

FYI

A Senate Commerce hearing to consider Danielle Thumann Severs' nomination as FCC Commissioner has been postponed. The hearing was originally set for Thursday at 10:30am. The new date and time are TBD.

AMAZON LEO CHASES STARLINK

Two LEO satellite operators are moving at different speeds, and while **Starlink's** lead over **Amazon Leo** isn't closing anytime soon, that doesn't mean the latter is sitting idle as it hopes to close the gap in the years to come. As both push to scale their broadband offerings, it's a race that connectivity providers are paying close attention to determine how they'll disrupt the competitive landscape.

Starlink, owned by *Elon Musk's* **SpaceX**, was a frequent topic throughout investor conferences last week, capped by SpaceX's [appearance](#) at **Goldman Sachs'** Communacopia and Technology event. CFO *Bret Johnsen* laid out how far SpaceX's satellite broadband business has come since its early years, when the company itself described the service as "better than nothing."

Enterprise customers now get a guaranteed high level of reliability and formal service-level agreements, and SpaceX has a large aircraft backlog that includes three of the four largest U.S. airlines, alongside cruise ships and trains. On the mobile side, Starlink has roughly 600 first-generation direct-to-device satellites in orbit powering **T-Mobile's** satellite texting service. A second-generation version aimed at full 5G-quality service is set to begin launching next year on the same satellite bus used for Starlink broadband, with commercial service planned for 1H28 using mid-band spectrum obtained from **EchoStar**.

Against that backdrop, Amazon Leo remains a distant second. It has about 392 satellites in orbit—the third-largest constellation currently operating—compared to Starlink's fleet of more than 11,000 (**Eutelsat's OneWeb** is second with around 650). In June, Amazon received a waiver from the **FCC** on its original deployment timeline, pointing to rocket shortages and manufacturing delays. It was initially supposed to launch 50% of satellites (1,616) by July 30 and the entire fleet (3,232) by July 30, 2029. While the FCC removed the initial halfway checkpoint, it maintained the final deadline—and if Amazon doesn't meet it, it'll be restricted to however many satellites are up and running at that time.

Amazon is hoping to shrink the gap on two fronts. European commercial satellite launch partner Arianespace announced last week an expanded agreement to add six more Ariane 64 missions for Amazon Leo, bringing their total from 18 to 24 flights scheduled through 2031. That's insurance against further delays from other partners, such as **United Launch Alliance** and **Blue Origin**, which operate newer rockets like the Vulcan Centaur and New Glenn, respectively.

"We committed early because we believed in what Arianespace was building, and they've executed mission after mission," said *Chris Weber*, VP, Amazon Leo Business and Product, in a release. "Expanding from 18 to 24 launches reflects our confidence in Ariane 6 and our continued investment in European launch capability."

Separately, the FCC's Space Bureau updated the reference-link dataset that governs how satellite systems like Amazon Leo's must share spectrum with geostationary operators including **DirectTV**, **SES**, Eutelsat and **Hispasat**. Amazon Leo submitted proposed reference links, drawn from the FCC's licensing database, that the Bureau incorporated into the revised dataset.

The Space Bureau's revision came alongside the White House budget office amending internal guidance to let federal spectrum studies and FCC auction preparation proceed at the same time, rather than in sequence. **NTIA** said the adjustments will accelerate the path toward future 6G spectrum auctions, noting a coordinated effort with the FCC "to ensure that as many as five spectrum actions are held by the end of 2028," when the *Trump* Administration leaves office.

Still, the near-term outlook for Amazon Leo is a continued push through Gen1 satellite deployment, while Starlink is already boasting a wide in-flight presence and a nascent mobile arm. It helps that the regulatory environment is lowering the friction for Amazon Leo and Starlink to continue scaling, though satellites and rockets aren't being built any faster.

Pivotal Research sees that existing bottleneck as an opportunity for SpaceX, which manufactures its own rockets, including the reusable Starship vehicle it hopes will succeed the Falcon9 and Falcon Heavy generation. So far, Starship has had 13 total launches—eight successful and five failed—and SpaceX hopes to design it in a way that allows multiple launches with minimal maintenance work necessary between flights.

If SpaceX sees the Starship design through, Pivotal thinks it could drive down the cost of launches "to the equivalent of terrestrial freight," opening opportunities such as expanding Starlink's capacity, deploying orbital data centers or generating revenue by establishing itself as "a monopoly space-gatekeeper."

