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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Nexstar Aftershocks: Carr Says Commission Vote Still Possible

Nexstar-Tegna wasn't on the FCC's Open Meeting agenda Thursday, but its presence certainly was felt. While the commissioners were voting on items addressing overseas call centers and robocalls, the agency's legal team filed its opposition to emergency motions for a stay of the Media Bureau decision granting the \$6.2 billion merger.

The deal being approved at the bureau level instead of a full Commission vote has drawn [criticism](#) from **Senate Commerce** Chairman *Ted Cruz*. North Carolina Attorney General *Jeff Jackson*, who is among the AGs in eight states that have petitioned to stop Nexstar and Tegna from integrating, called on Cruz Thursday to use his oversight authority over the FCC to challenge the decision.

Asked about Cruz's critique, FCC Chair *Brendan Carr* said the two have a great relationship and the door is still open for a Commission vote.

"This was a decision by the staff. Staff decisions are initial decisions. They're not final decisions... There's been an application for review seeking full Commission review of the decision. That may happen, so there may be a commission vote on this at the end of the day," Carr told reporters. "This decision by the Bureau was consistent with agency precedent and practice, if you look at similar scope and scale transactions. There's litigation playing out both in California and the D.C. Circuit, and we're going to be responding to all of it."

On Thursday, the FCC and Nexstar both told the D.C. Circuit why it should oppose the emergency stay requested by **DirectTV**, **EchoStar**, state broadband associations, **Free Press** and others.

"In a detailed decision, the Bureau reasonably found that in light of a transformed media landscape, as well as Nexstar's commitments concerning divestiture of certain stations, increased local news programming, and maintenance of retransmission consent rates, the public interest benefits of the proposed transaction outweighed any potential public interest harms," the FCC said, adding that the Bureau wasn't required to designate the matter for a hearing because it found, on balance, the benefits of the transaction outweigh any potential public interest harm.

Late Wednesday, Carr [responded](#) on social media to a video of Democratic California Gov. *Gavin Newsom* that criticized the approval of the broadcast merger and called the FCC chairman a "disgrace." Carr said Newsom isn't standing up for any legitimate interest, but simply "doing the bidding of his liberal Hollywood donors—the billionaires in media who have no interest in the FCC holding them accountable to their statutory public interest obligations."

Carr rebuffed an attempt during Thursday's FCC press conference to name who he was talking about, though he said he had plenty of billionaires in mind. "We'll have to see if I log on to social media again and get more specific," Carr said.

A sign of how testy things have gotten could be seen on the

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streets of D.C. Thursday. A box truck sponsored by **Free Press** was driving around outside the FCC's HQ with a photo of Carr and the words "Brendan Carr Censorship Czar."

The word billionaire was also thrown around a lot Thursday, with Commissioner *Anna Gomez* calling the Nexstar-Tegna approval the latest example of what she deems "the billionaire bypass." "If you are a billionaire with business before a government agency and a perceived friend of the White House, your transaction will get fast track approval," she said, listing **Paramount-Skydance** and the proposed **Paramount-Warner Bros. Discovery** merger. "Meanwhile, smaller transactions from less connected companies filed months earlier are still waiting. This is not a coincidence. It is a pattern, and it tells you exactly who this FCC is working for."

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CHARTER REMAINS HUNGRY IN BROADBAND TURNAROUND

Charter has all but one of the needed approvals to finalize its \$34.5 billion merger with **Cox Communications**, but even as it works with the **California Public Utilities Commission** to gain the green light for a mid-2026 closing, the operator is keeping its eyes open for further opportunities. "We like cable businesses. We like cable assets. We believe that we have the right strategic and tactical approach to running those assets. I think we will continue to look where there are those opportunities for sets of assets that we think could bring value to shareholders," CFO *Jessica Fischer* said Thursday at a conference hosted by **New Street Research** and **Boston Consulting Group**. According to her, Charter will continue evaluating assets that come at the right cost and add value for shareholders, and it won't have to wait while the company integrates Cox's systems and customers. As Charter and the industry near the end of 1Q26, Fischer noted that competition remains alive and wells. She said that the competitive pressures brought by fixed wireless remain largely unchanged from recent months, and when she was asked about a specific **SpaceX**-owned company, "there's not a discernible impact from **Starlink** on trends right now." It's a different story in wireless though. While **Spectrum Mobile** increased the total number of lines by 19.4% in 2025, Fischer said there's high promotional activity "to a point that I would say, some of it, I think, is probably irrational." So she's feeling pretty good that Spectrum Mobile has seen growth while keeping "economically rational" offers in the market. Mobile, along with video, are parts of Spectrum's Life Unlimited initiative that debuted in 2024. So far, it hasn't made a substantial impact on broadband subscriber trends—something Charter is looking to turn around in the near-term—but that doesn't mean

