

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## New and Improved: Walden Has Hope for BEAD Success

NTIA's \$42 billion BEAD program is plenty complicated and there's still a lot the agency has to figure out in terms of how it will be executed, but former Representative *Greg Walden* (R-OR) is of the mind that there are far less opportunities for failure in this program than there have been in others like it.

Legislation like 2009's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act that set aside more than \$7 billion for broadband grants that faced challenges in their execution, such as funding overbuilds due to a lack of oversight built into the statute. Walden has a lot more faith in the oversight provisions that have been baked into BEAD. "NTIA was never set up to be a huge grant management organization. It's pretty thin, so I think it does make sense to go out to the states," Walden, who now chairs policy and strategic counseling firm **Alpine Advisors**, said during a panel at the **Independent Show** Tuesday. "But what you're going to have to watch... some will be better staffed and ready for this money than others. You're going to have to work and get to know who makes those decisions in your state and how do you take advantage of it."

There could also be some states that see this as an opportunity to improve communications infrastructure overall, particularly in large rural states like Wyoming and Montana. For instance, they may be interested in projects that not only have broadband buildout components, but also those that have ties to telecom, including those that involve the construction of

new cell towers. "They're really struggling to get adequate communication one way or another and you're probably not going to have fiber to the home in every rural community there, in every house. So it may make sense in a different way," Walden said.

Looking to the future, he did note that Republicans have growing concerns about the amount of federal spending and whether or not it is contributing to larger economic issues like inflation. Should the House flip for the Republicans after the midterms, which based on historical data is likely, Walden warned that operators could see efforts from some legislators to rein in some of the infrastructure spend. That's not a certainty with the Senate being less likely to flip and President *Joe Biden* residing in the White House until 2025.

"You probably have more of a stalemate going on in terms of any big swings. Frankly, I think we've been through enough big swings with the pandemic and everything else," Walden said. "As a former business guy, certainty is not all bad."

There may also be a greater push in that environment to bring together the numerous broadband grant and loan programs that exist across state and federal agencies that are all targeting the unserved and underserved portions of the country. While the trend has been to create new programs every time one hasn't proven to be the panacea for the digital divide, it could now be the time to examine whether they could be combined under one roof or one initiative.

Walden warned that completing such a task won't be easy, more so because of ego than logistical challenges. Agencies



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tend to be protective of their programs and advocate for the way they run them. “You’re always going to have the jurisdictional fights in the Congress, but within the jurisdictions, they’re probably going to need to come back and say is there a way to put these back in a box so it is one and better administered and a little more streamlined,” he said.

Turning to the state of the **FCC**, he’s of the mind that a third Democratic commissioner will eventually be confirmed, but he wouldn’t bet on it being *Gigi Sohn*. A Fox Business report from last week claimed the Biden Administration has begun evaluating other candidates for the seat as well as pushing the vote on her confirmation until after the midterm elections.

“She’s not come up for the vote and that’s never a good sign,” he said. “And in the FCC world, the chairman decides everything... and you’ve got a very competent set of commissioners right now and they are having to work together, and that’s not all bad.”

**NCTC READING MVNO**

**NCTC** is “within months” of announcing an MVNO deal for its members to enter the mobile wireless business. “Over the last six to eight months, we’ve seen a massive shift in the attitude of many of you, many analysts and others about the importance of having a mobile offering when it comes to not just stickiness for you broadband customers but to be able to even obtain those customers in the first place,” NCTC VP of Technology Innovation *Jared Baumann* told co-op members Tuesday. “We’re within months of announcing something that we believe will be truly exciting to all of you because it’s not about being just competitive with a **Comcast** and **Charter**, but it’s about you actually being able to make money as well. That’s something I didn’t know we’d

be able to do when we first started this project.” NCTC CEO *Lou Borrelli* added that the MVNO should be for a “broad scope” of the co-op’s members. “This is not just for the big guys,” he said.

