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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Country Connections: USDA OKs More Funding for ReConnect

USDA's ReConnect program is distributing another \$714 million in grants and loans to 19 states. That brings its grand total of supported projects to 142, and those will help 314,000 rural residents access high speed broadband.

Much of the funding is going to small telecom companies, rural electric cooperatives and Tribal entities. For example, Missouri's **Goodman Telephone Company** is connecting nearly 7,000 people, 206 farms, 140 businesses and two educational facilities in McDonald and Newton counties, and the **Craw-Kan Telephone Cooperative** in Kansas will connect 4,189 people, 821 farms, 149 businesses and three educational facilities in Bourbon, Cherokee, Crawford, Labette and Neosho counties.

On a press call Monday, USDA Secretary *Tom Vilsack* called the small, rural entities that are ReConnect beneficiaries a lifeline between rural folks and the rest of the world, and USDA enjoys working with them because of their deep concern and interest in expanding access to broadband to their customers.

"They work hard. They do what they can to keep things affordable and they are, I think, very appreciative of the fact that they have a partner in the Biden administration basically providing the resources that will essentially make a project viable," he said. "It's no secret here without government support... it's highly unlikely that a lot of these projects would actually take place, and that would mean that we would have basically two

Americas... and the reality is the President feels very strongly that we should be one America, especially when it comes to broadband access and the capabilities and opportunities that it creates."

Lawmakers have been taking stock of the federal programs aimed at closing the digital divide and assessing their efficiency and effectiveness. The ReConnect program hasn't always been given top marks, but Vilsack remains adamant that it makes sense for USDA to continue heading a program aimed at helping rural Americans access technology.

"As far as USDA is concerned, the reality is we are the department that speaks most directly to and about on a daily basis the concerns and needs of rural folks," Vilsack said. "So it makes sense that we would have an opportunity to provide the resources that upgrade and connect existing broadband systems and new systems to be able to provide access to folks who are located in rural, remote areas."

Each of the entities receiving loans and grants is required to participate in the Affordable Connectivity Program, but USDA officials didn't say how they would ensure networks remain affordable if the program does run out of funding next year as expected. A senior Biden administration official said there is support across the administration for the ACP and options are being examined on how to make sure it is sustainable over time. That's why the administration is kicking off an Affordable Connectivity Week of Action designed to enroll new households and show the program's importance across the country.

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There's a lot of energy around broadband announcements these days with less than three weeks left until **NTIA** announces the state allocations of funding from the BEAD program. Folks remain nervous about the potential for government-funded overbuilding and ReConnect funding and BEAD funding being directed to the same areas. The two agencies, as well as others like the **FCC**, are talking as much as possible ahead of the BEAD announcement to make sure any duplication is minimized.

“There is substantial collaboration and coordination between and amongst all of the different agencies that are responsible for allocating funds under the three, four or five programs and to make sure we're not duplicating our efforts or laying fiber optic cable in the same place with two different sets of funds, and that's an ongoing effort,” White House Infrastructure Coordinator *Mitch Landrieu* said.

YACCARINO SPEAKS OUT ON DECISION TO JOIN TWITTER

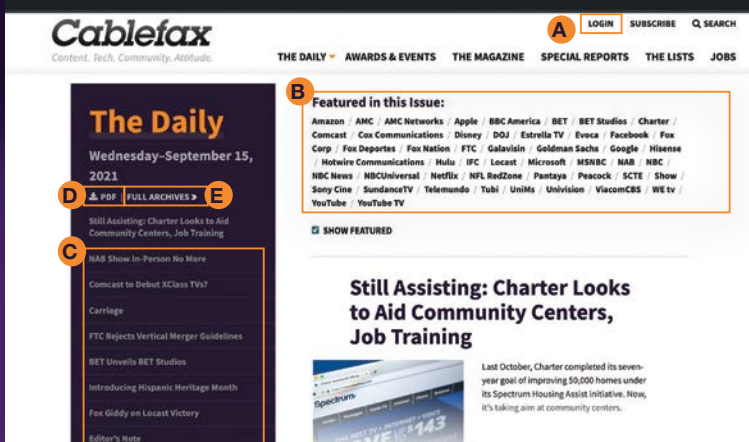
Twitter CEO *Linda Yaccarino* is sharing more on her decision to make the leap to the social media platform after more than 11 years at **NBCUniversal**. In a **Twitter thread** Monday, she communicated a desire to follow the example that *Elon Musk* made in the space industry and create change in an area where a shift is needed—social media. “It's also becoming clear that the global town square needs transformation—to drive civilization forward through the unfiltered exchange of information and open dialogue about the things that matter

most to us,” Yaccarino tweeted. “Have you ever been talking with someone particularly insightful and thoughtful, you should have the freedom to speak your mind. We all should.” She went on to say that Twitter has the opportunity to reach across aisles and create new partnerships that celebrate different voices, but the success of Twitter 2.0 is the responsibility of all users as well as the company's leadership. If everyone buys in and thinks big, it is Yaccarino's belief that the platform can transform into the world's most accurate real-time information source and a global town square for communication. “Our first principles are questioning our assumptions and building something new from the ground up. It's rare to have the chance to put a new future into the hands of every person, partner and creator on the planet,” she tweeted. “That's exactly why I'm here—with all of YOU.”

