

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Save ACP Week: Stakeholders Make Case for Refunding Broadband Program

Wednesday was the kickoff of the White House's "ACP Week of Action" to spread awareness of the broadband subsidy program, but it felt more like the launch of a campaign to get the initiative refunded.

"This window right now, June to September, is critical to getting ACP refunded," said **Public Knowledge** President/CEO *Chris Lewis* at a joint event hosted by **New America's** Open Technology Institute, Public Knowledge and **Network: On**. "Coming off the debt ceiling debate and leading into the conversation of how the government is funded this fall, we have the opportunity to make it clear that the ACP program is a must-have, not a nice to have."

Echoing that sentiment was **NTIA** Administrator *Alan Davidson*, who praised the work done thus far. "Now there is a new task in front of all of us—ensuring that ACP is on firm financial footing going forward," he said at the D.C. event. "Let your federal lawmakers know how important this program has been to people in your community and the communities you work with. Make sure they understand the real-world impact, the real-life impact, that affordable high speed internet connections can have and remind them how difficult it will be to deliver that connection to everyone in this country without the help of a vital tool like ACP."

Davidson also called on stakeholders to make sure people know about the program and use it. More than 18 million households are already saving an estimated \$600 million per

month with this program.

One thing in ACP's favor is that it has support from Republicans and Democrats. Still, there's no sign of dollars to come. A request for ACP was not included in President Biden's proposed budget and some are discussing whether ISPs need to warn customers of the program's potential expiration. Digital navigators speaking at Wednesday's event told story after story of how ACP is bettering their communities. "I say to that small fraction, because I think it's a small fraction of folks who might be on the fence about ACP or oppose ACP, unless you have a plan to eradicate poverty by Q2 of 2024, you need to support the Affordable Connectivity Program," said *Alisa Valentin*, Senior Director of Tech & Telecom Policy for the **National Urban League**.

Affordability continues to be a major barrier in broadband adoption. ACP provides a discount of up to \$30 per month toward internet service for eligible households (up to \$75 per month for households on qualifying Tribal lands). ACP replaced the Emergency Broadband Benefit program, which had offered an even bigger subsidy of up to \$50 per month for most eligible households. While some ACP recipients are getting broadband for free, some are paying something each month for service. That is proof of the important role broadband plays, said *Kathryn de Wit*, Project Director for **The Pew Charitable Trust's** Broadband Access Initiative.

"Now we've seen numbers of enrollment with ACP steadily increase since EBB started. As we transitioned to the ACP, these numbers have just continued to go up each month. That tells

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us importantly that consumers, regardless of their income level, are finding value in these connections,” said de Wit. “They are looking at their monthly budgets, they are looking at ACP and the benefit that it offers and they are deciding that the cost of staying offline outweighs the monthly price of staying online.”

Jonathan Cannon, Policy Counsel for Technology and Innovation at policy think tank **R Street**, said ACP deserves credit for having a lot more flexibility than other programs, such as Lifeline, which is limited in terms and services covered. “Broadband speeds have increased and broadband prices have gone down, even with inflation,” he said. “Having a market-driven program like ACP continues that momentum. It doesn’t force rate control. It doesn’t put any overbearing pressure on the carriers. It gives them the flexibility to choose and trade plans that are best suited to everyone regardless of income level, and ACP meets people at that moment to give them the plans that they need.”

And while there’s a lot of focus now on the \$42.5 billion in broadband funding through BEAD, Cannon warned that it could be 10 years or more before there are fruits from the program. “But ACP, that money’s already there. It’s already going to work. It’s already getting people connected,” he said. “The GAO reports that there’s 120 different programs out there, many of which are duplicative. We’ve got one program here that really shines above all these others.”

It’s also worth noting that network operators receiving BEAD funding are required to offer a low-cost broadband plan to eligible low-income subscribers. “The Affordable Connectivity program is a really key element of making those infrastructure programs successful. Without it, it’s going to be a lot more complicated, I think, to enforce that low-cost requirement,” said **Free Press** Policy Director *Joshua Stager* said.

When it comes to convincing Congress to find the money, **Digital Progress Institute** Chief Policy Officer *Kim Keenan* stressed the importance of raising the value it brings to communities—including access to jobs, education and health. “In all the big movies—‘Star Wars,’ ‘Star Trek’—when you want to get rid of people, you send them to the planet with no technology... That analogy really applies here,” she said. “We can’t go back to that. We can’t doom people to being somewhere where they can never get off the planet and join us on our planet.”

