

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Cooked Goose: Charter Chief Tough on Programmers for State of Video

Charter CEO *Chris Winfrey* was on a roll at the **SVB MoffettNathanson** conference Thursday, not holding back when it came to his thoughts on why the industry is losing video subscribers. He laid the blame squarely at programmers' feet.

"They managed to kill their own golden goose. And they did that by continuing to take rates for a decade or decades above CPI and then bundled it together with additional content that particular customers didn't want to see, shoving it down their throats to have it cost more money. And then turning around and actually making that same content available essentially a la carte in environments that cost less money or were available for free—either through AVOD or historically through password sharing," he said.

And yet Charter has done better than its peers when it comes to video losses. It shed 241,000 in 1Q23 vs Comcast's 614,000 and even managed to end 2020 with a net gain of 56,000 residential and SMB video customers. Winfrey believes that's because it's had more flexibility in video packages, but that only goes so far. He wants programmers to give distributors more flexibility in video offerings, but thinks it's not likely to happen because "the media and programming market has become beholden to the short-term whims of the capital markets and it has pandered to them."

Now remember, he said this at an investor conference... As Winfrey put it, "I hate to blame it on anyone in this room, but..."

and he reminded folks about how Wall Street was previously hot on programmers selling content to SVODs like **Netflix** without branding, advertising or password protections. When the market turned on that model, programmers pivoted to DTC. Just today, the **WSJ** reported **ESPN** is laying the foundation for a DTC offering. "I think you have to have a long-term vision and you have to protect the value of the asset. Not many people have really done a good job of that. And that's why everybody's losing traditional video subscribers, and that's why there's a lot less subscribers, and ultimately, there's going to be a lot less revenue in the space," Winfrey said.

Charter's answer is to team with Comcast on the upcoming **Xumo** jv, providing what Winfrey described as a bit of a re-aggregation, similar to how cable was originally put together.

During a separate appearance at the same conference, **Warner Bros. Discovery** CEO *David Zaslav* said he generally views the overall pricing for streaming services as irrational and the current way those businesses are run as unsustainable. That's because consumers continue to struggle to easily aggregate the content they want and the owners of streaming services continue to lose too much money. One of the long-term solutions in his mind is a repackaging and marketing of streaming services together. That could look as simple as the top three services entering into a market and offering one price for a subscription to all three services.

"It'd be great for consumers, would probably reduce churn, we'd both be marketing one product and it would provide a more

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Other nominations include D&I Mentor of the Year, Public Affairs Campaign and Thrivers Under 30, the industry's rising stars under 30.

Final Deadline: Friday, May 19
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meaningful consumer experience not just on price,” Zaslav said. I now have a bigger package of content that’s broader.”

A move to that degree would take an industry-wide shift and Zaslav could see that happening as soon as this year. At a point, he believes content owners will have to take their futures into their own hands and try these unique packaging solutions or watch others swoop in to offer similar options to consumers.

“I think eventually, something like that will happen. If we don’t do it to ourselves, I think it’ll be done to us,” he said. “It’ll be **Amazon, Apple, Roku** that does it. They’re already starting to do it and it makes sense. A lot of people will go to some of those platforms as an easier cure.”