NEW OWNERS FOR GLOBES

The **Hollywood Foreign Press Association** soon shall be no more, with **Dick Clark Productions** and **Eldridge Industries** acquiring all the Golden Globes' assets, rights, and properties from the organization. The Hollywood Foreign Press Association has come under fire in recent years for its lack of diversity and other practices, with **NBC** nixing televising the Globes in 2022. The transaction will result in the winddown of the HFPA and its membership. The proceeds from the transaction, plus the existing resources of the HFPA, will transition into a newly formed Golden Globe Foundation which will “continue the legacy of HFPA's history of entertainment-related charitable giving.” The move comes after last year's decision by HFPA to

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have Eldridge create a new private entity to manage its Golden Globes assets and preserve its charitable and philanthropic programs in a separate non-profit entity. The 81st Annual Golden Globe Awards will take place Jan. 7, 2024.

CARRIAGE

Amazon Freevee will launch 12 **MGM FAST** channels along with 11 FAST channels from **Warner Bros. Discovery** and 10 from **Lionsgate**. The additions include MGM title channels such as “Stargate” and “Green Acres” as well as genre channels “MGM Presents: Action” and “MGM Presents: Sci-Fi.” WBD’s FAST launches include channels for “Cake Boss,” “Ghost Brothers” and “Say Yes to the Dress,” while Lionsgate’s include channels devoted to “Nashville” and “Ghost Hunters.”

TUCKER CEASE & DESIST

Axios broke the [news](#) Monday that **Fox News** has sent a cease-and-desist letter to former host *Tucker Carlson* regarding his **Twitter** video programs. Carlson’s next Twitter ep is scheduled for Tuesday and will feature his response to the *Trump* indictment. The *NY Times* [reports](#) that Carlson is still under contract with Fox through early 2025, with Fox News accusing him of violating terms that limit his ability to appear in media other than Fox.

WEST VIRGINIA RELEASES \$18M FOR BROADBAND PROJECTS

West Virginia Governor *Jim Justice* granted preliminary approvals last week for more than \$18 million for broadband infrastructure projects across the state. This expansion includes applications received for three of the state’s programs: the Line Extension Advancement and Development, Major Broadband Project strategies and Wireless Internet Networks. **Frontier** will receive \$13.38 million in MBPS funds for the expansion of connectivity in more than 6,000 addresses, and **USCellular** is set to get \$929,950 in WIN and planning grant funds to upgrade three towers and plan a wireless implementation project to bring connectivity to Watoga State Park. Altogether, the projects given the green light will provide connectivity to 21,126 homes and businesses, many of which currently do not have internet services, and result in more than 700 miles of new fiber infrastructure. The investments are part of Justice’s Billion-Dollar Broadband Strategy, a plan to invest more than \$1 billion in state and federal funds to make broadband available for the first time in approximately 200,000 West Virginia homes and businesses.

BROADBAND EQUIPMENT SPENDING IS ON THE UPSWING

Total global revenue for the broadband access equipment market increased to \$4.6 billion in 1Q23, up 7% year-over-year, according to a recently published report from **Dell’Oro Group**. Total cable

access concentrator revenue was up 4% YOY at \$265 million, with Remote PHY devices, Remote OLTs, and Virtual CMTS platforms all recording significant revenue gains for the quarter as cable operators continue to expand their DAA and fiber initiatives.

‘THE WALKING DEAD’ TAKES NYC

AMC Networks is bringing the undead to NYC on Wednesday to build the buzz around the premiere of “The Walking Dead: Dead City.” The programmer is partnering with establishments like Katz’s Deli, Joe’s Pizza, the New York Hot Dog King Cart and H&H Bagels for the takeover. Each location will feature merchandise giveaways, and the show’s iconic Walkers will be occupying each space. The premiere of the next installment in The Walking Dead Universe arrives on Sunday at 9pm ET on **AMC** and **AMC+**.

PROGRAMMING

Max greenlit “Hop,” a preschool animated series from “Arthur” creator *Marc Brown*. The show follows a six-year-old frog with one leg shorter than the other and a superpower focused on empathy. The second season of “Winning Time: The Rise of the Lakers Dynasty” also has a debut date on **HBO**—August 6 at 9pm. – **Fox Nation** will release a new comedy special from comedian *Rob Schneider* on Sunday. “Rob Schneider: Woke Up in America” was filmed in front of a live audience at the Tampa Theatre and covers topics including culture wars and making movies with former president *Donald Trump*. – Season Two of “Almost Paradise” drops on **Amazon Freevee** on July 21. – **Bounce TV** will recognize Juneteenth by premiering new doc “Xernona Clayton: A Life in Black and White” on Monday at 9pm ET. Clayton was the first Black woman in the South to have her own TV show, helped write the blueprint to desegregate hospitals in the South and even convinced a KKK Grand Dragon to renounce his position as well as the organization. Following its Bounce premiere, the documentary will be available on **Brown Sugar**, Bounce’s SVOD service.

PEOPLE

Canela Media named *Chechu Lasheras* Chief Strategy Officer. He’ll spearhead the company’s corporate strategy while also identifying new avenues for growth. He last served as Executive Director of **Miami Dade College** and spent time as Chief Digital Revenue Officer at **Grupo Prisa**, a media conglomerate with newspapers, magazines, radio stations and digital platforms.

AWARDS

Clearfield CEO *Cheri Beranek* was named as an Entrepreneur Of The Year 2023 Heartland Award winner by **Ernst & Young**. Clearfield is a publicly traded company that designs, manufactures and distributes fiber protection, management and delivery solutions for fiber deployments.