the operator has lost confidence. Fischer said Life Unlimited is selling more products per customer, and those products make subscribers stay around in the medium and longer-term. Plus, aspects such as rate locks and lower roll-offs will lead to improved NPS scores over time. But will the prices themselves change? "We test all kinds of things all the time to try to see what will move consumers," Fischer said.

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OPENING DAY...OR NIGHT

MLB's new distribution packaging is encapsulated by the fact that the 2026 season began Wednesday night on **Netflix**. When the Yankees and Giants got underway, it started another chapter in Commissioner *Rob Manfred's* pursuit to completely reshape the way the league distributes games on both a local and national scale—and it's yet another case study on the fragmentation of sports media rights. Netflix will have an Opening Night game through 2028, as well as the Home Run Derby and other special events. Though it may need to take some notes from Wednesday's stream that saw the Yankees prevail 7-0. Comments from social media signaled fans weren't too pleased with the myriad of ways Netflix intertwined its IP into the telecast, in addition to the flashy introductions and elements that weren't fully baseball-focused. **NAB** used the Netflix criticism in a [blog post](#) Thursday that warned against sports media rights moving more away from broadcast and toward streaming services. **NBC, Peacock** and the revived cable net **NBC Sports Network** will take over Sunday Night Baseball games, with the streamer getting some Sunday Night exclusives on top of 18 early afternoon games it'll carry. **ESPN's** adjusted portfolio includes a 30-game slate mainly made up of weeknight and Memorial Day games. **Fox Sports** is in another year of its Saturday regular-season, postseason and World Series broadcasts, while **TNT Sports** has regular-season and postseason games as well. **Apple TV** remains the Friday Night Baseball owner in 2026. And of course, **MLB Network** will have some telecasts. And then there's the RSNs. The **Main Street Sports** [fallout](#) left nine teams—the Angels, Braves, Brewers, Cardinals, Marlins, Rays, Reds, Royals and Tigers—without a regional programmer to carry their games. Seven of the nine addressed the issue by partnering with MLB on production and distribution, while the Angels bought out Main Street's share and took over **FanDuel Sports Network West** and the Braves created **BravesVision**. That leaves MLB in control of 14 total franchises' RSNs, and many of them announced carriage deals with pay TV providers in their respective markets in the final moments before first pitch, with **Charter, Comcast, Cox, DirectTV, Fubo, Verizon Fios** and others among pay TV

distributors for the 2026 season. Leading into the season, DirecTV is also introducing a new 24/7 **MLB FAST** channel that'll offer highlights, a weekly replay of an MLB game from the prior week, Minor League coverage and original programming. Some RSNs remain in stride, despite the overall landscape looking bleak. **YES Network** and **SNY** continue to control the Big Apple's Yankees and Mets, with the former working with **Prime Video** to put on a [few exclusive games](#) for another year. The defending World Series champs Dodgers haven't moved from **Spectrum SportsNet LA**. **Marquee Sports Network** maintains the Cubs' telecasts while its new crosstown counterpart **Chicago Sports Network** enters its second season with the White Sox. And yes, there are still some **NBC Sports** RSNs for the A's, Giants and Phillies. This year will also be the first where **MLB.TV** lives on the ESPN app. The offering will continue to stream more than 2,000 out-of-market regular-season games and MLB Network programming for a price of \$149.99/season (or \$134.99/season if they have ESPN Unlimited as well). **T-Mobile** customers with a qualifying plan can continue to get MLB.TV for free.