CANDID CHARTER CEO ON BEAD, RURAL BROADBAND BUILDOUTS

Charter CEO *Chris Winfrey* sure didn’t hold back Thursday. While he predicts the operator has a high likelihood of success when it comes to capturing BEAD funding, it will be choosey. “It’s all subject to making sure that it works for both private and public capital and that may be different from state to state... [because there are] federal guidelines that have been left a little bit too open and the states can make an interpretation and say that’s what **NTIA** or **Treasury** really wants, when in fact, that wasn’t the case,” he said at his investor conference appearance. “You can get into some pretty archaic requirements that if those get put in on a state-by-state level, I can assure you we’re not going to be bidding in that state because they’re somewhat asinine,” Winfrey said then pausing to apologize in advance because “he’ll probably get quoted on that.” Guilty. He added, “you can tell I have a passion around this topic.” There’s a lot on the line with Charter announcing a \$5 billion investment to connect more than a million currently unserved, mostly rural households and businesses, to broadband. That figure is offset by \$1.2 billion in support won in the **FCC’s** Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction. Winfrey said Charter expects to be ahead of schedule on RDOF build-out commitments, though he opined that the company could go even faster if it had government help to streamline the permitting and pole attachment process. Charter’s primarily using contract labor on these projects, but he said it has pivoted to its internal workforce in areas where it expects to have a lot of almost permanent construction because of homes passed growth—think of places like Texas and the Carolinas. “We have stood up in-house teams that can do both aerial and underground construction, both to be able to control our own destiny, as well as I think it’s a pretty good sourcing strategy,” he said.

GOMEZ FCC NOM COMING SOON?

President *Joe Biden* may soon be putting forth *Anna Gomez* as the next nominee for the fifth seat at the **FCC**. That’s according to a *Bloomberg report* citing a source briefed on the situation. Gomez is no stranger to the work of the Commission or that of other federal agencies involved in broadband programs. She spent 12 years in various positions at the agency, serving as a Senior Legal

Cablefax Executive Round Up

We asked the Cablefax 100 where they work most frequently—home, office, road. Office was the most popular answer, but several honorees had more to share on the topic.



Patricia Jo Boyers
President/CEO & Co-Founder
BOYCOM Cablevision

“All three! Thank God and ACA Connects and all its members for building the finest broadband networks in America so us rural gals can work from anywhere!”



Ron Duncan
GCI
CEO

“Home. So do most of GCI’s employees. Since the pandemic GCI has become a remote-first workforce. The employees appreciate the switch. And the remote-work standard means we can hire talented people from the Lower 48 who are excited about working for GCI, but less enthusiastic about living through Alaska winters.”



Channing Dungey
Chairman & CEO
Warner Bros. Television Group

“I’m usually in the office 3-4 days a week. I like being able to engage with colleagues face to face—you can’t replicate that energy over Zoom. But as a working mom, I appreciate the flexibility that a hybrid schedule allows.”



Sujata Gosalia
EVP & Chief Strategy Officer
Cox Communications

“Place has less meaning nowadays, and technology is helping bridge distances better than ever before, but it’s been fun getting to work with colleagues in person again, both in the office and on the road.”



Geoffrey Shook
President & GM
Buckeye Broadband

“I think most executives integrate Work/Life balance into whatever location they tend to be in at the moment. I will take a personal call from my wife in the office or review potential personal business decisions just as I take business calls at home or away on holiday. Most specific to the question though, most frequently I work from the office.”

Advisor to former Chair *William Kennard* as well as Deputy Chief of the International Bureau, and spent years as **NTIA's** Deputy Administrator. She's well known in Congress as well, having spent time as Staff Counsel for the Senate Subcommittee on Communication as well as Senate Commerce. For the last five months, she has called the **State Department** home as a Senior Advisor for International Information and Communications Policy. She has led U.S. preparations for the International Telecommunication Union World Radiocommunication Conference, held every four years to update the international treaty governing the global use of spectrum and satellite orbital resources. This year's gathering will be held in Dubai, UAE, from Nov. 20-Dec. 15. Those who want to get to know her better through social platforms may need to join **Mastodon** since she appears to have left her **Twitter** [account](#) in November.

