

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Push-Pull: Broadcast Affiliates Don't Share Networks' Rosy View

It was networks vs. affiliates at the **FCC** this week, as comments came pouring in for the [agency's proceeding](#) on the interactions between broadcast station owners and the national networks.

"It is time to rebalance the network-affiliate relationship," the affiliate groups for **ABC, CBS, Fox** and **NBC** said in a joint filing that urged the Commission "to swiftly move forward with proposed actions that would rein in those network behaviors that are pushing affiliates to the brink."

They complained about high affiliation fees that they claim make it so many local stations can't continue to maintain their local news production. They also argue that programming exclusivity has been undermined by the networks' direct-to-consumer streaming platforms, and they objected to networks unilaterally controlling retransmission consent negotiations with virtual MVPDs, such as **YouTube TV**.

On the other side were network owners **Disney, Paramount, NBCUniversal** and **Fox Corp.**, who argue that the network-affiliate model works just fine and FCC interference could trigger negative, unintended consequences. NBCU went as far as to argue that FCC intervention could bring about the "demise of broadcasting" and it brought up the return of **NBA** games to NBC affiliates after 23 years as evidence of the current model working.

The network-affiliate relationship went under the microscope in September when the two largest affiliate owners, **Nexstar**

and **Sinclair**, preempted ABC's "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" over remarks made about the man accused of killing *Charlie Kirk*. Disney-owned ABC also suspended the show, but it took Sinclair and Nexstar longer to return the network programming to its stations.

For its part, ABC-owner Disney said the Kimmel preemption shows the regime is working in compliance with the FCC's rules and that regulatory intervention is unwarranted. "Over the last 30 years, ABC affiliated stations have exercised their right to preempt programming and will continue to do so without FCC intervention," Disney said, pointing to how nearly 60 ABC affiliate stations (serving 11% of the national audience) preempted the first episode of "NYPD Blue" in 1993 over concerns about nudity and coarse language. Some refused to air the show until its third season, and one affiliate never aired a single episode. In 2004, nearly one-third of affiliates didn't air the unedited version of "Saving Private Ryan" due to concerns about language in war scenes.

The affiliate groups don't see it the same way, alleging that the FCC's right to reject programming rule is not absolute. "As a practical matter, many affiliates are limited, pursuant to their affiliation agreements, in the extent to which they can freely preempt network programming in their discretion," they said, adding that affiliation agreements may permit preemptions for breaking news only or by imposing preemption caps or financial consequences that discourage preemption.

FCC Chairman *Brendan Carr* teed up this proceeding last month by describing it as looking at "ways we can empower



WREATHS
— across —
AMERICA

★ **KEEP MOVING FORWARD** ★

JOIN US ON WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA DAY
- SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13TH -

Each December on National Wreaths Across America Day, our mission to Remember, Honor and Teach is carried out by coordinating wreath-laying ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery and more than 5,300 participating locations in all 50 U.S. states, at sea and abroad.

Join us by sponsoring a veterans' wreath at a cemetery near you, volunteering or donating to a local sponsorship group.

Visit www.WreathsAcrossAmerica.org

Breaking boundaries
and reaching for the stars

**CONGRATULATIONS
TO OUR MOST
POWERFUL
WOMEN
AND RISING TIDE
2025 HONOREES**



CINDY HOLLAND
CHAIR OF DIRECT TO CONSUMER



ELIZABETH WRIGHT
EVP & CFO
DIRECT TO CONSUMER



MICHELLE GARCIA
EVP, CONSUMER MARKETING
PARAMOUNT+



AMY KUESSNER
EVP, PROGRAMMING PLUTO TV



JENNIFER MITCHELL
PRESIDENT STATIONS & DIGITAL



SUZANNE BRUDERMAN
SVP, FINANCIAL PLANNING & ANALYSIS

local broadcasters to meet their public interest obligations by reviewing the network/affiliate relationship for the first time in more than 15 years.” He made [comments](#) during the Kimmel flashpoint, urging broadcasters to push back against the networks over programming because they run “the possibility of fines and license revocations from the FCC” if content is deemed as “news distortion.” In announcing this Commission proceeding, he wrote on social media: “The FCC has an obligation to ensure that local broadcast TV stations meet their public interest obligations. Yet National Programmers operating out of New York and Hollywood are reportedly preventing those broadcasters from serving their local communities—including by punishing them for exercising their right to preempt national programming.”