SUBCOMMITTEE EXAMINES TELECOM ACT

Even the House Communications Subcommittee's hearing on the 1996 Telecom Act couldn't escape the **Nexstar-Tegna** reverberations. **Free Press** VP of Policy and General Counsel **Matt Wood** delivered a scathing critique of **Brendan Carr** and called out the **FCC** waiving the 39% national audience cap set by Congress. Wood noted that fellow witness **Michael O'Rielly** has [said](#) that the FCC doesn't have the authority to modify the cap and called an attempt "preposterous" and "effectively creat[ing] one of the biggest backdoors in the history of legislating" when he was an FCC Commissioner. Wood said lawmakers on both sides of the aisle should be alarmed when any FCC ignores statute, adding "giants like Nexstar are 'local' the same way CVS is a local pharmacy." The Telecom Act covers a lot, so not surprisingly, the nearly three-hour hearing touched on a potpourri of issues, including USF, the digital divide, AI and media consolidation. **ACA Connects** didn't miss the opportunity to repeat its call for the elimination of retransmission consent rules. CEO **Grant Spellmeyer** sent leadership a letter with the retrans recommendation and others, such as prohibiting rate regulation, removing regulatory barriers around communications network deployment and ensuring that rural America shares in the technology and choices offered in urban areas.

OPTIMUM SEES MOBILE, VIDEO GROWTH PATH

During an investor conference appearance Thursday, **Optimum** Chairman/CEO **Dennis Mathew** zoned in on two of the growth opportunities Optimum sees on the horizon: mobile and video.

While Mathew said that he expected 1Q26 performance to be "flat-ish to our 4Q results," the company is also "monitoring very specific metrics" as it executes new strategies, including "our ability to drive attach of mobile." Only 8% of Optimum's base currently has mobile, "so this is a big opportunity for us," Mathew said. It also introduced new video packages offering more flexibility, including via the skinnier Entertainment TV bundle, which is priced at \$30/month for the first year without most live sports and news channels. Optimum reported its lowest video sub declines in more than five years in 4Q25. "We're continuing to see good momentum as we move into Q1 that that package is resonating," Mathew said, sharing that 15% of its video base is now on one of Optimum's simplified video plans, which also includes the more live news-heavy Extra TV and more complete live sports Everything TV plan. "I'm optimistic that we're going to be able to continue to drive these packages at the point of sale and as part of our base management strategy," the exec said.

AT&T DOESN'T SWEAT STARLINK

AT&T SVP, Network CTO **Yigal Elbaz** was asked at an investor conference whether the carrier saw **Starlink** and its direct-to-cellular satellite connectivity capabilities as a competitor to AT&T's terrestrial network. Elbaz responded that while AT&T is partnering with AST SpaceMobile for D2C service because "we can't cover every square inch in America,"—he doesn't see "how D2C from the sky becomes a true competitive offering." He added that AT&T sees D2C as a "great innovation" and that the ability to provide customers with service no matter where they are is a "great opportunity," but it's "absolutely something that we in the industry are looking at as a complementary capability."

NETFLIX PRICE HIKE

Netflix is raising its prices again. Its ad-supported standard plan is going up \$1 to \$8.99/month, while its standard ad-free option goes to \$19.99/month, a \$2 increase. The premium plan, which offers no ads, ultra HD and HDR and streaming on four devices, is also going up \$2 to \$26.99/month. The streaming giant said in a statement to the trades that the price hike will enable them to reinvest in quality content and improve the user experience. The new prices are effective immediately for new members, while existing customers will be notified by mail a month before the increase kicks in. Netflix last raised prices in January 2025.

WBD-PSKY VOTE SET

Warner Bros. Discovery set April 23 at 10am ET for its special meeting for shareholders to vote on the **Paramount Skydance** merger. Originally, WBD stockholders were set to vote on a merger with **Netflix** on March 20 before PSKY proposed a

superior offer of \$31 per share in cash, plus sweeteners. Assuming the vote goes their way, PSKY hopes to close the deal by Sept. 30. Much depends on U.S. and European regulators, though. While DOJ antitrust enforcers are yet to flag anything, Senate Dems have certainly been vocal about taking a closer look at the deal, including at the [foreign sovereign wealth funds](#) helping finance PSKY's offer. A recent [letter](#) signed by Minority Leader *Chuck Schumer* (D-NY) also warned PSKY CEO *David Ellison* of a potential investigation into the company's contacts with the *Trump* administration concerning the deal.

RETRANS UPDATE

With **Dish** without **Gray Media** stations and **DirecTV** missing **Morgan Murphy** stations, this wasn't the retrans deal we were expecting. DirecTV satellite and streaming customers saw Zolo Broadcasting-owned KOHD-ABC and KBNZ-CBS stations in Bend, Oregon returned last night. The duopoly stations have been dark on DirecTV since Nov 1. That was the same day they returned to Dish customers, with the provider losing them for nearly a year.