T. HOWARD CELEBRATES 30TH DIVERSITY AWARDS DINNER

It was back to the normal springtime date for the **T. Howard Foundation's** Diversity Awards Dinner. The event celebrated its 30th anniversary Wednesday night at the Cipriani Wall Street and continued to shine a spotlight on leaders and companies that remain full-speed ahead on increasing diversity and inclusion in the media industry. The Foundation revealed a new logo to kick things off, keeping the "T. Howard" moniker prominent but adding arrows that rotate in a circular motion. "It moves, because we're always on the move," said the Foundation's President/CEO *Jo Pamphile*. Leading the night's festivities was former news reporter and current talk-show host *Tamron Hall*. She told attendees her inspiration to pursue a career in media stemmed from seeing *Iola Johnson*—one of the first African American women to serve as a news anchor in the Dallas area—on the TV screen. It gave Hall hope she could rise to the same position in the future, which fittingly preceded this year's Executive Champion Award given to **ABC News** President *Kim Godwin*. The Florida A&M alum and first Black woman to be President of a broadcast news group got her career started with **ABC's** Tallahassee affiliate, which was one of three jobs she held as a senior with a full-time class load. While her career was met with many obstacles, she encouraged the crowd to be the change they wanted to see. "Many times along the way, though, I was told what I could not do. I was told which meetings I could not attend, why I was not the choice," Godwin said. "But I couldn't say anything because I was then a single mom. I had those two little girls to take care of, so I would wipe my tears and get up and push on. But for every person who did not see me, there was someone who did. So everyone here tonight: be the person, be the leader here in New York who sees those who feel invisible." *Rhonda Crichlow*, SVP/Chief Diversity Officer for **Charter**, was on deck to receive her recognition. She joined Charter in 2016 on the heels of the company's MOU with six civil rights organizations. Since then, she's led its D&I initiatives and community impact, which earned her this year's Diversity Advocate Award. **Revolt**

Media & TV CEO *Detavio Samuels* followed as the Executive Leadership Award winner, saying the network is engineering transformative change for Black culture in media. "Our stories, our struggles and our triumphs have been ignored. They've been erased. And they've been co-opted by others. But guess what? Welcome to the new era of Black media that is right here upon us," he said. **Procter & Gamble** Chief Brand Officer *Marc Pritchard* capped the night by accepting the Corporate Excellence Award on behalf of the company. P&G is working to expand the Black-owned media ecosystem with initiatives like the Queen Collective within P&G's Widen the Screen program.

YOUTUBE TV STUTTERS DURING NBA FINALS

YouTube TV users were up in arms Wednesday night as an issue with the vMVPD service left subscribers in a commercial loop with less than five minutes left in the showdown between the Miami Heat and the Boston Celtics. Rather than watching the close of Game 1 of the Eastern Conference Finals, users reported repeatedly being served a stuttering trailer for the live action "The Little Mermaid" movie. The Team YouTube Twitter account also told subscribers they may experience an issue when trying to watch content on multiple channels, and some users also struggled to watch **Bravo's** "Watch What Happens Live." Both issues were resolved by 12pm ET Thursday.

C&T SUBCOMMITTEE ADVANCES FCC AUCTION AUTHORITY

The FCC may be on track to regain its spectrum auction authority. The **House Communications Subcommittee** unanimously advanced a bill to the full committee during a markup late Wednesday that would restore the agency's authority through June 30. "My goal is to continue working on a broader deal to extend spectrum auction authority longer term and provide certainty to the FCC and the communications industry, fund important priorities like the Rip and Replace program and Next Generation 911 and work with my colleagues across the aisle and in the Senate to make this a bipartisan deal that gets signed into law," House Commerce Chair *Cathy McMorris Rodgers* (R-WA) said at the markup.

PAC-12 ADDS BROADCAST BOOSTS

The **Pac-12's** media future remains unclear, but it's still rolling out pre- and in-game broadcast access to coaches and players for the upcoming year. The conference is working with **ESPN** and **Fox Sports** to bring in-game head coach interviews, pre-game and halftime locker room camera access, cameras in both coaches' booths (without sound) and extended handheld camera permission. It's also going to have select athletes and coaches mic'd up on the field before games. More enhancements could come before the season kicks off August 26.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