While the affiliate groups expressed appreciation for the FCC’s interest in preemption issues, they see bigger problems in the network-affiliate relationship. “The Affiliates Associations wish to make clear that solving issues regarding network overreach in the preemption space, while important to realigning the appropriate Network-Affiliate boundaries, will not impact local broadcasters’ ability to survive and continue to serve the public interest in the long-term without a rebalancing of the broader network-affiliate economic relationship.”

When it comes to those other issues, Disney, Fox, NBCU and Paramount presented a united front. They emphasized that network programming draws audiences in and makes it more likely that viewers will watch local content. They pointed to a RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University study that found stations affiliated with the largest networks generally provide more news and public interest programming—including more local news—than non-affiliated stations.

The networks also argue that the FCC’s statutory authority here is limited, with no authority over the networks. And NBCU added, it’s “‘public interest’ authority over broadcast stations is not unlimited—the First Amendment protects against government attempts to interfere with or otherwise influence broadcast stations’ or networks’ programming decision.” As for negotiating retrans with vMVPDs, the networks argue that they are outside the FCC’s statutory purview since they’re Internet-based platforms.

“The network-affiliate relationship has been a key part of the television broadcast industry since its foundation. It is a mutually beneficial relationship that provides the affiliates with high-quality programming that they otherwise would not be able to afford, while providing networks with a nationwide distribution platform,” concluded Fox. “The relationship has thrived without heavy-handed government regulation. The imposition of such regulations during the most challenging time in our history can only hinder that relationship and hurt the public interest.”

RETRANS, PBS ALSO POP UP IN NETWORK-AFFILIATE FEEDBACK

Distributors sat out the FCC’s initial comment deadline for its broadcast network-affiliate relations proceeding, with one notable exception. **Altafiber**, which has been embroiled in a retransmission consent dispute with **Nexstar** since June, used it as an opportunity to push for retrans reform. Rather than piecemeal FCC broadcast proceedings on network-affiliate economics or ownership caps, the operator argued “the greatest concern and the Commission’s primary focus [should be] the unaffordability of ‘free, over-the-air’ broadcast content.” Altafiber has proposed “Local Choice,” giving consumers the option to purchase only the local television stations that they want to watch, or a “social contract” where in exchange for regulatory waivers, broadcasters would implement retrans rate reductions over a seven-year period with MVPDs to pass through the savings to subscribers. The **Center for American Rights** (CAR), which filed a news distortion complaint over **CBS’** editing of a *Kamala Harris* interview, had plenty to say on the network-affiliate issue—including that the FCC shouldn’t exclude **PBS** from the proceeding. “When PBS sends out consistently liberal news, entertainment and education programming, it lets down millions of potential viewers of PBS affiliates in red states just as much as **ABC** and **NBC** let down potential viewers in those same red states,” the group said. CAR recommended the FCC open an inquiry to look at the future of public broadcasting in the wake of the wind-down of the **Corporation for Public Broadcasting** and the end of federal funding for **NPR** and **PBS**. “If PBS and NPR cannot prove a viable long-term business model as national networks—and if their individual affiliates cannot show long-term business models in each market—then this Commission needs to consider whether those channels (i.e., that spectrum) will become available in the near future for other potential licensees or uses,” CAR wrote.

