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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Moving Forward: NTIA Takes Step Toward National Spectrum Strategy

The FCC's hands are tied for now when it comes to spectrum policy, but NTIA is moving forward in its quest to create a much-needed national spectrum strategy. The agency is seeking public comment on the development and implementation of such a strategy, releasing a request for comments from stakeholders on three proposed pillars of the plan: a spectrum pipeline for the future, long-term spectrum planning between NTIA and the FCC and the pursuit of technologies that could expand the capacity or overall usability of spectrum.

The agency's overall goal is to identify at least 1,500 MHz of spectrum to study for potential repurposing to meet the requirements of both federal and non-federal users. NTIA is planning on holding two listening sessions for the public and stakeholders to provide presentations and recommendations to the agency as it develops the strategy. The first will be in D.C., on March 30 while the second will be held at the University of Notre Dame on April 11. Both will also be webcast.

NCTA applauded the NTIA's request for comments, calling it the first step toward ensuring the U.S. maintains its position at the top of the global spectrum race. "Creating a diverse national spectrum strategy and pipeline that relies on shared-licensed, unlicensed and exclusive-licensed spectrum will ensure that the U.S. remains a global technology leader," the association said in a statement. "As spectrum has become an increasingly vital technology for major economic sectors

ranging from manufacturing to healthcare, education, agriculture and more, enabling innovative uses that unleash new applications and services will benefit all Americans."

During an appearance at an event hosted by Georgetown Center for Business and Public Policy, former FCC Commissioner *Michael O'Rielly* said the NTIA was asking a lot of the right questions, but that Congress can't ignore spectrum issues while the agency waits for responses. "They absolutely have to because this pipeline is about future spectrum uses, but you need to fill the pipeline in a very short timeframe. We're not going to wait three years or so to fill the pipeline," he said. "We need to identify bands... I wouldn't want the spectrum strategy to slow down that process, and I don't think it will because I look at the spectrum strategy as more of a macro issue."

O'Rielly called the decision to let the Commission's spectrum auction authority lapse shameful and a mistake. He's hopeful it will be restored quickly, saying there is no better alternative to the FCC's process. But he believes this also draws attention to a growing need to address how branches of the federal government work with the Commission and NTIA.

"You need to put those pieces back together. I think what it shows though is some of the frustrating parts with certain players and actors and the disingenuousness of certain federal agencies who will say one thing to one side and another thing to the other side," he said. "It was evident during my time in the Commission, they would say one thing and then wait for an administration change and say another. That's problematic for spectrum policy

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to actually make thoughtful decisions going forward.”

O’Rielly also spent time championing the Affordable Connectivity Program and arguing his case for why Congress should appropriate more money to the subsidy program. A fiscally conservative Republican, he said that maintaining a mechanism for affordability is actually a win in the long run as it reduces the pressure to regulate the rates of broadband or the want to interfere in the marketplace overall. He also said allowing the ACP to disintegrate just before an election could leave a pretty terrible taste in the mouths of voters.

“You don’t want to be dumping 20 million subscribers into the cold before an election cycle. ACP serves not the R’s and the D’s, the blues and the reds—it covers the whole nation and you’re talking about recipients, 30,000 per congressional district on average. It really does matter if you can deal with affordability in my mind,” O’Rielly said.

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DIAMOND SPORTS FILES FOR BANKRUPTCY

The moment many expected is finally here. **Diamond Sports Group** filed for Chapter 11 protection in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Southern District of Texas Tuesday. It’s in the process of finalizing a Restructuring Support Agreement with holders of the majority of its debt and **Sinclair** to eliminate more than \$8 billion of Diamond’s outstanding debt. That agreement also provides that Diamond will separate its business from Sinclair and become a standalone company moving forward. Sinclair is expected to continue to provide management services during the proceeding and to offer transition services for a period following Diamond’s emergence from Chapter 11. For now, Diamond’s expectations are that the **Bally Sports** RSNs will continue to operate as normal and be able to broadcast games for the foreseeable future, and it has filed motions with the Court seeking the authority to pay employee wages and benefits and honor customer programs in the ordinary course of business without disruption. The company’s bankruptcy is but one of the many crumbling bricks holding up the RSN model. Unanswered questions remain about **Warner Bros. Discovery’s AT&T Sports Nets**, which are reported to be [shutting down](#) at the end of the month.