"Our forecast is that Musk will solve for Starship reusability and lever [Tesla, SpaceX and Intel's semiconductor JV] Terafab to bring innovation and substantial cost savings on many of their major costs," Pivotal wrote.

CHARTER-SCRIPPS FRIENDS AGAIN?

Last week, **Charter** voluntarily dismissed its lawsuit against **Scripps** without prejudice, which means it retains the option to re-file. Scripps never filed an answer or motion for summary judgment. Charter filed the case in Nevada District Court shortly after its merger with **Cox Communications** closed. The heavily redacted complaint seemed to suggest Scripps was pushing back against Charter's claims that its retransmission terms should apply in the newly acquired Cox systems, including Las Vegas, which carries Scripps' KMCC, which has exclusive rights to games from **WNBA's** Las Vegas Aces and the **NHL's** Golden Knights that aren't nationally televised.

CRUZ'S 'GAMEDAY' APPEARANCE SPARKS SCRUTINY

It's not often fans get to see a "College GameDay" crew featuring *Rece Davis*, *Kirk Herbstreit*, *Pat McAfee* and Sen. *Ted Cruz* (R-TX), but Saturday proved to

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be one of those occasions as the **Senate Commerce** Chairman appeared on **ESPN** to advocate for the Protect College Sports Act. Cruz co-authored the legislation alongside Ranking Member Sen. *Maria Cantwell* (D-WA), with the bill first introduced in early June. Although ESPN doesn't face the **FCC's** Equal Time rule that broadcasters are held to, the appearance raised eyebrows—reportedly even within ESPN's own walls—for GameDay's unusual intersection of sports and politics. In this case, the lack of a guest who opposed the Protect College Sports Act caused some fans to call foul, and *The Athletic* [noted](#) that Cruz asked to come on Saturday's episode rather than the network reaching out, citing an ESPN source that added if GameDay received a request to counter Cruz, the show would accept. Nonetheless, there were a handful of fans who might have mixed up the Equal Time rule and assumed ESPN needed to follow it. FCC Chairman *Brendan Carr* joined Saturday's discussion on social media in an attempt to provide clarity, reiterating that the rule only applies to broadcast nets and legally qualified candidates (Cruz isn't up for reelection until 2030). Carr thinks the negative reaction to Cruz's GameDay hit stems back to Texas' Democratic Senate candidate *James Talarico*, whose appearance on **ABC's** "The View" sparked an inquiry into whether the show constitutes as a bona fide news program. "This ties back to Talarico. He's just running the same hoax he did a few months ago on Colbert for the purpose of getting clicks and donations—he's banking on people not understanding the statute or operating as partisan lemmings," Carr [wrote](#) on **X**, referring to Talarico's appearance on "The Late Show with *Stephen Colbert*," which was posted on **YouTube** but withheld from the broadcast episode on **CBS**. Carr also tied the issue to the public interest standard that's been front and center during his tenure. "Congress has charged the FCC with ensuring that broadcasters meet those public interest obligations, as required by their licenses. The agency should do so," Carr wrote.

SPECTRUM NEWS DIVES DEEPER IN CALIFORNIA

Charter launched a new digital-first **Spectrum News** series on **YouTube** covering long-form stories about the issues that matter most to the California communities it serves. "More On That" dives deeper into local stories without the constraints of linear TV, providing an on-the-ground perspective on how issues are really affecting Californians. Topics will include housing, health care, big tech, agriculture and climate change. [Monday's episode](#) covered data centers that were approved in the state without public votes. The show is led by Spectrum Networks, Sr. Director of Production *Seth Katz*, along with a team of multimedia journalists from key markets across the state. A new weekly show also launches this Thursday at 8pm PT on Spectrum News nets in California.

NTCA'S NEW VIRTUAL SUMMIT

NTCA - The Rural Broadband Association is set to expand its educational programming with the launch of its Business Operations Summit, a new half-day virtual event scheduled for Feb. 4 from 1-5pm ET. It will bring together executives, operational leaders and industry experts to explore the challenges and opportunities shaping rural broadband operators, while offering targeted educational content, practical case studies and networking opportunities. The association promised to provide "actionable ideas and proven approaches" that attendees can implement in their own organizations. "Having seen how well this format works through our virtual AI Summit earlier this year, we are especially excited about the prospect of making this content accessible to operational staff who may not typically be in position to attend in-person conferences, which we hope will support broader team participation," said NTCA CEO *Mike Romano* in a statement. The agenda, speaker list and registration details will be released in the coming months.