DISNEY’S \$1B OPENAI INVESTMENT

Disney CEO *Bob Iger* has been transparent about his take on AI and the potential it brings for content and operations. The company is now taking a significant leap, signing a three-year licensing agreement with **OpenAI** while also committing to a \$1 billion equity investment, subject to the negotiation of definitive agreements, corporate and board approvals and customary closing conditions. As part of the deal, Disney is allowing **Sora**, OpenAI’s short-form generative AI video product, to create user-prompted videos that can tap into a set of over 200 characters from Disney, Marvel, Pixar and Star Wars. That



YOUR PARTNERSHIP POWERS NAMIC

Thank you to our 2025 Annual Corporate Sponsors for championing NAMIC's work and advancing the next generation of leaders across the media, entertainment, and technology industry.

We're grateful for your partnership and excited for the year ahead.

Warm holiday wishes from NAMIC.

2025 PLATINUM SPONSORS



2025 GOLD SPONSORS



2025 SILVER SPONSORS



2025 BRONZE SPONSORS



2025 FRIEND SPONSOR



STAY CONNECTED WITH US IN 2026 AND SEE WHAT'S NEXT ON THE HORIZON

namic.com YouTube

includes costumes, props, vehicles and environments, which users can share on Sora's social feed. ChatGPT will also be able to use the assets for image creation. The initial roster of characters includes Mickey and Minnie Mouse, Lilo and Stitch, Cinderella and Simba and Mufasa from "The Lion King." However, it doesn't include any talent likeness or voices. For Disney, it'll use OpenAI's application programming interfaces to create new products, tools and experiences for **Disney+** and other areas of the Mouse House's portfolio. Speaking of, some of the Sora-made videos will appear on Disney+. Disney will also deploy ChatGPT to its employees. Although some have expressed concerns about the use of AI for content creation, Disney and OpenAI "are affirming a shared commitment to the responsible use of AI that protects user safety and the rights of creators." In an [appearance](#) on **CNBC's** "Squawk on the Street" on Thursday, Iger said the deal won't pose a threat to creators.

FCC FAST TRACKS COMCAST'S POLE ATTACHMENT COMPLAINT

The **FCC** granted **Comcast's** request for an accelerated docket for its pole attachment [complaint](#) against **Appalachian Power Company**. The Commission's Rapid Broadband Assessment Team found the complaint suitable for expedited handling because it's limited to the single, discrete legal issue of whether the utility's pole replacement policy violates the Commission's rules and orders. "In short, the Complaint may be adjudicated based on minimal pleadings, and resolution of the issue will enable the parties to this and other potential disputes to proceed with broadband deployment without delay," said the Commission order.

NIELSEN GAUGES AD-SUPPORTED TV

Ad-supported TV accounted for 72.9% of overall TV viewing in 3Q25, according to **Nielsen's** latest Ad Supported Gauge. Viewing peaked in September when it reached 74.7%, driven largely by football season and other live sports. During the third quarter, streaming made up 46.4% of ad-supported viewing, followed by cable and broadcast at 27.2% and 26.4%, respectively. Nielsen spotted some trends in 3Q as well. When only looking at adults 18+, ad-supported TV increased to 75.1% while streaming declined to 42.4%. That boosted cable to 29.2% of share and broadcast to 28.4%.

XFINITY'S READY TO PLAY

Comcast rolled out the cloud gaming service **Amazon Luna** on Xfinity TV and streaming devices throughout the U.S. Customers with a compatible X1 or **Xumo** Stream Box now have access to Luna's collection of games such as "Hogwarts Legacy" and "Indiana Jones and the Great Circle," as well as family-friendly options "Courtroom Chaos: Starring Snoopy

Dogg," "The Jackbox Party Pack 9" and more. Folks won't need to download games or use a console. However, they'll need either a Prime or Luna subscription—and, of course, a Luna or Bluetooth controller.

