

BY THE NUMBERS

More than half of Americans (54%) now say data centers are mostly bad for the environment, up from 39% in January, according to a new Pew Research Center survey. The percent saying they're bad for energy costs rose to 50% from 38%. And 49% say they're bad for people's quality of life nearby, up from 30%.

DOUBTS LINGER OVER BEAD'S OVERHAUL

It was hard for the government's \$42.5 billion BEAD program not to get a few jobs Thursday during a **Benton Institute for Broadband & Society** panel on the evolving broadband marketplace.

NCTA SVP, General Counsel & Chief Legal Officer *Russ Hanser* quipped that the sequel to BEAD 1.0 should have been called "Two BEAD Too Furious." "We were going with BEAD 2 Location Boogaloo," added **Nextlink** Internet Chief Strategy and Legal Officer *Claude Aiken*.

The jokes were in reference to BEAD 2.0, the *Trump* administration's overhaul of the program that slashed the amount of deployment funds to around \$20 billion as a result of **NTIA**'s "Benefit of the Bargain" policy overhaul that had the states rebid with a technology-neutral stance and less emphasis on fiber solutions. NTIA is still set to issue guidance on the remaining \$21 billion in unused surplus, with the agency [announcing](#) earlier this month that states could use a portion of that savings toward unserved locations that were identified after their final proposals were submitted.

"When BEAD came around, it was going to be the last, best and greatest infrastructure subsidy program ever. I don't think anybody truly believes that anymore," said Aiken.

He has spent years working on various subsidy programs—from BEAD to RDOF to BTOP and CAF. "Each one has its own pluses and minuses. It does seem like it ends up being a pendulum that swings back and forth between technological neutrality [to] prioritizing fiber. Overall economic efficiency to we don't care too much about what we spend. It's very easy to apply for, and there are very few regulatory constraints to we're going to make sure that every dollar is spent absolutely how the government wants it to be," he said. "Every single one has had defaults. Every single one has had successes. Every single one has had failures. We can learn from all of those, if we take the time to."

Joining the Benton panel was *Ernesto Falcon*, Program Manager for the Communications and Broadband Policy Branch at the Public Advocates Office within the **California Public Utilities Commission**. He wishes BEAD 1.0 had stuck around because he thinks it could have been a huge infusion of dollars so that it was "one and done," with the infrastructure scalable for the future needs of whatever killer app/tech that's around the corner.

"We're far afield nowadays in terms of what BEAD is doing. I suspect we will have to come back, at least in California, with close to 400,000 households that may be in a satellite monopoly because needs will continue to grow [beyond satellite capacity]. The future continues to march forward. Industry [providers], for their part, are in a

place where they're actively marketing gig-plus speeds," Falcon said, noting that at the end of 2025, about one in three California subscribers are taking service above a gig. "I suspect they are using services that they feel are what they need, and they will continue as that number grows."

Hanser, who joined NCTA in 2024 after serving as NTIA Associate Administrator for Policy Analysis and Development, said there's no issue with a technologically neutral approach—the problem is capability neutrality. "Policymakers should look at what the capabilities need to be and then be neutral as among technologies that can satisfy those requirements and meet those demands," he said. "It should not be the fastest and cheapest, but it should be what is the best for the consumer, what kind of technologies will be the most future-proof, what will allow for the kind of activities that people want to engage in and what is the best use of the public money."

While it's hard to predict exactly what's coming, broadband service providers do see roles to play in the growth of AI and data centers given the massive amount of data being transferred. "Cable providers have fiber-rich networks that they view as being extremely well suited to that task, so that is a huge opportunity," Hanser said, adding that might mean bringing new facilities that could provide opportunities for other entities beyond the data center.

Aiken was a bit more pessimistic given his role at Nextlink, which has fiber and fixed wireless networks across 12 states in the Midwest and South. "Candidly, I think the opportunity tends to go to the large national giants rather than the small electric co-ops or small regional ISPs. But absolutely yes, any sort of additional revenue opportunity that we can leverage our network to provide is absolutely welcome," he said.

The Nextlink exec said one thing that concerns him is that a lot of the fiber going to these data centers is closed. "So it is not accessible to a provider like us who may say, 'Hey, we have a tower right there. We would really like to upgrade our backhaul capacity and provide better gigabit fixed wireless service in that area,'" Aiken said. "All strands are reserved for future data center capacity growth. So that's a challenge that I think we run into with that."

Falcon said he didn't know much on the subject, but worried if it's happening that it's a massive missed opportunity, likening it to how fiber made it into rural Marin County, California, because of *George Lucas'* Skywalker Ranch. "If a data center were to pull an extraordinary amount of capacity deep into an area that traditionally doesn't have it, that brings down the derivative cost of connecting to that further into these rural territories by a lot," he said.