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T-MOBILE ADDING MINT MOBILE TO BRAND PORTFOLIO

T-Mobile is adding some star power to its empire, entering into an agreement to acquire **Ka’ena Corporation** and its subsidiaries. That includes **Mint Mobile**, the prepaid wireless brand

The WHO and the WHY

CFX’s spotlight on recent new hires & promotions



DAN
Jedda
CFO
ROKU

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- After the current CFO Steve Loudon announced his departure from Roku, the company selected Dan to take over the job effective May 1. The two will work together during a transition period that’ll last until August. Dan will report to founder/CEO Anthony Wood.
- One of his main duties will be to help Roku see through its goal of positive adjusted EBITDA next year. Dan was previously CFO of Stitch Fix, an online personal fashion service, since 2020, and prior to that was at Amazon for 15 years. There, he held positions as CFO for Digital Video, Digital Music and the Advertising and Corporate Development organizations.
- Before Amazon, Dan had stints at Toshiba America, Honeywell and ADC Telecommunications, holding various business finance roles in treasury and internal audit. He has a bachelor’s in accounting and finance from St. Thomas (MN) and an MBA from the University of Minnesota.

owned by actor **Ryan Reynolds**; international calling service **Ultra Mobile** and wholesaler **Plum**. T-Mobile will pay up to \$1.35 billion in a combination of 39% cash and 61% stock to acquire their sales, marketing, digital and service operations and plans to use its supplier relationships to grow the Ka’ena brands. The actual price to be paid will be based upon Ka’ena’s performance during certain periods before and after the closing. Following the closing, Mint Founders **David Glickman** and **Rizwan Kassim** will join T-Mobile to manage the brands, which will be classified under a separate business unit, and Reynolds will continue serving in a creative role on behalf of Mint.

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UPFRONT AND PERSONAL

Hallmark Media is rolling out in-person experiences for advertisers and agencies from Tuesday until mid-April. Clients can choose from different New York adventures that best suit their individual interests, such as a farm-to-table retreat, private pizza tour, a baking class at Magnolia Bakery or a wellness-themed evening. – **Tubi** is getting its place in the spotlight with its first-ever dedicated event separate from **Fox’s** upfront. Tubi Connect will be hosted at Spring Studios in New York and have CEO **Farhad Massoudi**, CMO **Nicole Parlapiano**, CRO **Mark Rotblat** and others speak to advertisers. The event’s sessions

will discuss streaming marketplace predictions, new ways to drive impact in streaming, how brands can utilize data for better campaign planning and how content that appeals to different audiences can improve viewer engagement and loyalty.

DISNEY ADS SELLS OUT NCAAW TOURNAMENT

It's madness for advertisers as well come tournament time, and this year, **Disney Advertising** sold out in-game sponsorship opportunities for the NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament. That includes 15 broadcast sponsors and nearly 100 advertisers in different categories. **Comcast's** Xfinity is among addressable brands that'll sponsor live digital shows, while **AT&T** is a digital sponsor and will have custom integrations on Instagram, **Twitter**, **Snapchat** and **YouTube**. The event began today and will go on until the title game on April 2, with games airing across **ABC**, **ESPN**, **ESPN2**, **ESPNU** and **ESPNEWS**.

LIFT LABS ADDS AI-THEMED ACCELERATOR

Comcast NBCUniversal's LIFT Labs is adding a series of accelerator programs that'll focus on emerging trends in connectivity, entertainment and more. The first will be "Generative AI," where startups that use AI to build next-gen technologies, products and services can apply through April 9. The program will begin May 22 in Philadelphia as startups will be connected with leaders from Comcast NBCU's companies, such as Xfinity, Universal Pictures and Sky. Chosen companies will participate in in-person and remote programming that includes one-on-one personalized curriculum and executive mentorship.

WHAT'S THE SCORE?

Sling TV is introducing a trio of new features as March Madness gets fully underway. Starting this week on **Roku**, **Amazon** and **Android TV** devices, users will be able to browse sports scores while watching TV with "Sling Sports Scores." Sling TV is also rolling out a side view feature for internet browser users, which will allow them to watch a program on a small-screen overlay while using other programs. Lastly, iOS users can now add a custom widget to access games directly on a mobile device.

CARRIAGE

Allen Media Group's free platforms **Local Now**, **Sports.TV** and **theGrio** added the FAST channel **Speedvision** to its lineup. The automotive-focused channel [returned in the fall](#) with shows such as "Graveyard Carz" and "Two Guys Garage."

RATINGS

Last week was men's college basketball championship week, which brought in 28 million unique viewers to **ESPN**. The ACC Tournament Championship between Duke and Virginia led conference title games on the network with 2.7 million viewers, followed by the Big 12 with 2.5 million. The SEC had its most-viewed title bout since 2019 at 1.9 million, with the AAC (1.7 million) and Pac-12 (1.6 million) also having their most-viewed games since 2014 and 2019, respectively.

FIBER FRENZY

Vexus Fiber launched its fiber network in Nacogdoches, Texas, continuing the company's expansion in the Lone Star State. Vexus' network is designed to scale and update as demand in the community rises, meaning customers won't have to upgrade their network with new technological advances.