'Ghosts of Beirut' Comes Alive With Docu-Spin

Sometimes you have to blur the genres to tell a story the right way. Take **Showtime's** approach to "Ghosts of Beirut" (premiering Friday on non-linear platforms and Sunday at 10pm on the network), a limited series based on the true story of the manhunt for elusive terrorist *Imad Mughniyeh*. The spy drama was created on the back of journalistic research and incorporates documentary elements into its storyline, incorporating in perspectives from those that supported his actions as well as those that looked to take down the mastermind behind the concept of suicide bombers. "If you go to Lebanon and ask Hezbollah supporters, you will find out that to them, Imad Mughniyeh is a hero. If you ask Americans or Israelis, he's a terrorist," writer/co-executive producer *Joëlle Touma* told **CFX**. "Everyone in the series has their own reasons to do what they're doing. We thought it was the most authentic and, hopefully, interesting way to tell the story." When it came to incorporating fictional elements, the team focused on filling in the gaps and imagining what Mughniyeh's life was like outside of his reputation. "Most wanted man, but also a family man, a lover, a strategist, one of the most important figures in Hezbollah," Touma said. "Living a totally clandestine life but probably getting tired of it, longing to have some normalcy." The mix of the documentary elements with the fictional interludes was part of creator *Greg Barker's* vision from the start, but he wasn't sure that it was going to work, and it didn't at first. It was in the editing room where, through continual experimentation, things fell into place. The series toys with the ideas of the downfalls that come with obsession as well as the quest so many go on to seek redemption for the sins of their past. For Barker, he hopes viewers walk away asking themselves a question that he finds relevant in today's divided world: "How do we confront our worst adversaries without becoming the worst versions of ourselves?" – *Sara Winegardner*

REVIEWS

"Stonehouse," streaming, **BritBox**. For those readers beginning to experience "Succession" withdrawal pains as that 4-season series starts its denouement, this brief, 3-parter is just what you need. "Stonehouse" serves up a large helping of *Matthew Macfadyen*, who plays a very Tom Wambsgans-like character, *John Stonehouse*. It's a true story about a somewhat bumbling member of Parliament from the Labour Party in the late 1960s (OK, at least there's an ideological difference between Wambsgans and Stonehouse). Based on a true story, Stonehouse, like Wambsgans, sort of stumbled into power. Once there, of course, both characters love the life and fear losing any privileges. In addition, despite falling into traps of their own making, they prance about as if they know what they're doing. More than that, they put on airs with the best of 'em. Though Macfadyen is a versatile actor, his role as Tom has typecast him. Fortunately, Tom's combination of upper-class starchiness, ineptitude, and sycophancy, mixed with a touch of evil, are the ingredients needed for an excellent portrayal of Stonehouse, whose lies—to his wife, family and the world—could make *George Santos* envious. A great bit of casting has *Keely Hawes*, Macfadyen's real-life wife, playing Mrs. Stonehouse. Though she's badly underutilized, Hawes has the suffering wife down pat. We hope her spouse hasn't helped color her portrayal. – *Seth Arenstein*

BASIC CABLE		
P2+ PRIME RANKINGS*		
(05/08/23-05/14/23)		
MON-SUN	MC	MC
	US	US AA
	AA%	(000)
TNT	1.041	3250
ESPN	0.806	2516
FNC	0.456	1425
MSNBC	0.361	1127
INSP	0.232	724
HGTV	0.232	724
HIST	0.215	670
CNN	0.214	669
TLC	0.189	590
FOOD	0.185	578
HALL	0.182	569
DISC	0.174	543
TBSC	0.166	517
USA	0.151	471
ID	0.142	443
TVLAND	0.141	441
BRAVO	0.131	409
HMM	0.123	383
LIFE	0.113	353
A&E	0.110	343
REELZ	0.107	336
NWSMX	0.101	315
WETV	0.098	305
GSN	0.097	302
AMC	0.095	295
FX	0.091	283
SYFY	0.087	271
OXY	0.082	256
NATGEO	0.080	249
NAN	0.078	243
BET	0.076	237
FRFM	0.071	221
PRMNT	0.070	220
FETV	0.063	197
COM	0.062	195

*P2+ L+SD rankers are based on national Nielsen numbers, not coverage.



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