CTS INKS DISTRIBUTION DEALS

Charter and **Cox** signed deals with **Comcast Technology Solutions** to help with the distribution of linear channels for out-of-market sporting events. The two companies will use Comcast MediaOrigination for back-end video management, delivery and viewing rights enforcement for games from premium leagues like **MLB**, **NBA** and **NHL**. Comcast MediaOrigination is part of Comcast Media360, which offers various technologies tailored for global video delivery and monetization across linear and on-demand platforms. While Cox and Charter are set to merge mid-2026, their respective CTS agreements are separate.

CARRIAGE

A+E Global Media introduced two German-language FAST channels in Austria, Germany and Switzerland. The channels, **Ax Men** and **Swamp People**, offer access to the two series while growing A+E's FAST footprint in the DACH region. They're available on **Prime Video**, **Rakuten TV** and **Titan OS**, though **Samsung TV Plus**, **LG Channels**, **Pluto TV**, **VIDAA** and **wedotv** will join in the coming months.

FIBER FRENZY

Astound launched a new fixed wireless network, expanding high-speed internet and WiFi access to more than 26,000 homes in Davis, California, and nearby Yolo and Placer Counties. Addresses connected include over 2,000 homes in predominantly rural areas that have not had access to high-speed internet before. Communities in these areas can access speeds of up to 500 Mbps.

RATINGS

Hallmark Channel isn't the only network to get a Christmas boost in the weekly cable ratings. **Freeform** cracked the primetime top five with 506,000 viewers P2+ from Dec. 1-7, trailing Hallmark's 769,000, **MS Now's** 965,000, **Fox News'** 2.09 million and **ESPN's** 2.31 million. While Freeform was No. 7 in total day (266,000), Fox News took the category with 1.38 million viewers. ESPN had 788,000, with MS Now and Hallmark posting 613,000 and 435,000, respectively. – **ESPN** and **Formula 1** crossed the finish line in the last year of their media rights agreement. They ended on a high note, with the 2025 season concluding with an average of 1.3 million viewers per race across ESPN, **ESPN2** and **ABC**. That's the highest season average in F1's U.S. history and surpasses the previous record set in 2022 (1.21 million). For context, the first

year of ESPN's F1 deal averaged 554,000 back in 2018. The previous season on **NBC Sports** checked in at 538,000. Sunday's Abu Dhabi Grand Prix had 1.5 million viewers on ESPN, marking the 16th race to set an event viewership record this season out of 24 total races.

PROGRAMMING

Monumental Sports Network and *Sport Business Journal's* monthly show "Inside the Industry" will be syndicated across the **FanDuel Sports Network** footprint starting Monday. The program is currently in its second season, with the first episode to appear on FDSN looking at the business evolution of golf. FDSN holds 15 owned-and-operated networks across the U.S. – The 93rd Annual Hollywood Christmas Parade is set to air on **CW Network** this Friday at 8pm. The two-hour special will feature appearances from *Terry Fator*, *Byron Scott*, *Estelle* and more, with *Laura McKenzie* and *Erik Estrada* serving as Parade hosts. – *Christine Williamson* is set to expand her responsibilities at **ESPN**. She'll join *Kevin Negandhi* as a co-anchor for the 6pm edition of "SportsCenter" while also stepping in as the network's lead women's college basketball host, including the hoops variant of "College GameDay." Williamson is stepping in for *Elle Duncan*, who's [heading to Netflix](#) to lead the streamer's studio coverage for sports.

