

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Madam Chair: Rosenworcel Takes the Gavel at FCC

Jessica Rosenworcel presided over her first **FCC** meeting as acting chairwoman Wednesday, offering a glimpse into how she will run the agency if the gig becomes permanent. She has started a top-to-bottom review of the FCC, saying her office is looking at issues in every bureau to determine if they need a revamp or new way of operating. "I think that is regular practice for anyone who takes over an institution and that's what we're doing here," she said during a press conference after Wednesday's open meeting.

One of her first acts was to establish a task force dedicated to improving the agency's broadband data and mapping tools, which she has long criticized as inaccurate. Her office drew inspiration from the agency's Incentive Auction Task Force that spearheaded the FCC's first-ever incentive auction in 2016 to repurpose broadcast airwaves. *Jean Kiddoo* was tapped as chair of the new task force, and she'll continue to serve as chair of the Incentive Auction Task Force.

Rosenworcel is also looking into the FCC process of reviewing national security items. "While we make it a priority to coordinate externally, we need to do the same internally. So my office is exploring changes to the FCC process for reviewing matters related to national security, which right now are siloed within the agency's various bureaus and offices," she said.

The Democrat begins her job shortly after the completion of Phase 1 of the \$9.2 billion Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction. A bipartisan group of lawmakers have asked the FCC to scrutinize


the companies that won support for broadband projects to make sure they can deliver the services and speeds promised. "We are using our finely tuned combs and regulatory review right now to assess the financial capabilities of those bidders, the technical and engineering capabilities of those bidders and the operational capabilities of those bidders," she said, adding that the FCC won't decide how it will proceed with the second phase of the RDOF auction until it's finished this process.

Not surprisingly, Rosenworcel indicated she won't take any action on the Section 230 petition filed by **NTIA** under the *Trump* Administration. Net neutrality is a different matter. **Public Knowledge** and others have filed a petition for the FCC to reconsider a 3-2 vote in October dealing with a court remand of the Restoring Internet Freedom order. The party-line vote essentially said the 2017 order is just fine and promotes public safety, facilitates broadband infrastructure deployment and allows the FCC to continue to provide Lifeline support.

"We are assessing right now what the best way is forward, conscious of composition of the Commission," she said—a reference to the FCC's current 2-2 split among Republicans and Democrats. "It's my hope we can continue to discuss these matter going forward. I support net neutrality, and I oppose what the last administration did on this subject."

### MEDIA CALLED TO HILL FOR EXTREMISM HEARING

**House Commerce** will hold a hearing Feb 24 entitled "Fanning the Flames: Disinformation and Extremism in the Media." "Some broadcasters' and cable networks' increasing reliance on




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conspiracy theories and misleading or patently false information raises questions about their devotion to journalistic integrity,” said Commerce leaders *Frank Pallone* (D-NJ) and *Mike Doyle* (D-PA), adding that the pandemic and Capitol riots have shown “the spread of disinformation and extremism by traditional news media presents a tangible and destabilizing threat.” The witness list has not been posted yet.

**WINTER STORM URI SLAMS TEXAS**

Old Man Winter didn't get the memo and sure messed with Texas this week. Connectivity providers in the state were continuing to assess the impact Wednesday and were restoring services as power returned. **Sparklight**, part of the **Cable One** family of brands, reported Wednesday afternoon that it still had approximately 20,000 customers without commercial power. While the company has back-up generators supporting numerous impacted areas, some areas remain inaccessible due to storm debris, downed power lines and icy road conditions. Sparklight donated \$15,000 along with food and supplies to support relief efforts in the markets it serves. A **Charter** spokesperson said the company hasn't sustained any significant network damage from the snow and ice, but crews are working on localized damage where they can do so safely. Most of the impact to customers is power related. A few dozen Spectrum stores are closed, again largely due to a loss of power. **Comcast** noted that in some instance customers may have power but not their Xfinity services because commercial power hasn't been restored to the area. **Altice USA** said it's closely monitoring the situation and making assessments to its network and facilities to ensure that when power is back on, **Suddenlink** services are restored as well. “Of course, the wellbeing and safety of our local

employees and customers remains our utmost priority as the area continues to experience extreme winter weather and power outages,” a spokesperson said. The **FCC** said it will be available to address emergency communications needs 24/7, including throughout the weekend. As of 10:30am ET Wednesday, the agency was aware of 279,585 wireless users in Texas affected by the storm and more than 9,000 wireline users who were impacted. It counted 140 network data outages overall in Texas and seven in Oklahoma. Of these outages, a total of four 911 call centers in Texas and Oklahoma have been affected.