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## MORE THAN 300 JOIN TO SPREAD WORD ON ACP

More than 300 local and national organizations, including **Comcast**, **Cox Communications**, **NAACP**, **Verizon** and **Dell**, joined **Civic Nation** and the **U.S. Department of Education** to launch digital equity campaign Online For All to go after the estimated 31 million U.S. households eligible but not signed up for the Af-

## The WHO and the WHY

CFX’s spotlight on recent new hires & promotions



**HEATHER McCallion**  
VP, NEW BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES & BUSINESS BREEZELINE

### 3 THINGS TO KNOW

- Heather is a familiar face at Breezeline, with her 10th anniversary at the Cogeco-owned operator coming up in August. She’s spent the past decade overseeing products and programming, which gives her plenty of expertise to take on the newly created post of VP, New Business Opportunities and Business Transformation. She helped establish a broadband-first strategy at Breezeline, leading it through its 2022 IPTV launch as well as the introduction of its best-in-class managed home WiFi solution. Now she’ll be looking for new revenue opportunities and transformation efforts along with innovation around process efficiencies and project management.
- She’s one of those rare executives who have spent time working for an MVPD as well as a programmer. Heather spent a decade at NBCUniversal, most recently as VP, Content Distribution, giving her insights on what’s at stake for both sides when at the negotiating table. She also has held roles at Starz and Disney. Her first job in the industry was as a manager for Disney Channel.
- Heather is a team player for the industry as a whole. She was elected to a three-year term to the NCTC’s board in 2021 and is a graduate of the WICT Betsy Magness Leadership Institute.

fordable Connectivity Program. Visit [OnlineForAll.org](https://www.onlineforall.org) to see the video spot, join the campaign and more. Hundreds of events are planned this week, including an **AARP**-hosted tele-town hall. Comcast is participating in 100 sign-up, awareness, and training activations across the country in 22 states and virtually throughout June. Other campaign elements include the **FCC** launching paid media efforts with ads and a satellite media tour to spread the word through radio and television interviews in English and Spanish. **Charter**, **Verizon**, **AT&T** and other ISPs are also participating in sign-up events, while organizations like **Goodwill** and libraries getting in on the action. Civic Nation also released the [Civic Nation Affordable Connectivity Program Pilot Report](#), which shows the success of community outreach in enrolling eligible households in the program. During the pilot period, grantees educated 39,335 people about the Affordable Connectivity Program; had 2,708 one-on-one conversations with community members; and helped 417 people start their applications and 210 people fully enroll in the Affordable Connectivity Program.

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## ASTOUND MOBILE IS COMING

**Astound Broadband** is getting ready to debut its Astound Mobile service. Powered by **T-Mobile**, the service will be available to customers in approximately four million homes currently passed by the company across 12 states. By the end of June, the service will be exclusively available to eligible Astound home internet customers in Massachusetts as well as Corpus Christi, Midland-Odessa, Temple and Waco, Texas. Plans are in place to bring Astound Mobile to the company's remaining markets by the end of the year.

## FCC COMMITS TO PROTECTING CONSUMER DATA AND PRIVACY

**FCC** Chair *Jessica Rosenworcel* is putting her foot down on data privacy, establishing a Privacy and Data Protection Task Force. The working group will be led by Enforcement Bureau Chief *Loyaan Egal* and coordinate across the agency on the rulemaking, enforcement and public awareness needs in the privacy and data protection sectors. That includes data breaches and supply chain vulnerabilities. In a speech at the **Center for Democracy and Technology**, Rosenworcel said she would be sharing a proposed enforcement action against two companies that put the security of communications customers at risk. She also called on her fellow commissioners to join with her to finalize more than \$200 million in fines proposed against **AT&T**, **Verizon**, **T-Mobile** and **Sprint** back in 2020 for selling real-time location info to data aggregators. During a separate panel discussion, **Public Knowledge** SVP *Harold Feld* welcomed the aggressive stance from the FCC, who said the agency really attacked the issue for the first time under Chair *Kevin Martin*, but much of that fire died down when *Ajit Pai* became chairman. "He said multiple times he did not think the FCC should be in the privacy business. He said this is a job for the Federal Trade Commission. The enforcement action that we've been waiting on was the result of massive shaming in the press and pressure from Congress for *Pai* to actually take any action on what were egregious and well-publicized violations," *Feld* said. "Now we're in sort of a recovery period where we need to work to get the agency back on track."

## ALTAFIBER SNAGS BRIDGEWIRED

**Altafiber** and Ohio-based fiber company **Bridgewired** signed an agreement last week under which altafiber will acquire the latter's broadband infrastructure assets. Bridgewired provides gigabit internet to portions of Warren County, Greene County and Clinton County. Altafiber will assume responsibility for Bridgewired's existing customer base as well as its fiber infrastructure, and Bridgewired will provide certain management services to altafiber after the closing of the deal. The transaction is expected to close in 3Q23.

## NBCU, WELLS FARGO STRIKE COMMERCE SPONSORSHIP DEAL

**NBCUniversal** has tapped **Wells Fargo** as the preferred financial partner of NBCUniversal Checkout, the company's commerce technology. Wells Fargo credit cardholders will receive exclusive benefits when purchasing through the One Platform marketplace, and Wells Fargo credit cards will be integrated into anywhere NBCUniversal Checkout exists on the company's properties. The partnership kicks off Wednesday at 10pm ET with the premiere of Bravo's "Project Runway." Fans will be able to shop hair care products and designer looks all season long using Must ShopTV ad technology.

