

QUOTABLE

"This is an exciting moment for our company and our industry. If you're like me, you're in this business because you love the art of visual storytelling – the chance to entertain, unite and inspire the world through extraordinary stories. Together, Paramount and WBD can do more of that, for audiences everywhere. And we can't wait to get started." - PSKY CEO David Ellison on WBD antitrust trial settlement

SCTE'S NEW WEAPON AGAINST VANDALISM

One year after helping launch STRIKE (Strategic Threat Response & Infrastructure Knowledge Exchange), **SCTE** is ready to strike even harder at the growing problem of network vandalism and how it cuts off critical communications services.

SCTE joined **NCTA** in unveiling the STRIKE initiative last September, creating an executive-level coalition to address spiking criminal attacks on broadband infrastructure. Now, SCTE is gearing up to launch a standards subcommittee to fight back.

"**Spectrum [Charter]** is going to chair the subcommittee. It is called Critical Infrastructure Protection Subcommittee, or CIPS for short," SCTE President/CEO *Maria Popo* revealed in the latest episode of **CFX Download**. "The vice chair will probably be **Verizon, AT&T or T-Mobile**, just to illustrate how everybody's coming together to attack the same problem."

And what a problem it is. Providers [recorded](#) 18,327 attacks on critical communications infrastructure in 2025, a 59% increase from 2024—and they are quick to warn that the number likely grossly undercounts incidents. On Monday, a [Verizon fiber cable cut](#) by what appears to be a construction crew, not vandals, caused flight delays at five major Northeast airports. Verizon said it wasn't responsible for the damage, but the incident underscores how disruptive damage to network infrastructure can be, malicious or not.

Next week's SCTE **TechExpo26** will put the issue front and center during Wednes-

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day's opening session with a panel that includes Verizon VP, Network Engineering and Operations *Leo Perreault*, **Comcast** SVP, Network Operations *Tony Speller* and T-Mobile SVP Network Infrastructure & Operations *Lori Ames*.

NCTA has been leading the push on the policy side, including supporting bipartisan bill [HR 2784](#), which would criminalize attacks on private communications networks and impose stricter penalties for sabotage, damage or theft of vital broadband infrastructure. Popo thinks SCTE has a unique operations role to play that's aimed at preventing and even predicting network attacks.

"[That] might be evidence collection. One of the biggest problems is that law enforcement doesn't always show up because they're constrained," she said. "So you have crews coming out to repair the cables right away because that's what they're supposed to do—get people back up with service."

But creating some consistent standards across providers for those repair crews, including photographing damage, could be a place SCTE takes the lead. It's also looking at how it can leverage AI and all the data the workforce can collect. "The idea is hopefully that STRIKE itself maybe goes away, right? If we solve the problem," Popo said.

There are plenty of other hot topics to dig into at TechExpo26, which bills itself as the largest and most influential broadband and telecommunications event in the Americas. "You will hear AI more than you've ever wanted to hear AI before. It is in everything," quipped Popo, who noted that there is also a session on quantum computing. **World Broadband Association** Director General *Martin Creaner* is joining Expo for the first time to delve into the business and the economic side of broadband technology and AI.

Also new is **AMC Global Media** stepping up as Expo's first-ever programming sponsor, with CEO *Kristin Dolan* and CTO *Stephanie Mitchko* speaking at Tuesday's headliner session. The idea was borne from SCTE's various video standards, including last year's SCTE 301, "Next Generation Linear Channel Assembly: Scaling FAST and Other Use Cases."

"I saw that **YouTube**, **Meta** and all [others]... were talking about our standards at their shows, but we weren't talking about them," said Popo. "We're thinking of it more on the technology side of the house. Even in live streaming, where the network infrastructure operators are always the ones that are looked at if there's any issue in a livestream when many times it's probably not them. So we're looking right now at that ecosystem. We thought, 'OK, let's start to invite some of these folks to the show.' We thought co-host was a good place to start."

It's too soon to say if TechExpo27 will feature another programmer with co-hosting duties, but Popo would be all for it. For now, she's hoping to get the word out that SCTE is a place for those focused on all forms of connectivity, including video.

"I don't think you're going to show up all of a sudden, even next year, where there's all these content providers on the tech side. We've got to build to that, and I think you're starting to see that," she said, pointing to SCTE's partnership with the **Streaming Video Technology Alliance** (SVTA), which co-hosts Expo's StreamTech track.