**NEW FCC MAPS A LONG WAYS AWAY**

**FCC** acting chair *Jessica Rosenworcel*'s review of the agency's progress dominated its February meeting, which kicked off with three presentations laying out the current status of the Emergency Broadband Program, COVID-19 Telehealth Program and efforts to improve broadband mapping data. The Commission officially chose to use the **Universal Service Administrative Company**, which operates the databases tied to the Lifeline program, to administer the EBB. It is now working with the USAC to establish the program rules and stand up additional systems. Eligible telecommunications carriers and broadband providers that had a low-income or COVID-19 program as of April 1 will receive automatic approval from the FCC to participate in the program. On broadband mapping, details as to how long it will take to create complete versions of the new data maps are still hazy, and the Commission is still in the early stages of working with potential contractors and getting RFPs out. “I think, based on my experience with developing other complex systems at the Commission and how difficult it is to

# Mark Your Calendars!

## Cablefax Award Submission Deadlines:

<b>The FAXIES Awards</b>	Entry Deadline: March 19 Final Deadline: March 26
<b>Cablefax 100 Nominations</b>	April 9
<b>Top Ops Nominations</b>	April 23
<b>The Diversity List Nominations</b>	July 16
<b>Most Powerful Women Nominations</b>	September 10
<b>Program Awards</b>	Entry Deadline: November 19 Final Deadline: December 3



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do these kinds of very difficult data gathers, it's going to take a while. I think we are talking probably next year," said *Jean Kiddoo*, newly-named chair of the Broadband Data Task Force.

#### C-BAND ACTION FINALLY CEASES

Bidding in the **FCC's** C-band auction finally came to a close Wednesday afternoon after a nine-day long assignment phase. The phase allowed winning bidders the opportunity to bid for frequency-specific licenses corresponding to their clock phase winnings. Gross proceeds for the entire auction now sit at \$81.16 billion. The Commission said it will release the Closing Public Notice within the next few business days that officially notifies winning bidders and specifies the deadlines for payments and long-form applications. After the results are announced, winners will be required to make a 20% down payment within 10 business days, at which point the quiet period will end.

#### YOUTUBE TV ADDING 4K STREAMING FOR A PRICE

**YouTube TV** is releasing a paid add-on that will offer 4K streaming, DVR for offline playback and unlimited simultaneous in-home streams. The vMVPD, which made its debut nearly four years ago, counts more than 3 million paid subscribers and offers more than 85 networks. "While the majority of YouTube videos are watched on mobile, our fastest area of growth is the TV," **YouTube** chief product officer *Neal Mohan* said in a blog. "That's why we've brought that same spirit of YouTube's experience to TV content with YouTube TV." The announcement came on the same day as YouTube's virtual **TCA** presentation, much of which focused on YouTube Originals. The upcoming programming slate includes an untitled project with *Alicia Keys*, special "Black Renaissance" (Feb 26) and docuseries "Demi Lovato: Dancing with the Devil" (March 23).

#### WARNERMEDIA UPS KIDS & FAMILY PLEDGE

**WarnerMedia** doubled down on its commitment to family-friendly programming at its virtual upfront Wednesday, announcing a preschool-centric programming block launching on **Cartoon Network** and **HBO Max** this fall. "Mush-Mush & the Mushables" and "Thomas & Friends: All Engines Go" are among 20 new series that will be available at launch. WarnerMedia pledged to grow the offering to nearly 50 new shows within its first two years. All preschool content will be aligned with Cartoon Network's new "Redraw Your World" tagline, encouraging kids to be themselves. "Cartoon Network's mission is to make every kid feel comfortable as their own messy, complicated self," *Tom Ascheim*, pres of global kids, young adults and classics said during the upfront.

#### MSNBC WINS THE WEEK

With the Senate impeachment trial of former president *Donald Trump* dominating headlines last week, **MSNBC** took the first-place crown among ad-supported cable nets in prime (2.583 million) and total day (1.791 million). **Fox News** was close on its heels in prime with 2.580 million viewers, followed by **CNN** (2.02mIn). **TNT** (1.155mIn) and **HGTV** (1.09mIn) continued their reign as top non-news nets in prime. **CNN** took second place in total day (1.791 million), followed by **Fox News** (1.38 million). **MSNBC's** "The Rachel Maddow Show" was the #1

cable program in total viewers for the week with 4.1mIn.

#### NIELSEN DIVES INTO DE&I MEASUREMENT

**Nielsen** launched a new solution designed to gather data around on-screen diversity and representation. **Gracenote** Inclusion Analytics delivers metrics assessing the degree to which different identity groups are featured in programming and how evenly this reflects viewing audiences. At launch, the solution will offer insights around gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation of on-camera talent. Future enhancements will expand coverage to include theatrical movies as well as behind-the-camera talent.

#### STARZ WANTS OTHERS TO #TAKETHELEAD

Citing stats that show **Starz** leads the industry with 63.2% series leads who are people of color, 54.6% female showrunners and a 75% female executive team, the programmer is launching the #TakeTheLead initiative to deepen its commitment to women and underrepresented audiences. The figures come from a study **Starz** commissioned with The Center for Scholars & Storytellers. As part of the new initiative, the programmer will host a series of monthly "Transparency Talks" beginning in April with thought leaders. The effort will culminate in an industry-wide **Starz** Summit.