A SWIFT RESOLUTION

The **National Advertising Division** said **Charter** voluntarily changed disclosures regarding its claims of "fiber-powered" Spectrum internet. In a Fast-Track SWIFT challenge lobbied by **AT&T**, NAD looked at whether the fiber-powered claims in Spectrum's TV and website advertising gave the impression that Spectrum internet is served to users via FTTH infrastructure. Spectrum's disclosure stated "Spectrum Internet is powered by fiber and delivered to the home via HFC," but it's now adjusting disclosures by removing references to HFC and disclosing that fiber-powered services aren't delivered through FTTH.

HBO MAX WRAPS EURO ROLLOUTS

HBO Max added to its international distribution Thursday, debuting in the U.K. and Ireland in addition to 12 countries across the Asia-Pacific region. The U.K. and Ireland releases wrap up the DTC streamer's expansion in Europe after having been [introduced](#) in Austria, Germany, Italy and other countries in January. The former is working with **Sky** and **Prime Video** as launch partners, while Sky is the launch

partner in Ireland. In Asia-Pacific, countries including Bhutan, Fiji, the Maldives and Samoa can now sign up for HBO Max. It'll add New Zealand come mid-2026.

WSOP RETURNS TO ESPN

After a few years apart, **ESPN** and the **World Series of Poker** signed a multiyear rights deal to bring the WSOP Main Event back this summer. ESPN, which first aired the Main Event in 1987, will offer more than 100 hours of coverage across its platforms, beginning July 2 and lasting through the three-night live finale Aug. 3-5 (9pm-Midnight). Edited episodes with added storytelling and programming elements will air on ESPN's linear networks.

HALLMARK STARS GO ON TOUR

Hallmark is going on a two-week multi-city tour July 22-Aug. 2. The inaugural Hallmark Stars Live tour will see the brand's stars hit the stage to tell behind-the-scenes stories about fan-favorite titles as well as answer burning questions. The ticket pre-sale is open now for **Hallmark+**, Gold Crown Rewards and Michaels Rewards members, with the general sale starting Friday.

CARRIAGE

FloRacing 24/7 was added to **The Roku Channel** lineup. The **FloSports** FAST channel comes with select live and on-demand FloRacing content, including the NASCAR Whelen Modified Tour and Interstate Batteries High Limit Series. The Roku Channel currently reaches 90 million streaming households.

RATINGS

March Madness means it's time for the **T-Nets** to rise in the weekly cable ratings—though they didn't prevent **Fox News** from sweeping both primetime and total day with 2.48 million and 1.67 million viewers P2+, respectively. However, it was a tight battle in prime, with **TBS** following the news net with 2.24 million viewers and **TNT** keeping pace at 2.21 million. **TruTV** came fourth with 1.26 million, while **MS Now** had 1.19 million. TBS also came second in total day with 725,000, followed by MS Now (719,000), TNT (644,000) and **CNN** (570,000). TruTV made its way to the No. 7 spot with 398,000, trailing **ESPN's** 469,000. For comparison, truTV's total-day rankings for the previous three weeks were 67th, 70th and 69th.

BASIC CABLE		
P2+ PRIME RANKINGS*		
(03/16/26-03/22/26)		
MON-SUN	MC	MC
	US	US AA
	AA%	(000)
FNC	0.760	2446
TBS	0.649	2090
TNT	0.553	1779
TRUTV	0.402	1296
MS NOW	0.362	1165
CNN	0.244	785
ESPN	0.214	688
HGTV	0.204	656
FS1	0.186	599
HALL	0.181	584
HIST	0.162	521
FOOD	0.161	517
TLC	0.152	488
DISC	0.146	469
USA	0.135	435
A&E	0.120	386
GSN	0.111	359
TV LAND	0.109	350
INSP	0.108	347
ID	0.098	317
HALLMYS	0.094	304
NAN	0.093	299
LIFE	0.085	275
AMC	0.085	274
ESPN2	0.083	268
FX	0.077	249
BRAVO	0.076	244
REELZ	0.073	236
WETV	0.073	234
OXY	0.072	232
NWSMX	0.068	220
COM	0.065	208
BET	0.063	203
ADSM	0.055	178
NWSNTN	0.055	177
SYFY	0.055	177
FRFM	0.052	168
FETV	0.051	164
FXX	0.051	163
PRMNT	0.050	161
MTV	0.049	157
TRAVEL	0.047	150
APL	0.047	150
IFC TV	0.045	146
MGNLA	0.045	146
OWN	0.045	143
LMN	0.042	137

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