## PEACOCK TEST FLIGHT ON VIZIO

A **Peacock** preview experience has arrived on **VIZIO**. Smart TV owners will be able to watch episodes of popular titles from the streamer via a channel on VIZIO's WatchFree+ streaming app for the next three weeks. VIZIO is also testing out Content Connections, an interactive feature offering users a more seamless way to navigate between WatchFree+ and other streaming applications—in this case, Peacock.

## RATINGS

**Fox News** won the Tuesday news battle over coverage of former president *Donald Trump's* arraignment over 37 federal charges. The network drew in 1.46 million total viewers P2+ across total day and 2.42 million in primetime, just beating out **MSNBC** (1.44 million total day, 2.40 million in prime). **CNN** averaged 760,000 viewers in total day and 948,000 in prime. "The Five" emerged as the most-watched program in cable news with three million viewers, but was followed closely by the 2.9 million that tuned in to "Hannity." – Tuesday's Yankees-Mets game was **Yes Network's** second-most viewed game of the season, averaging 431,000 total viewers in the New York DMA. It peaked at 545,000 total viewers between 9:30-9:45pm.

## AMAZON GOES TO THE MOVIES

**Amazon** is offering Prime members a free early screening in theaters of upcoming Amazon Originals through its "Prime Premiere" program. First up is "The Horror of Delores Roach." Episodes 1-3 will be in select theaters on June 28, with Prime members able to reserve their free seats one week before the screening. A two-episode sneak peek of Season 2 of "The Summer I Turned Pretty" is set for July 12, while "Good Omens" first two eps of Season 2 will screen on July 26.

## PEOPLE

**AccuWeather** has a new CEO. *Steven R. Smith* is stepping into the role, effective immediately, while AccuWeather founder *Joel Myers* will become Executive Chairman. Smith, who started at the network as a forecasting intern in 1997, last served as president of the network.

Think about that for a minute...

Is No News Good News?

Commentary by Steve Effros

If there's one thing I'm hearing a lot these days it's the lament that folks just are sick and tired of "the news." Of course what they're really saying is that the repeated reporting about the indictment of a former President, or the totally ineffective condition of the House of Representatives, or the latest tornado, fire, hurricane, draught, flood or whatever exacerbated by climate change has just become too much. So many folks seem to be hearing just selective "truth" that reasonable conversation has become difficult.

Yup, we're all getting numb from it all and one of the most common "fixes" seems to be the suggestion that we simply stop watching or listening to "the news." And yes, that will help resolve the angst for a little while, no question about that. But in the long run that's not an answer since those who choose not to remain aware of what's going on around them, those who don't participate, are usually the ones who get hurt the most precisely because they are not keeping informed.

There are real world consequences to the "just turn it off" or "stop reading it" trend. You really can't miss them at the local level. Local newspapers are dying. Two more local newspapers are shuttered every week. Reporting staff have been decimated. There are millions of folks in "news deserts" with no local reporting at all.

Now of course there are reasons for all this other than the "see no evil, hear no evil" trend. Even on a good day "local" newspapers tend to have less than 20 percent of their content about local issues and events. "The media" have changed the name of the game. We now all see and hear national media outlets and distribution, which used to be dependent on subsidies built into the postal rates, has dropped in cost substantially because of the electronic world we now live in, be it distribution by radio, television, or broadband. So simply looking at "newspapers" and suggesting there's a crisis is probably a misplaced concept.

The newspapers had, or have, for those still surviving,

multiple sources of revenue, but each one has been hit hard. Subscriptions are down, except for the few very successful papers that have migrated to web distribution as well. Classified ads got killed when local listservs came along and advertising revenue took a hit with the likes of Amazon and Google. But local information is still an important part of our lives. We really do need to know about the road closure or the local school board challenges. However we can get a lot of that, too, on the web rather than in a "local newspaper." The issue is more affording the reporting rather than the distribution of a hardcopy newspaper. The cost of reporting keeps going up as does the cost of nursing, garbage collecting, teaching and lots of other local things. We have to figure out ways to make sure those folks get paid an appropriate wage so they can do the jobs we need done!

Why mention all this? Well, broadband has been a key part of the change taking place. We can all get frustrated with "the news," but it's critical that we keep informed. So the founding fathers were right about deciding to subsidize the delivery of newspapers (and Congress expanded that to all publications on a nonpartisan, content-neutral basis.) The subsidies now going into developing broadband availability focus on the same idea. It makes sense.

Keeping informed is part of being a citizen. Making sure the information you get is reasonably curated is a growing challenge, especially with the advent of AI, but it's what we have to do. "No news" would be bad news.



Steve

T:202-630-2099  
steve@effros.com

(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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