BIG TECH STREAMERS FORM POLICY COALITION

Netflix, **Amazon** and **Google's YouTube** are teaming up with big tech trade group **TechNet** to form a new policy alliance lobbying D.C. on key issues, such as live sports rights moving to streaming services. The group plans to advocate for "technology-neutral policies that encourage innovation in entertainment—enabling streaming services to invest in a wide range of programming, including live sports," TechNet [told Axios](#). The formation of the group comes as streamers and sports leagues, including the **NFL**, are being scrutinized on the Hill, including

by the **FCC**, which opened a docket into whether the Sports Broadcasting Act of 1961 needs to be revised amid a more fragmented live sports ecosystem.

BLUEPEAK TAPS CABLE ONE VET AS CEO

Midwest operator **Bluepeak** named *Ken Johnson* as its new CEO, effective Oct. 19. If Johnson's name sounds familiar, it's because he served as COO of **Cable One** until May, overseeing residential and business services, field and call center operations and the company's digital evolution and integration across 24 states. He also previously served as CTO of **SureWest Communications** and **Everest Broadband** and was inducted into the **Cable TV Pioneers** Class of 2025. At Bluepeak, Johnson succeeds *Rich Fish*, who is retiring after leading the ISP for six years and guiding its growth into a multi-state fiber provider. Fish will transition into an advisory role. "I look forward to building on the momentum Rich and the entire Bluepeak organization have created, to completing the fiber transformation of Bluepeak communities, and to continuing to expand access to best-in-class connectivity across the communities we serve," Johnson said.

REPORT: SKYSHOWTIME'S FUTURE IN DOUBT

The board of **SkyShowtime**, an international streaming jv between **Paramount** and **Comcast**, informed its CEO *Monty Sarhan* on Monday that the business is up for strategic review, with "the possibility of a wind-down." A memo obtained by the trades made clear that no decisions have been made and "all options remain under consideration." The jv was formed in August 2021 as a way to bring **Paramount+** and **Peacock** content to European markets without access to those streamers. It also includes Sky Studios programming and local content. The move comes as Paramount is seeking to merge with **Warner Bros. Discovery**, a deal that received the green light from the European Commission, although it was on the condition that it exit an international film distribution jv with Universal Pictures (also owned by Comcast).

MORE FOLKS LOOK AT PHONES WHILE WATCHING TV

If you've ever scrolled **TikTok**, **Instagram** Reels or **YouTube** while watching TV, you're definitely not alone. New research from **Omdia** shows nearly three in four U.S. TV viewers regularly use their smartphones to view other media while watching television. In fact, simultaneous media use has risen across age groups, including older demos. Among 55-64 year olds, 56% said they view media on their phones while the tube is on, up from 42% in 2023. Seventy-three percent of 45-54 year olds said the same, an 11-point increase, while 35-44 year olds went from 69% to 76%. The results highlight how traditional television is increasingly competing with short-form and vertical video for the audience's attention, with the firm suggesting content companies need to consider TV and mobile as part of the same viewing experience.

PRIME VIDEO LAUNCHES NEWS CLIPS

Amazon's Prime Video is adding on-demand news clips for the biggest national and local stories to the app's dedicated news page. Users can scroll down to the Trending Topics or Local News carousel to find curated playlists of short-form videos from multiple news sources, including FAST channels **ABC News Live**, **CBS News 24/7**, **LiveNow from Fox**, **CNN Headlines**, **NBC News Now** and more. The clips are launching on TVs and other living room devices first and will roll out on mobile and web at a later date.

CARRIAGE

Allen Media Group is adding 111 **Gray Media** local stations to the **Local Now** FAST platform. The deal brings the numbers of channels on the platform to about 600, including 370 local news channels, across all 210 markets across the country. The service is available on most streaming platforms, including **Roku**, **Apple TV**, **Fire TV** and more.

PROGRAMMING

AMC+ will premiere the first two episodes of its spooky new mystery thriller "Yaga," starring *Carrie-Anne Moss*, on Oct. 23, just in time for Halloween. New episodes will debut on Fridays.