PROGRAMMING

Galey Alix is getting her own **HGTV** series "Home in a Heartbeat with Galey," set to premiere April 19 at 9pm and available to stream the same day on **discovery+**. The first season will span eight episodes and follow the **Goldman Sachs** exec as she and her team conduct DIY home renovations for families chosen from Alix's following on social media (1.5 million followers on Instagram and 2.8 million on TikTok). – The limited **FX** series "Class of '09" will debut May 10 on **Hulu**. The premiere will have the first two episodes before a new episode releases in the following weeks. It'll be available on **Star+** in Latin America and **Disney+** under the Star banner in all other territories. – "Chasing the Rains," a three-part series that dives into the wilderness of Kenya, will premiere April 22 at 8pm on **BBC America**, available to stream on **AMC+**. – Spring hasn't fully sprung yet, but that's not stopping **UPtv** from getting ready for the season. "God Bless the Broken Road" will debut Sunday at 7pm, followed by "I Go to the Rock: The Gospel Music of Whitney Houston" on March 24 at 8pm and "The Confession Musical" on March 26 at 7pm. Season 2 of "The Chosen" will begin April 2 as an all-day marathon from 2pm-11pm. "Southern Gospel" caps UPtv's Easter programming April 9 at 7pm.

PEOPLE

Thomas Baltimore Jr. was appointed as a director for **Comcast Corporation**. He's currently the President/CEO of the lodging and real estate investment trust Park Hotels & Resorts and was CEO of RLJ Lodging Trust from 2011-16. – *Traci Biswese* is joining **NCTA** as VP/Associate General Counsel. She was most recently Associate General Counsel, telecom & Regulatory for **Meta Platforms**, working with network infrastructure and connectivity teams on domestic and international telecommunications, data protection and privacy laws relative to submarine cable networks, new connectivity solutions, metaverse-ready networks and next-gen OTT services.

Think about that for a minute...

Gigi

Commentary by Steve Effros

Gigi Sohn has withdrawn her name from the circus that resulted from her nomination to be a Commissioner (and potentially Chair) of the FCC. The not-so-surprising thing that happened in that process is the name calling and hyperbole that now swirls in the aftermath.

It took way too long for the Biden Administration to even nominate Gigi, who is probably the best-known, most quoted “consumer advocate” in the telecommunications realm. Gigi has always been described as being the “lightning rod” of the so-called “public interest” lobbyists in the field. Hence, apparently, it was with some reluctance that President Biden nominated her in October of 2021. Those many months of delay before the nomination contained lots of reporting that the “ask” of many of the most ardent “consumer advocates” was for Gigi to be named Chair of the Commission. Gigi, after all, spearheaded the long, breathless drive for “net neutrality.” Now, they decided, was the chance.

But as I noted last year in a column, “...if there’s one thing that can be said with certainty it’s that Gigi is very, very smart and absolutely ‘qualified’ to be an FCC Commissioner. The problem, however...is that Gigi, in her past public lives, has taken some very hard and fast positions on telecom policy. Lots of folks don’t agree with those positions, and therefore didn’t want her to be in a critical voting role at the Commission.”

One necessary civics note here, and it’s one that the “public interest groups” often miss; consumer advocacy is only one side of most many-sided policy debates. The other “sides” legitimately include the businesses that the “advocates” are trying to control to their benefit (by forcing lower rates, or additional services, for instance) while the businesses are trying to maximize their success in at least two different marketplaces; selling services or goods to consumers, and providing a good return to the public on the investments made in their company. All of those are “publics” and they all have a right and deserve to be heard.

To suggest now that there is shock and dismay that Gigi ran into such strong opposition to her nomination with 16 months gone by and three failed Congressional hearings is just silly. Many of us wrote at the time of her original nomination that this was going to be a very tough and contentious battle because Gigi has taken so many absolute, hyperbolic and often righteous shots at her opponents and shown little interest in compromise. The “other side” was the enemy, plain and simple. And, of course, they were ham-handed and hyperbolic as well on occasion. There’s plenty of fault all around. Was there an expectation that they would just go away and accept the notion that Gigi Sohn could be named Chair of the Commission that in many cases decides their business plans? Of course not..

The real question is why it took so long for the “advocates” to finally decide that Gigi needed to withdraw. Over a year ago I suggested that her nomination faced, at best, a 50/50 chance. I was off by about two votes. I also suggested that the longer the delay in getting a full complement of FCC Commissioners, the more likely it was that it might be impossible to do so for the entire Presidential term. That looks more likely today than ever before, and that’s a shame.

A less obviously contentious nomination a long time ago could have resulted in a 3-2 majority that would have adopted the old “net neutrality” chestnut, which is really somewhat irrelevant today. But now the FCC is moribund in the real issues, like edge-provider media ownership, privacy, AI and the like. Another long ago quote of mine: “Time to move on or the FCC will be net neutered.” It may now be too late.



Steve

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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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