BROADBAND AFFORDABILITY DEBATE

Thursday's **Benton** panel also treaded into affordability, with *Ernesto Falcon* an especially noteworthy contributor given the **CPUC** Public Advocates Office's role in getting **Charter-Cox** and **Verizon-Frontier** to agree to [merger conditions](#) around pricing. Both carriers had to offer high-quality services that matched California's \$20 and \$30 California Lifeline subsidy offering. Verizon is offering what Falcon called the fastest post-subsidy free internet in the country: 500 Mbps over fiber for qualifying low-income households in areas

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where Frontier's network was upgraded, and roughly 200 Mbps on the fixed-wireless side. Charter's condition, set to begin in January, will have it offer a fully subsidized service at 100 Mbps down/20 Mbps up and a 500 Mbps tier at \$20 a month post-subsidy. Verizon's conditions last 10 years, while Charter's last five. "I think there's more we can do to eventually get it to a point where income should not be the barrier of whether you have access or not," Falcon said. **NCTA** is all for low-income programs, but opposes states "getting into the rate regulation game under the guise of affordability," said *Russ Hanser*, arguing it goes against how Congress set up the 1996 Telecom Act. But that doesn't mean operators shirk affordability obligations. He noted cable providers are collectively the fourth-largest wireless provider in the U.S. and undercutting the prices at Verizon, **AT&T** and **T-Mobile**. Plus, cable was a pioneer in low-cost broadband with Comcast launching its \$10/month Internet Essentials program in 2011, followed by Cox, Charter and others. "The plans have gone up a little bit, generally in the \$15-range, with more robust plans for a little bit more," Hanser said. "But these are plans that providers have offered and continue to offer long after obligations to do so have expired. Our members were big supporters of ACP and fought against it lapsing."

JUDGE PRESSES STATES, PSKY-WBD ON SETTLEMENT

U.S. District Judge *Araceli Martínez-Olguín* spent a chunk of Thursday's hearing on the **Paramount-Warner Bros. Discovery** settlement drilling into the deal's cable safeguards. She pressed California Senior Assistant Attorney General for Antitrust *Paula Blizzard* to tie the provisions back to the states' original underlying Clayton Act claims, to which Blizzard said the consent decree keeps the combined company's cable channels on staggered negotiating calendars, rather than one master negotiation. That way PSKY-WBD wouldn't be able to bundle channels and threaten to black them all out at once. And if a distributor alleges unfair treatment, an independent monitoring trustee and state compliance committee would review the matter before they'd initiate a court procedure to ensure a court-ordered "cure" process. If that fails, a slate of channels will be made eligible for divestiture—a mixture Blizzard said cuts across networks formerly owned by **Turner** and **Scripps Networks Interactive**, because they still carry revenue despite cable's overall viewership decline. Martínez-Olguín, who ultimately didn't sign off on the settlement but will deliver a ruling "in due course," spent other portions of the hearing making sure the settlement was made at arm's length and "not the result of collusion." She wants Paramount, WBD and the 12 state AGs to respond to Sen. *Cory Booker's* (D-NJ) letter asking for independent public-interest review of the settlement. Additionally, Martínez-Olguín ruled to allow outside parties to file amicus briefs by midnight tonight.

CARRIAGE

Optimum and **A+E Global Media** renewed their carriage deal. The new agreement spans the programmer's full linear portfolio, including **A&E**, **History**, **Lifetime**, **Lifetime Movie Network**, **FYI**, **Vice**, **Military History Channel**, **Crime+Investigation**, **Lifetime Real Women** and **History en Espanol**.

BIPARTISAN BILL TARGETS TELECOM CYBERSECURITY

A pair of Senators are reaching across the aisle to try and strengthen the U.S.' defense against cybersecurity attacks, particularly on telecommunications networks. Sen. *Mark Warner* (D-VA), Vice Chairman of the **Senate Select Committee on Intelligence**, and **Senate Commerce** Chairman *Ted Cruz* (R-TX) introduced the Telecommunications Cybersecurity and Resilience Act on Thursday. The legislation seeks to form a telecom cybersecurity working group within **NTIA** that's made up of providers, suppliers, cybersecurity experts and representatives from state, local and federal agencies. It'd also expand on existing federal frameworks and threat defense while creating a voluntary certification process, in addition to requiring the best practices be reviewed at least every two years—and following major cyber incidents, such as the Salt Typhoon attack that helped inspire the bill. "The Salt Typhoon intrusion was the worst telecom hack in our nation's history and showed us just how vulnerable our critical infrastructure is, but it does not have to be that way. If telecommunications companies adopt cybersecurity best practices, our networks can be more resilient," Warner said.

