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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Morning After: FCC Meeting Caps an Eventful 2025

No time to rest for the **FCC**, which held its final open meeting for 2025 just a short 24 hours after **Senate Commerce's** oversight hearing. Despite a few [contentious exchanges](#) with lawmakers and continued back-and-forths on social media, Chairman *Brendan Carr* appeared to be in good spirits as Thursday's gathering got underway.

"I usually enjoy being on this side of the dais, but I had fun down there as well, so hopefully you all will enjoy it as much as I did yesterday. So have at it," Carr said.

Naturally, there were a handful of follow-ups regarding comments made from both sides of the hearing. Regarding the FCC's status as an independent agency, Carr continued to lean on the 1934 Communications Act and Congress' decision not to include for-cause removal protections for FCC commissioners. However, when asked about the suggestion Sen. *Ted Cruz* (R-TX) made about Congress revisiting the Communications Act (and subsequently, the public interest standard), Carr remained neutral to the changes that could be implemented.

"If Congress and the White House pass and sign legislation, we'll do whatever it is that they end up enshrining. But as of right now, the public interest standard is there, and we're going to be vigilant about enforcing it," Carr said.

He took a more definitive stance against Cruz's skepticism of the news distortion rule, with Carr making it clear he doesn't intend to eliminate the policy. Carr maintained that he's applied

it evenly to broadcasters throughout his time as chair, but once again remarked he was "applying those same precedents" made by the 2018 letter signed by Senate Democrats that targeted **Sinclair** with accusations of news distortion.

Commissioner *Anna Gomez* believes there's a difference in how Carr and the *Trump* administration have used news distortion, compared to the 2018 letter and the way previous Democratic administrations have gone about enforcing it. "What you did not see in the last administration was the administration take action against any broadcaster for the content of their broadcasting or for their editorial decisions in news and news making," she said

Speaking of Trump, he [recently](#) took to **Truth Social** to advocate for spectrum to be "properly licensed" and for broadcasters to pay "significant amounts of money" in order to use it. Carr's take was that the FCC could consider some level of spectrum auction if broadcasters or other stakeholders don't want to adhere to the public interest obligation. That won't happen unless there are reforms to the Communications Act, but there's already a 5% fee broadcasters pay if they offer non-broadcast services—a notable matter as ATSC 3.0 continues to roll out across the U.S.

For now, the FCC has the upcoming Upper C-Band auction in 2027 to worry about, as well as a newly introduced AWS-3 re-auction that's slated to begin June 2. Approximately 200 AWS licenses in the 1695–1710 MHz, 1755–1780 MHz and 2155–2180 MHz bands will be up for grabs, with proceeds go-

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ing toward the FCC's efforts to strengthen communications networks from "untrustworthy and insecure foreign equipment."

Other decisions from Thursday's meeting included the expansion of the STIR/SHAKEN caller ID authentication rules. All interconnected VoIP providers with access to phone numbers must certify and disclose information about robocall compliance, public safety and national security. The FCC also updated LPTV service rules to reflect changes in the broadcast industry and provide more clarity on regulations. And it wouldn't be an FCC meeting without Delete, Delete, Delete: the Commission voted to remove 36 rules pertaining to obsolete equipment, such as analog cable receivers and cordless phones.

NCTA PRESSES FCC TO RESTORE TOP-FOUR BAN

NCTA called on the FCC to reinstate the top-four prohibition to its broadcast ownership rules, arguing it has the statutory authority to bring it back. The regulation prevented a single entity from owning or controlling more than one top-four-rated station in a local market, but it was struck down by the **U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit** in July. "In the wake of the court's decision, broadcast station groups announced new deals that would consolidate ownership of two—or even three or four—Big Four stations in the same market," the cable association said in comments filed in the FCC's quadrennial review of broadcast ownership rules. It rattled off a list of examples: the proposed **Nexstar/Tegna** deal would create 27 new full-power Big Four duopolies and two new full-power Big Four triopolies; **Sinclair** has filed applications to acquire new Big Four affiliate duopolies from existing sidecar partners in nine markets; and various proposed **Gray** transactions would create Big Four duopolies in nine DMAs and a new LPTV Big Four duopoly in the Rockford, Illinois. "Consolidation has fueled explosive growth in the costs MVPD subscribers incur to watch 'free' over-the-air broadcast signals—an average per-subscriber jump of 1,000%+ since 2013," NCTA said. "Consumers are increasingly concerned about affordability, and the Commission should not open the door to higher consumer bills by unleashing even greater broadcast station group consolidation." NCTA also urged the FCC to retain the Local Television Ownership Rule, which limits owners to two stations per market, and called on it to prohibit stations and station groups from negotiating retransmission consent for non-owned out-of-market stations. On the other side, **NAB** used 150 pages to detail why it's time to loosen the reins on broadcast ownership. "The retention of analog-era restrictions on broadcast stations alone will disserve the FCC's goals and impair local broadcasters' ability to improve or even continue

