CEO David Ellison. Meanwhile, exiting Paramount co-CEOs *Brian Robbins* and *Chris McCarthy* said their farewells. Robbins wrote in a memo to staff Wednesday that “this moment of transition is,

of course, bittersweet,” adding that he was leaving with “deep pride” for what Paramount has built and was confident staff would continue to “thrive and excel” under Ellison’s new team. But *George Cheeks* is staying put, becoming Chair of TV Media to oversee Paramount’s broadcast and cable businesses. In a [letter](#), Ellison wrote that “today marks day one of a new Paramount,” adding that he wants to “transform Paramount into a tech-forward company that blends the creative heart of Hollywood with the innovative spirit of Silicon Valley.” The CEO’s plan includes scaling **Paramount+** globally as well as reorganizing the company into three business units: Studios, DTC and TV Media to “streamline strategic decision-making and thereby accelerate our ability to move the business forward.” He said that on the TV Media side, Paramount’s challenge is “to reinvent our portfolio of brands for a non-linear world,” adding that “the evolution of streaming services” will be pivotal to transforming the company. That begins with Paramount+ and **Pluto TV** operating on a unified tech stack, starting next year, to “position Pluto TV as the ‘top of the funnel’ to attract new customers to Paramount+.” In a final memo to staff, *Shari Redstone* wrote that she would continue to cheer for the company “every step of the way.”

TIGHT TURNAROUND FOR THE FCC

It’s only been two weeks since the **FCC** [held](#) its July Open Commission Meeting, but the agency nonetheless made the quick pivot to host August’s gathering. Although it began festivities earlier this week by [approving three proceedings](#) that were on Thursday’s agenda, five measures remained, and all but one received unanimous approval. Chairman *Brendan Carr* and Commissioner *Olivia Trusty* gave a thumbs-up in each vote. The lone issue that saw Commissioner *Anna Gomez* concur and dissent in parts pertained to an item that stems from the push to “Delete, Delete, Delete.” It sought to repeal 98 broadcast rules and requirements that were deemed obsolete or unnecessary, mainly coming from within the broadcast services section of media regulations for provisions that govern outdated technology or rules that are no longer used, such as 1970s-era stipulations regarding the kind of testing equipment radio stations are required to buy. Gomez’s hesitation is about the processes by which the FCC is removing such rules, something she first raised during last month’s meeting. “The procedures implemented last month and used again today to erase rules adopted pursuant to notice and comment were put in place without seeking public comment on appropriate processes and guardrails. So I cannot support the elimination of substantive rules pursuant to these procedures,” Gomez said, adding that some of the rules being removed weren’t substantive but rather explanatory, hence her concurring in part. Carr, Gomez and Trusty voted to initiate a review of the FCC’s National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) rules in an effort to simplify permitting processes. The Notice of Proposed Rulemaking will look at the agency’s environmental

regulations as well as its National Historic Preservation Act guidelines. Another vote saw the FCC enact new rules to enhance the Ground-Station-as-a-Service business model that allows multiple satellite systems to share the same ground station. Ground station operators can now receive a baseline license without first identifying a specific satellite point of communication. The FCC is officially evaluating the national alert and warning systems, including the Emergency Alert System and Wireless Emergency Alerts, and implementing new rules to protect the U.S.' submarine cable infrastructure from foreign adversaries. The FCC now enters an extended break until next month's Open Meeting on Sept. 30.