#### PROGRAMMING

**Fox News Media** SVOD **Fox Nation** is adding exclusive content from *Tucker Carlson*. Starting in April, the **Fox News** host will release at least three new video podcast eps each week for **Fox Nation** and launch monthly long-form series, "Tucker Carlson Originals." **Carlson** will continue to host **Fox News's** top-rated primetime show, "Tucker Carlson Tonight." **Fox Nation** retails for \$5.99/month/\$64.99/year. - *Justin Bieber* will headline **Nickelodeon's** "Kids' Choice Awards," March 13, 7:30pm. The show will be simulcast across **Nick**, **TeenNick**, **Nicktoons** and the **Nick Jr** channel.

#### TCA NOTEBOOK

**Peacock** had its day in the spotlight at the **CTAM** portion of the **TCA** Winter tour Wednesday. The tour is skipping **Pasadena** this year due to COVID, with talent, network execs and critics all connecting via **Zoom**. **NBCU** streamer **Peacock** revealed a slate that includes an unscripted half-hour comedy featuring *Craig Robinson*. It picked up "Ex Rated," hosted and executive produced by *Andy Cohen*. The show is sort of an exit interview for singles to rate past relationships. **Peacock's** also delving into true crime with six-part doc series "John Wayne Gacy: Devil In Disguise" (March 25).

#### ON THE CIRCUIT

**FCC** acting chairwoman *Jessica Rosenworcel* will speak during **WICT's** invitation-only Senior Executive Summit. Other speakers include **Zoom** COO *Aparna Bawa*. The program, designed by **WICT** and the **Stanford Graduate School of Business**, is entering its seventh year. It will take place virtually March 10-11.

#### PEOPLE

**Discovery** hired **Hulu** marketing chief *Patrizio "Pato" Spagnoletto* as global CMO for direct-to-consumer, reporting to **Discovery International** president/CEO *JB Perrette*. - *Jeff Meier* of **Sony Pictures** was named head of programming for **Crackle Plus** networks, which includes **Crackle**, **Popcornflix**, **Popcornflix Kids**, **Truli**, **Espanolflix**, **FrightPix**, and SVOD platform **Pivotshare**.

## Think about that for a minute...

### Quality

Commentary by Steve Effros

Remember “talk radio,” “on-demand television,” and “conference calling?” I would hope so, they’re all still with us. So is “blogging,” “network television” and the telephone. But you would almost be excused for not realizing all that while reading the latest stories about the “newest” technologies which are sweeping the imaginations of folks who apparently have very short memories!

The more things change, the more they stay the same. I recognize that new technology allowing for broader, faster distribution and refined business plans are certainly shaking up the telecom marketplace and indeed society. But how new are the underlying services we are so agog about these days?

Isn’t a “podcast” another form of radio, for instance? Sure, you can now select what you want to listen to, when. That’s neat. But really, I listened to Jean Shepherd many, many years ago. I knew where to find his monologues, and when. I hope they’re still available today. The technology, even back then, allowed you to record those shows (think DVR). Now they would be called podcasts. Someone has recorded them for you, and you can pick which one you want to listen to. Then it was simply radio. Massively different? Not really. Shepherd always complained that there were too many commercials interfering with his stream of consciousness. The same is true today of podcasts unless you are listening on a subscription basis.

And that’s sort of the point. The technology has allowed experimentation with different business models. Subscription models and aggregated content with a middleman, like Google or Spotify inserting commercials, seem to be the most successful at the moment. But it’s not clear whether either model, by itself, will be sufficient in the long run. Listening to audio, however, will be popular no matter what, and it has been for a long time, bluetooth earphones or not.

The latest “big thing” you will be reading about is “Clubhouse” and its clones. This is the “newest” idea about, pardon me, talk

radio! You use an app and have to be “invited” at the moment. I suspect that will lead to subscriptions shortly. But the basic idea is that someone interesting is talking and for the most part you, as part of a large group, are listening. It’s live. There is the potential for interaction. How is this really different from a C-SPAN call-in show? Of course the biggest change is that for some strange reason the stock market and investors will dump millions of dollars into this “new” unproven, profitless business.

What I also don’t get is the total fascination with texting. Sure, for a brief communication it makes sense on our “smartphones.” But far too many people are texting constantly. The “beep-beep” of the arrival of text messages has become an almost constant background noise. And apparently you can’t just read the message, you have to send a message back, even if it’s just an “emoji” indicating you got the first one. Or maybe you wanted to add to it, or comment on it. So there’s an entire generation of “thumb typists” now instead of morse code telegraph experts! Excuse me, but why not just push one button on that phone and actually talk to the other person? That’s called a “telephone” for those who have forgotten.

Isn’t a Twitter blurb just a shortened “blog” which started out as a pamphlet? And yes, again, I admit that the technology has allowed us to distribute our ideas, pictures, (YouTube and “OTT” are just iterations of television) and the like faster and farther. But stop characterizing all these new technical abilities to listen, view and respond as resulting in something unique. The underlying issue is still the quality of what’s being said.



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*(Steve Effros was President of CATA for 23 years and is now an advisor and consultant to the cable industry. His views do not necessarily reflect the views of Cablefax.)*

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