offering their most important public service by far—offering over-the-air news, weather, emergency information, sports and entertainment programming in communities across the nation at no cost to the public," NAB said.

VERIZON-FRONTIER PROGRESS

The pending merger between **Verizon** and **Frontier Communications** hit a speed bump laid out by the **California Public Utilities Commission**, but it's looking like there could be forward progress in the new year. An Administrative Law Judge issued a proposed decision that recommends CPUC approve the deal and consider the matter as early as Jan. 15. However, there's a long list of conditions attached to it after concerns were raised regarding Verizon's commitment to the **FCC** that it would [slash DEI initiatives](#) and the ways they could've clashed with California laws. Those conditions include establishing a recruiting pipeline from underrepresented populations and routine meetings with state and local entities about procurement, employment retention and transparency requirements. "VZ has taken the position that requiring the company to comply with California DEI requirements that conflict with the company's commitment to the FCC not to engage in DEI efforts raises thorny legal federal-state preemption issues. We think VZ's lawyers will push back against any requirements that go beyond commitments to broad categories of small businesses," wrote **New Street Research**, which added that it believes there's room for compromise between Verizon and CPUC. According to an ex parte, Verizon's regulatory leadership and CPUC are scheduled to meet Friday afternoon.

COX FILES POLE ATTACHMENT COMPLAINT AT THE FCC

Cox Communications filed a pole attachment complaint at the **FCC** this week against **Oklahoma Gas & Electric (OG&E)**, accusing it of imposing unlawful and unreasonable rates, terms and conditions. Cox's complaint follows one filed [late last month](#) by **Comcast** against **Appalachian Power Company** that the Commission has agreed to fast-track for consideration. Cox claims OG&E has refused to provide data underlying its annual rental rates in violation of FCC rules. The specific increases are redacted, but the provider claims the utility raised rates in 2025 and plans to again in 2026. Cox said its review of limited data "reveals significant increases in OG&E's investment in poles, but without the logical corresponding increases in the number of poles." The utility asserts that FCC rules only require it to share the info it relied on to calculate its attachment rate, while Cox maintains

it is required to provide the data necessary to analyze, and potentially challenge, annual rental rates, including pole heights, investment in appurtenances, reimbursements for make-ready, treatment of non-unitized investment and excess ADIT, among other things.

SOO KIM'S CABLE AMBITIONS?

No **Paramount**, no problem it seems for **Warner Bros. Discovery's** linear networks. **FT reports** that **Standard General** founder **Soo Kim** has held talks with a "major" WBD shareholder to buy WBD's cable assets, which are currently set to spin off as **Discovery Global** in 2026. Kim, whose hedge fund tried and failed to acquire **Tegna** in 2022 for \$9 billion, is said to be exploring either acquiring all of the cable assets or just part of the linear portfolio. This comes after WBD urged shareholders to reject a hostile bid from Paramount Skydance for the whole company, including the cable business.

VERIZON, MISSION SHAKE HANDS

Mission Broadcasting and **Verizon** reached a new retransmission consent deal Wednesday. Mission has two stations in the Fios footprint: **WNAC (Fox, CW, Rewind TV)** in Providence and **WXXA (Fox, OTB TV, Grit)** in Albany. The deal originally expired Monday, but the two agreed to a short extension. Verizon hasn't been as lucky with **Cox Media Group**. It's been without its Boston Fox affiliate and Pittsburgh **NBC** affiliate since Monday.