PEOPLE

Richard Kaplar is stepping down as President/CEO of **The Media Institute** on Jan. 31. Succeeding him will be former **FCC** Commissioner and **Cablefax** columnist *Michael O'Rielly*. Kaplar became The Media Institute's leader in December 2018 but has been involved with the organization for quite some time. He helped create programs like the Communications Forum Luncheon in 1981, the Institute's annual awards banquet in 1992 (now the Free Speech America Gala) and Free Speech Week in 2005. Additionally, Kaplar rolled out the Digital Media Center in 2020. O'Rielly currently sits as a Senior Fellow for the Institute and is a member of its First Amendment Advisory Council. – Shortly after signing a deal to [end TelevisaUnivision's](#) carriage dispute with **YouTube TV**, EVP, Global Distribution and Partnerships *Adam Waltuch* departed the Spanish-language me-

dia company after a four-year run. *Deadline* was first to [report](#). Waltuch joined Univision prior to the Grupo Televisa merger in 2021. Before then, he spent six years at **Netflix**. – **AMC Networks** appointed *Annie Luo* President, Streaming Growth. In the newly created role, Luo will be responsible for driving the growth and expansion of AMCN's streaming services as well as leading the development and execution of the company's streaming strategy. Luo most recently served as EVP, Head of Global Partnerships & Strategic Development at **Peacock**. At AMCN, she will report to CCO *Kim Kelleher*. – **Allen Media Group** hired *John Kozack* as its new Chief Revenue Officer to oversee advertising sales, brand sponsorships and revenue partnerships for the AMG portfolio of linear networks, sports, streaming, digital, social and branded content. Kozack will also lead these efforts for **HBCU Go Sports**. Joining on Jan. 1, Kozack comes from **TelevisaUnivision**, where he spent 22 years in various roles across the media company's sales organization.

COX ENTERPRISES GOES OUTSIDE

Cox Enterprises, which is in the process of completing a deal to combine **Cox Communications** with **Charter**, announced the launch of a new business segment dedicated to outdoor recreation and conservation. Cox Outdoors includes fly-fishing equipment maker Loop Tackle and outdoor performance gear maker KUIU. "Cox Outdoors is a way for us to continue diversifying into new industries that let us make a meaningful difference on the world around us," said *Alex Taylor*, Chairman and CEO, Cox Enterprises. "This new business segment is rooted in something I care deeply about: conservation. Protecting the wild places that make life richer for all of us and caring for our planet has never mattered more." *Will Thorburn* serves as President of Cox Outdoors. He has been with Cox for 15 years, was previously head of Cox Cleantech and has held various strategy roles with Cox Communications.

EDITORS' NOTE

Cablefax Daily will not be publishing Friday, Dec. 12. Your next issue will be delivered Monday, Dec. 15. Stay tuned to [Cablefax.com](#) for any breaking news that happens in the meantime. And ICYMI: check out [this year's edition](#) of **Cablefax: The Magazine's Most Powerful Women**.

BASIC CABLE P2+ PRIME RANKINGS* (12/01/25-12/07/25)		
MON-SUN	MC US AA%	MC US AA (000)
ESPN	0.663	2133
FNC	0.604	1943
MSNOW	0.310	998
HALL	0.216	697
CNN	0.141	453
FOOD	0.131	421
HGTV	0.129	415
FRFM	0.123	395
HIST	0.120	387
TBS	0.120	387
HALLMYS	0.114	367
TLC	0.114	366
USA	0.107	346
INSP	0.100	322
ESPN2	0.095	305
DISC	0.089	285
TVLAND	0.089	285
GSN	0.088	284
A&E	0.081	260
BRAVO	0.075	240
AMC	0.067	215
ID	0.065	210
LIFE	0.064	205
NAN	0.062	199
FX	0.059	191
OXY	0.059	189
BET	0.059	189
ADSM	0.054	173
WETV	0.051	165
NWSMX	0.049	158
REELZ	0.048	153
NATGEO	0.043	139
SYFY	0.043	138
COWBOY	0.041	133
TNT	0.039	126
SNDNCE	0.039	126
TRAVEL	0.039	124
NFL	0.037	119
COM	0.036	116
FXX	0.035	111
FETV	0.034	111
GAF	0.034	110
MTV	0.034	110
IFC	0.033	107
PRMNT	0.033	107
HLN	0.033	107
CMT	0.032	104

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