APPLE'S MISSION TO GROW F1 IN THE U.S.

Eddy Cue, **Apple** SVP, Services and Health, and **F1** President/CEO *Stefano Domenicali* joined a **Paley Media Council** talk on Thursday in NYC to dish about how the motorsport has progressed since Apple TV began exclusively streaming races in March. In terms of early fan engagement, “it’s younger, a lot more females and a lot more people watching,” Cue shared. “We can measure ourselves against things in the past, and we’re up by a significant double-digit percentage growth on the race day.” The Apple exec is particularly encouraged by how Saturday’s race qualifying streams have performed. “Our ratings on Saturday are through the roof,” he said. Cue and Domenicali spent a lot of time outlining their vision for growing F1 in the U.S., with the motorsport CEO stressing that “you have to be culturally relevant” if you want to succeed as a sport in America. It’s why the companies are working to put F1 in front of younger people, including via creator-led altcasts on Fox-owned **AVOD Tubi** and partnering with **Netflix** for the Canadian Grand Prix. “People thought it was crazy. You guys pay for the exclusive rights; why the hell would you put a race on Netflix?” Cue said. “My view on this is how do we grow the sport? I don’t care what it is. We’re going to try all kinds of different things... If we grow the sport, we’re going to win.” Apple is also serving F1 content on Apple News to expose more people to the sport. Another facet is pushing the celebrity appeal of F1 racers in the country. In the same way that Swifties became Chiefs fans after their fav pop singer began dating (and eventually married) *Travis Kelce*, Apple and F1 think driver *Lewis Hamilton* dating *Kim Kardashian* is a great way to capture the zeitgeist. Cue told an amusing story about personally texting Kardashian during a race to come outside so they could show her on camera for Apple viewers. “The culture and the things that happen outside of the race are very important if you want to grow the sport,” Cue said.

GRAY MEDIA, SINCLAIR WORKING WITH THE HORNETS

The **NBA**’s Charlotte Hornets added OTA distribution ahead of the 2026-27 season. The team already tapped **DAZN** as its DTC partner, but it’s also working with **Gray Media** and **Sinclair** to add free access in nine markets across North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia: Charleston, Columbia, Greensboro, Greenville-New Bern, Greenville-Spartanburg-Asheville-Anderson, Myrtle Beach, Raleigh, Roanoke and Wilmington. Each broadcast will include pre- and postgame coverage. More details will be shared closer to the season’s start next month.

YOUTUBE’S TV MUSCLE

The annual “Made on YouTube” showcase allowed the **Google**-owned streaming platform to boast about its progress on TV screens. In a blog post accompanying the event, **YouTube** Sr. Director, Product Management *Kurt Wilms* shared that TV is the top way viewers watch over half of the platform’s top 100 creators. And it’s not just podcasts and whatever you call what *MrBeast* does that are getting the love from TV audiences: views of microdrama content on TV alone increased by over 90% YOY. (Microdramas surpassed 6.5 billion views in the first half of 2026 across all screens). Now, the streamer is focused on making it easier for TV watchers to engage with the content they love. Soon, those users will be able to post comments directly through their TVs via the voice functionality on their remotes.

DOES THE NY TIMES REALLY KNOW THE BEST TV SHOWS OF THE CENTURY?

Who doesn’t love a good list, no matter how subjective it may be? The *NY Times* has been dribbling out a [ranking](#) of the 100 best TV shows of the 21st Century based on votes from more than 500 influential actors, showrunners, TV execs and other big players. So far, it’s published 21-100, which includes many current shows—**FX**’s “Shogun” (#86), **HBO**’s “The Pitt,” (No. 36), **CBS**’ “Survivor” (No. 31) **Apple TV**’s “Severance” (No. 30), **AMC**’s “Better Call Saul” (No. 27). We have to wait until Friday for 1-20, but we can’t help but make some guesses based on who’s missing (no “Sopranos” since it debuted in 1999). **AMC**’s “Breaking Bad” and “Mad Men” have to be shoo-ins. **Paramount**’s “Yellowstone” and **Netflix**’s “Stranger Things” also seem to be worthy contenders. Glaringly absent are some sitcom classics, such as “The Office” and the more recent (and very deserving) “Abbott Elementary.” Place your bets—we’ll be back Friday to see who called it.

PEOPLE

Nick Troiano is stepping down as CEO of predictive advertising company **Cadent**. *Lisa Utzschneider*, Special Advisor to Novacap Management, was appointed Interim CEO and Chair of the Board, effective immediately.