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Check out the entire conversation on CFX Download on [YouTube](#), [Apple](#) and [Spotify](#) for Popo's take on CFX's idea of jokingly expanding Expo's SCTE Broadband Championship, formerly Cable-Tec Games, to include a sting operation targeting infrastructure criminals.

PSKY, STATES SETTLE WBD MERGER FIGHT

After quite a lot of will-they-won't-they over the weekend, the states and the **Writers Guild of America** settled their antitrust case over the \$110 billion **Paramount Skydance-Warner Bros. Discovery** merger Monday, clearing the path for the transaction to close. And the good news for MVPDs is that some of the concessions hammered out are aimed at protecting them at the carriage negotiating table. On top of making several content production and theatrical commitments as part of the settlement, PSKY-WBD agreed to negotiate distribution agreements for Paramount's basic cable channels and WBD channels separately for five years, and will not alter existing schedules for renegotiation of agreements except at the request of a distributor. The combined company also agreed not to make the terms of any future distribution agreements for WBD channels contingent on the terms of an agreement for PSKY channels, and vice versa, or use affiliate fee data for one group of channels to determine or influence negotiating for the other group. It also must continue to offer a free streaming service like **Pluto TV**, and will establish a News Editorial Independence Board to ensure **CNN** and **CBS**'s editorial independence. If the company breaks these terms, it will be forced to divest its **BET** channels, **VH1**, **Comedy Central**, **Smithsonian**, **Destination America** and **Science**. Not cheering the news of a settlement is the **FCC**'s lone Democratic commissioner. *Anna Gomez* said the transaction "represents a troubling new stage of media consolidation," with the editorial independence protections untested. Plus, she's still mad the FCC approved indirect foreign ownership funding for the deal. In a memo to staff, PSKY CEO *David Ellison* said that the companies aim to seal the deal in "approximately two weeks," presumably just before the \$650 million per quarter "ticking fee" kicks in on Oct. 1. "This settlement is not a vote of support for this merger. But we believe this settlement, which resolves our antitrust concerns in every market alleged in our case, protects competition and consumer choice, and puts workers' needs, concerns, and futures first, is the best course of action," said California AG *Rob Bonta*, who led the state coalition suing PSKY, in a statement. PSKY is on the hook for the states' legal fees, not exceeding \$40 million. On the WGA side, PSKY will "prohibit writer layoffs" at CBS News for five years and pay \$17.5 million to the Guild's health fund. When the transaction closes, it will bring together not only two major film studios and cable portfolios but also **HBO Max** and **Paramount+**, which the combined company plans to combine under one platform in the future. WBD shares closed up nearly 11% Monday, while PSKY shed 30 cents/nearly 3%.

DISNEY/ABC HAS MORE FRIENDS IN FCC DISPUTE

The **FCC**'s order directing **ABC**'s stations to submit renewal applications for its eight broadcast licenses years ahead of schedule—issued after President *Trump* criticized ABC commentators and editorial decisions—is "an undisguised effort to intimidate not just ABC but every broadcast licensee in the country," according to The Reporters Committee for **Freedom of the Press**. The nonprofit—whose attorneys provide pro bono legal representation, amicus curiae support and other legal resources to protect First Amendment freedoms—made the comment in a brief filed Monday in support of ABC/Disney's lawsuit seeking to halt the FCC's early license renewal review. Also Monday, First Amendment attorney *Robert Corn-Revere* filed an amicus brief in support of Disney/ABC on behalf of multiple groups, including **The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression**, **Cato Institute**, **Public Knowledge** and **The Multicultural Media, Telecom and Internet Council**. He claimed that the proceeding is "illegitimate," even if the FCC could be taken at its word that the license review is based on station employment practices due to the agency's limited jurisdiction to enforce EEO mandates. "Just as the FCC may not exercise EEO authority to ensure programming is sufficiently 'diverse,' it may not read those same rules in reverse to reach programming decisions the Chairman regards as 'woke,'" Corn-Revere wrote.