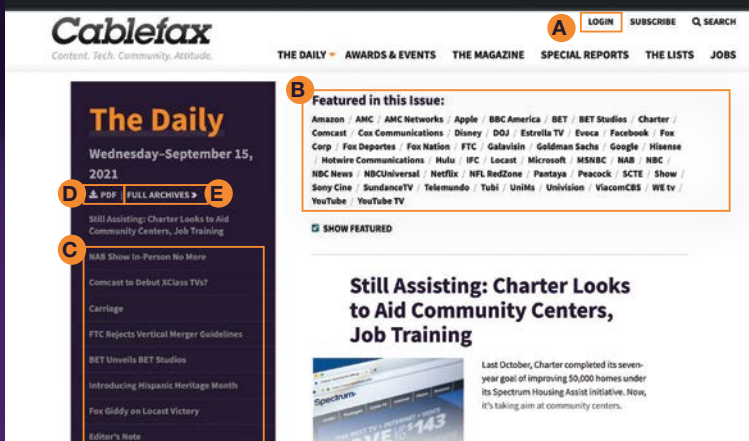
**CHARTER TO APPEAL \$7B VERDICT**

A Dallas, Texas, jury returned a \$7 billion verdict against **Charter** following the death of 83-year-old *Betty Thomas*, who was fatally stabbed in 2019 by an off-duty company field technician. A jury found the operator acted negligently in hiring *Roy James Holder*, 45. Charter plans to appeal and noted it did conduct a pre-employment criminal background check that showed no arrests/conviction/criminal behavior. “Our hearts go out to Mrs. Thomas’ family in the wake of this senseless and tragic crime. The responsibility for this horrible act rests solely with Mr. Holden, who was not on duty, and we are grateful he is in prison for life. While we respect the jury and the justice system, we strongly disagree with the verdict and will appeal,” Charter said in a statement. “The law in Texas and the facts presented at trial clearly show this crime was not foreseeable—and the plaintiffs’ claims of wrongdoing by Charter are categorically false. We are committed to the safety of all our customers and took the necessary steps, including a thorough pre-employment criminal background check.” Holder pleaded guilty to murder and received a life sentence in April 2021. He went to Thomas’ home while working for Charter to help with her phone line and returned the next day, when he was off the clock, and stabbed her to death.

**ACP BEST PRACTICES**

Plenty of examples during the **Independent Show** of what’s working to get people to sign up for the Affordable Con-

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nectivity Program, which provides \$30/month government subsidies to qualified low-income households. **Vexus Fiber** saw 70% growth in the ACP take rate when it launched a door-to-door program to spread the word, according to Regulatory Compliance Officer *Robin Davidson*. She also outlined how the company has targeted non-paying disconnects with an amnesty program that writes off their debt and enrolls them in a \$30/month 150 Mbps broadband tier. *Sarah Bonnoitt*, **HTC's** Director of Government Affairs, found social media buys much more effective than digital in targeting ACP prospects. HTC also has found that messages focused more on discounts vs lifestyle have resonated well. It's even had success placing coupons in the flyer section of local newspapers. Most ACP households qualify through SNAP or Medicaid. **Armstrong** had initially believed the free/reduced school lunch program would be a big driver, but "it hasn't fed this as much as we thought," said *Dave Wittman*, VP of Cable Marketing. With back-to-school season around the corner, some operators are looking at ways to help spread the message to families, including through stuffing backpacks with marketing. Bottom line: get as grassroots as possible.