MOBILE HELPING ALTICE USA WITHSTAND COMPETITION

The turnaround efforts continue at **Altice USA**, but now the company hopes to sustain momentum in an environment where competition seems to only heighten. Altice USA reported 2Q25 earnings Thursday, and while total broadband primary service units saw a net loss of 35,000 in 2Q25, it was an improvement from the 51,000 lost in 2Q24 and the 37,000 lost in 1Q25. Total broadband subscribers settled at 4.3 million at the end of the quarter. Fiber was a bright spot with 56,000 net adds, helping the provider reach 663,000 fiber customers—up 53% YYY—in addition to eclipsing 3 million fiber passings at the end of 2Q25, with 21.9% customer penetration of the fiber network. Chairman/CEO *Dennis Mathew* said Altice USA's new go-to-market strategies have been key in gaining share versus larger telcos, fiber overbuilders or fixed wireless providers. Specifically, the hyper-local strategies have been successful after being deployed across nearly 600,000 homes, resulting in an initial 13% connect lift and improved win share from 20-40% across its footprint. "For the first time, we're seeing actual sub growth in areas of Texas and the northeast as well, where we have a combination of fiber over builders and mature telcos competition. We've made meaningful progress, but we're also seeing that in certain markets, where we were losing customers, we're now flat or positive," Mathew said. "We are willing to invest where we need to invest, but we're doing that in a very surgical fashion." **Optimum Mobile** is another area Altice USA is leaning on. 2Q25 saw 38,000 mobile line net adds, contributing to a total of 546,000 mobile lines as mobile customer penetration of the company's broadband base reached 6.8%. "We are still on the path for a million lines by '27, and we're very happy with our MVNO partnership with T-Mobile. We just continue, also, to integrate it across all of our sales channels," Mathew said. "Mobile is critical—the convergence is critical. It really delivers an even improved churn benefit when we look at folks that are taking mobile." Altice USA added 35,000 total passings and 28,000 fiber passings in 2Q25. Total revenue came in at \$2.2 billion, down 4.2% YOY, and its free cash flow deficit improved from \$40.9 million to \$28.4 million.

TEGNA SHARES AI STRATEGY

TEGNA CEO *Mike Steib* said that the company's news organization is leveraging artificial intelligence to boost productivity and speed. "By automating routine work, sharing resources and simplifying layers and bureaucracy, we've freed up more time and dollars to invest in content. The result is better journalism, faster and at lower cost," he said. When asked to list some of the biggest areas where AI is being used by the company for cost savings, he answered that AI wasn't being used for the content creation itself. "That's not where we're playing. We believe you need good journalists...But there are a number of activities that are rote and could be automated." Those include transcription, video editing and identifying news stories before news teams get to the office. "We receive lots of emails from sources, and those can be summarized and presented to the team so that they can jump on the hottest opportunities." Total company revenue was down 5% YOY to \$675 million, which TEGNA said was in line with its guidance and was due to lower political advertising revenue and lower ad and marketing services rev. Distribution rev was flat at \$370 million due to sub declines, offset by contractual rate increases. Total Adjusted EBITDA decreased by 14% YOY to \$151 million partially due to lower political ad rev, offset by continued cost benefits from core operational cost-cutting initiatives.

COMCAST WINS IN VIRGINIA'S FINAL BEAD PROPOSAL

The Commonwealth of Virginia is hoping to begin the process of connecting the last 133,500 locations not yet covered by high-speed internet soon. The Department of Housing and Community Development released the state's final proposal for BEAD, opening a seven-day window for public comment before submitting to **NTIA** for final clearance. If approved, \$613 million in funding will be dispersed among providers. **Comcast** was awarded the most locations with 24,343, according to the proposal, which is still subject to change ahead of becoming official, while **All Points Broadband** was given 19,801. On the satellite front, **Amazon's Project Kuiper** and **SpaceX** received 6,957 and 5,579 locations, respectively. Virginia said it received double the applications during the new "Benefit of the Bargain" round.

SOUTHLAND, ESPN RE-UP

More media rights news coming from **ESPN**, this time involving Division I's **Southland Conference**. The two signed a six-year extension to their distribution agreement that'll last through 2031. Starting this 2025-26 season, select men's and women's basketball games and a marquee event from football, basketball, baseball or softball will air live on ESPN, **ESPN2** or **ESPNU**. In addition to the marquee event, the Southland will have its men's and women's basketball championships, one men's basketball tournament semifinal and one regular-season men's basketball game broadcast on ESPN's linear networks each year.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