WAR EAGLE!

You might've seen people like President **Trump** and **YouTube** creator Mr. Beast introduce mobile offerings, but now a college is getting into the MVNO game. Auburn University launched **War Eagle Mobile** this week through **Collegiate Mobile**, a company that offers wireless phone services via **T-Mobile's** 5G network for collegiate athletic partners. Rates vary across student, fan and employee plans, but every monthly payment includes a contribution to Auburn Athletics, scholarships or student funds at no extra cost. Plus, no contract is necessary. Fan and employee plans begin at \$20/month for 5 GB of data and unlimited talk and text, while the \$45/month Unlimited Max option includes unlimited data (speeds will be reduced after using 30 GB) as well as VIP perks and experiences. Each student plan comes with those same VIP benefits and ranges from \$15 to \$35/month.

NETFLIX PLUS BARSTOOL SPORTS

Netflix is killing two birds with one stone as it continues to expand its podcast and sports portfolio. The streamer revealed a multiyear partnership with **Barstool Sports** to bring the video editions of three podcasts early next year. "Pardon My Take," "The **Ryen Russillo** Podcast" and "Spittin' Chiclets" will have all new video episodes streaming exclusively on Netflix, as well as select library episodes from each show. Audio forms of the podcasts will remain free on other platforms. They'll initially roll out in the U.S., but additional markets are expected to follow.

RATINGS

A week of college basketball games, Heisman ceremony coverage and postseason **NCAA** women's volleyball helped **ESPN** take the No. 1 spot in primetime for the week of Dec. 8-14. The sports net averaged 2.07 million viewers P2+, edging out **Fox News**—which recently was **crowned** the primetime and total-day winner for 2025—with 2 million. **MS Now** came third at 975,000, followed by **Hallmark Channel** (660,000) and **CNN** (527,000). Fox News maintained its first-place standing in total day with 1.31 million viewers. ESPN trailed with 727,000 but got a boost from the Wisconsin-Texas volleyball match that reeled in 663,000 on Sunday. Overall coverage of the volleyball regionals garnered a record 530,000 viewers across ESPN platforms. MS Now was behind ESPN at 598,000, with Hallmark and CNN following at 424,000 and 412,000, respectively.

FIBER FRENZY

Bluepeak has invested more than \$95 million to date to expand FTTH broadband access to more communities in South Dakota. So far, the initiative has connected approximately 55,000 homes and businesses to fiber internet. Bluepeak plans to connect even more through a second phase of investment that will see the operator deploy an additional \$150 million to bring its total reach to more than 175,000 homes and businesses statewide, including in Rapid City and Sioux Falls. — Bluepeak also launched fiber internet service in Cushing, Oklahoma. The network delivers speeds of up to 5 Gigs for homes and 10 Gigs for businesses.

BASIC CABLE P2+ PRIME RANKINGS* (12/08/25-12/14/25)		
MON-SUN	MC US AA%	MC US AA (000)
ESPN	0.680	2189
FNC	0.608	1958
MSNOW	0.294	947
HALL	0.195	627
CNN	0.162	521
HGTV	0.155	500
FOOD	0.142	458
HIST	0.126	407
TBS	0.125	403
TLC	0.123	396
HALLMYS	0.118	379
FRFM	0.112	362
TVLAND	0.101	325
AMC	0.099	320
USA	0.098	315
ESPN2	0.098	315
FX	0.097	314
INSP	0.097	313
DISC	0.093	298
GSN	0.081	261
A&E	0.079	254
BRAVO	0.075	242
CWBY	0.074	237
OXY	0.068	218
LIFE	0.066	213
ID	0.063	202
NAN	0.062	201
BET	0.059	188
NWSMX	0.054	175
REELZ	0.054	175
TNT	0.053	171
COM	0.049	158
NFL	0.049	157
WETV	0.047	153
NATGEO	0.047	152
GAF	0.045	146
PRMNT	0.042	136
ADSM	0.042	136
FS1	0.041	131
IFC TV	0.039	125
LMN	0.039	124
MTV	0.038	123
FX	0.035	112
HLN	0.035	111
NWSNTN	0.032	102
SYFY	0.031	101
TRAVEL	0.031	100

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