#### DEMS FLAG REJECTED HULU ADS

Democrats have raised concerns regarding **Disney-owned Hulu** rejecting political ads relating to the party's core themes ahead of the midterm elections. The Democratic Governors Association, Democratic Senatorial Campaign and Democratic Congressional Campaign Committees [attempted to buy](#) joint ads centered around the issues of abortion, gun rights and Jan. 6 on Hulu, **ABC** and **ESPN**, according to the *Washington Post*. While the ads ran on the two networks, they didn't on Hulu, which has a policy to not run content it labels controversial. Democratic candidate for New York's 12th District *Suraj Patel* also submitted a campaign ad to Hulu addressing those three issues, but it was rejected. "On June 30th, my campaign received a call from one of [Hulu's] representatives informing me that according to an 'unwritten Hulu policy,' merely mentioning these topics was considered too 'sensitive,' and without censoring my campaign advertisement I would not be allowed to air the ad on Hulu," Patel wrote in a [letter](#) to Disney CEO *Bob Chapek* and Hulu President *Joe Earley*. After edits were made to specific wordage, Hulu ran the ad. But on Monday, the streamer informed Patel and his campaign it approved the original ad to air.

#### SEC CHARGES FORMER REP WITH INSIDER TRADING

Former Congressman *Stephen Buyer* (R-IN) was charged by the **SEC** with insider trading Monday. According to the [complaint](#), Buyer attended a golf outing in his native state where he learned from a **T-Mobile** executive the company's nonpublic plan to acquire **Sprint**. Buyer bought Sprint securities the following day and eventually garnered \$568,000 of Sprint common stock across various accounts.

#### FNC TOPS TOTAL DAY VIEWERSHIP

For a 29th straight week, **Fox News** was the top-rated channel among basic cable in total day viewership with 1.4

million average viewers P2+. **MSNBC** came second with 849,000 viewers, followed by **CNN's** 579,000, **Hallmark Channel's** 576,000 and **HGTV's** 520,000. Fox News and MSNBC took the first- and second-place spots in primetime with 2.22 million and 1.69 million viewers P2+, respectively. **ESPN** (1.2 million), Hallmark Channel (1.04 million) and CNN (998,000) filled the remainder of the top-five.

#### CARRIAGE

**Newsmax** is expanding its global reach following three distribution agreements. The channel signed a deal with **Sony** subsidiary and SVOD service **Zee5** to carry Newsmax's newsfeed and VOD content in India and later the Middle East and North Africa. **M7**, a cable provider owned by **Canal+**, will distribute Newsmax in Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Hungary, Netherlands, Slovakia and Romania. Lastly, Newsmax partnered with **Flash News** to extend distribution to Australia.

#### VERIZON ADDS XBOX ALL ACCESS DEAL

**Verizon** is offering Xbox All Access in select stores and online beginning Thursday. The deal includes a next-gen Xbox console and Xbox Game Pass Ultimate—which gives access to over 100 games—starting at \$24.99/month for 24 months. For a limited time customers can also get 50% off an Xbox Elite controller, \$40 off an Xbox stereo headset and 25% off the Razer Wolverine V2 controller and headset.

#### DOING GOOD

**Comcast RISE** is awarding a total of \$1 million and marketing resources to over 100 Philadelphia-based small businesses owned by women and POC. The initiative began in 2021 when it awarded an initial \$1 million to small businesses in Philadelphia or Chester.

#### PROGRAMMING

**HGTV** greenlit a six-episode season of "Ugliest House in America," where homeowners nominate what they believe are the unsightliest houses for a chance to win a \$150,000 renovation. – "Let the Right One In" will debut Oct. 7 for streaming on **Showtime** before making its on-air premiere Oct. 9 at 10pm. – **Curiosity original** "Tracker's Diary: Bears of Katmai" is coming to **Curiosity Stream** on August 4. – **AMC Networks'** animated series "Pantheon" debuts Sept. 1 on **AMC+**. – **HBO** ordered "The Palace," a limited series detailing the fall of an authoritarian regime. – "Black Girl Stuff," a female-led talk show centered on current cultural topics, will premiere on **Revolt's** linear platforms Aug. 2 at 9pm. Episodes will release weekly and be available on the network's streaming platform. A podcast version will also be made available. – Based on the 1992 movie, **Prime Video** series "A League of Their Own" will debut on the platform on Aug. 12.

#### PEOPLE

*Stephen Clare* was named VP, Finance at **Sinclair Broadcast Group**, where he'll oversee the company's financial planning and analysis and business development departments.





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