Disney Jr. Strikes While the Iron's Hot

Following in the mighty footsteps of "Marvel's Spidey and His Amazing Friends" is **Disney Jr.**'s newest preschool entry in the superhero canon: "Marvel's Iron Man and His Awesome Friends." "We always like to say that Spidey swung so that we can fly. Because without Spidey, there would be no opportunity. Spidey has been hugely successful. And without it, we wouldn't be here talking about Iron Man and his awesome friends," Executive Producer Sean Coyle told **CFX**. Spidey's amassed more than 896 million hours watched globally, so there's a bit of pressure on those iron shoulders. The animated series, which debuts Aug. 11 on Disney Jr. and the following day on **Disney+**, features friends Tony Stark, Riri Williams and Amadeus Cho working together to solve familiar problems (like a flying disc stuck on a roof), while also protecting their city and, of course, saving the day. The kids are all super geniuses with their own Iron Suits that allow them to fly and give them super-strength. Introducing a young audience to a beloved Marvel character is tricky, especially knowing Mom and Dad will likely be watching as well. "We knew there were certain elements of Tony Stark that are relatable to all ages—picking yourself up, using your natural smarts to solve problems. And we went from there," explains Executive Producer *Harrison Wilcox*, who also serves as EP on Spidey. Along the way, there are plenty of guest appearances from *John Stamos* as Howard Stark (he voiced Iron Man in Spidey and His Amazing Friends) to **ESPN** sportscaster *Jessica Mendoza* playing Dottie Doubleday, owner of Dottie Doubleday's batting cages. And the theme song was written and performed by *Mark Hoppus* of blink-182. "When I watch the main title with Mark Hoppus' vocals in there, it thrills me every time. When the characters fly through the giant donut hole on top of the downtown, it just reminds me, and I believe it sets a tone for our audience, that this is a fun show," says Wilcox. "This is a show of excitement and action, but also the three characters, while they are doing their best always to save the city, they all are going to have fun doing it. There's no reason you can't have fun while doing a good thing." - *Amy Maclean*

REVIEWS

"This is Going to Hurt," streaming, **Acorn TV**. Ignore the blurb describing this 7-ep British import from 2022 as "hilarious." There are laughs, but it's gallows humor only, as junior doctors and nurses in a gritty London hospital's labor ward help expectant moms and deliver newborns, despite being desperately understaffed, sleep-deprived and overloaded mentally. Gurgling underneath is the system: Britain's National Health Service, whose good intentions are barely noticeable under its bureaucratic weight. The protagonist is peripatetic obstetrician Adam (Ben Wishaw), often the ward's sole doctor, though bewildered student Shruti (a terrific Ambika Mod) progresses rapidly, albeit at a tremendous cost. Besides Adam's droll, fourth-wall comments, the mini's most consistent humor is an outstanding Ashley McGuire as Vicky, whose brusque manner and hedonist lifestyle recede at times, exposing her medical skill and humanity. She's a welcome respite from the realism. - *Seth Arenstein*

BASIC CABLE

P2+ PRIME RANKINGS*

(07/28/25-08/03/25)

MON-SUN	MC US AA%	MC US AA (000)
FNC	0.740	2347
MSNBC	0.232	736
ESPN	0.181	575
HGTV	0.174	551
CNN	0.154	488
DISC	0.136	431
INSP	0.131	416
HIST	0.130	411
TBSC	0.126	398
HALL	0.121	383
USA	0.120	379
FOOD	0.111	352
TLC	0.105	334
TVLAND	0.099	314
GSN	0.097	308
HALLMYS	0.097	307
A&E	0.091	288
ID	0.081	258
LIFE	0.077	244
NWSMX	0.075	239
NAN	0.072	229
REELZ	0.069	219
ADSM	0.069	218
TNT	0.067	213
OXY	0.067	212
FX	0.066	211
AMC	0.065	206
BRAVO	0.063	201
WETV	0.062	198
PRMNT	0.054	171
BET	0.053	169
NATGEO	0.053	168
MGNLA	0.051	160
COM	0.048	151
SNDNCE	0.047	150

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



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