NETWORKS TAKE TRUMP FEUD TO COURT

It's no secret President *Trump* has been at odds with an array of media outlets throughout his two terms, but it's reached another turning point. After **CNN**, *Politico* and **MS Now** said their press credentials were revoked without any notice, the three outlets announced they were filing a lawsuit Monday "to protect our First Amendment rights

and defend the principle that the government does not decide what the press reports or publishes.” The lawsuit, filed in the U.S. District Court for D.C., seeks an order that would deem Trump’s ban unconstitutional and block the future removal of reporters. “Left unchallenged, this threatens press freedom and the public’s right to independent journalism free from government interference,” the three said in a joint statement. The trio have plenty of support, with no other networks stepping up Monday to fill in for CNN, which was slated to provide the pool report before the ban. “The public has a vital interest in receiving accurate, independent information about its government. No administration should restrict a news organization because it objects to its reporting,” said **ABC News**, **CBS News**, **CNN**, **Fox News** and **NBC News** in a joint statement. **C-SPAN** also issued a statement supporting CNN, MS Now and Politico. The public affairs net urged the Trump administration to reverse course and restore the three outlets’ White House credentials. “A very proud C-SPAN Board member here,” **NCTC** CEO *Lou Borrelli* wrote on **LinkedIn**. “Democracy Unfiltered [relies] on access to our government by all news operations. We stand for what is right and the Constitutional rights of our colleagues in the press.” In a [post](#) on **Truth Social**, Trump said he wasn’t waging a war on the press, but rather he’s “instituting an assault on the FAKE NEWS.” A separate [post](#) said the White House would appeal the lawsuit “because Fake News people and publications that only write negatively, and who violate our National Security by writing false and defamatory stories with unknown ‘sources,’ shouldn’t be allowed access to the most important Office anywhere in the World.”

NCTC NAMES LTN AS APPROVED PARTNER

With the upcoming C-Band transition looming, **NCTC** has selected **LTN** as an approved partner for the co-op. The company provides satellite-to-IP migration, which could be useful for the co-op’s 700 or so operator members as the FCC prepares to auction 160 MHz of spectrum from the upper C-band next year.

FIBER FRENZY

TDS Telecom unveiled new fiber projects in development across Wisconsin including Beaver Dam, Ripon, New London, Hortonville, Brillion, Colby and Abbotsford. All told, they will serve a total of over 25,000 homes and businesses. TDS is also broadening its service area in Janesville, Greenville, Marshfield and Eau Claire, where network construction has been ongoing.

RATINGS

Prime Video ushered in its fifth season of Thursday Night Football. The opening Lions vs Bills matchup lifted the streamer to an average audience of 18.6 million viewers, a 5% improvement compared to the 2025 debut and a 21% increase against last year’s full-season average. What’s more is the postgame “TNF Nightcap” had an all-time high of 3.66 million viewers, up 33% from last year’s average of 2.75 million. -- **YES Network** said that as of Friday, linear viewership in September was up 36% YOY. That’s alongside streaming viewership on *Gotham* climbing 63%, helping total audience delivery jump 41%.

PROGRAMMING

HBO ordered “The Spread,” a new original drama set in Miami about “a visionary billionaire who collects the brilliant, the hungry and the dangerous, then turns their ambitions loose on the markets that power America.” Production, premiere and other details are still TBD. Meanwhile, the second season of “Rage” begins Oct. 9 on **HBO Max**. -- Former **NBA** champion and head coach *Doc Rivers* is returning to TV screens, joining NBC Sports as a game analyst. Rivers was previously on **ESPN**’s main commentary team alongside *Mike Breen* and *Doris Burke* back in 2023, but resigned in January 2024 to become the Bucks’ coach, a position he’d hold until April. Rivers joining NBC Sports also means he’ll work alongside his son Austin, who serves as an analyst. -- **Sinclair** has expanded its “The National News Desk,” adding additional news hours across Sinclair stations. As of Monday, the 5pm edition is now part of the schedules in Seattle, Nashville, Baltimore, Columbus, Mobile, Wilkes-Barre, Flint, Savannah, Charleston, New Bern, Reno and Chico. Sinclair also is adding daytime half-hour editions of The National News Desk within the afternoon programming blocks of stations in Seattle, St. Louis, Nashville, Pittsburgh, Las Vegas, Grand Rapids, Oklahoma City, Birmingham, Mobile, Wilkes-Barre, Omaha, Flint, Chattanooga, Syracuse, Tri-Cities, Reno, Tallahassee, Eugene, Bakersfield, Corpus Christi and Gainesville.