

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Locked and Loaded: FCC Sets its Calendar as Title II, Billing Items Loom

The FCC released one of its most anticipated documents of the year Monday—the calendar for next year’s open meetings.

While it’s always nice to have for planning purposes, industry policy folks have been especially interested in seeing the dates given the expected vote early in the year to classify broadband under Title II. No word on when that might happen, but some watchers think the April 25 or May 23 meetings seem like good candidates. Initial comments in the Title II net neutrality proceeding are due Dec. 14 and reply comments are due Jan. 17, so that would rule out the Jan. 25 meeting and Feb. 15. The March 14 meeting is possible, but could be a bit too early given that it typically takes FCC staff a couple months to review comments and draft an item.

Comments have been trickling in since the FCC voted on the NPRM at its October meeting, with a big rush expected as the deadline nears. Entities that have already weighed in include the **National Federation of Independent Business**, which frets that the agency is reinterpreting existing statutes to expand its authority over the internet and that small broadband providers could be adversely impacted. Chiming in as supporters of the move are Stanford professor *Barbara van Schewick* and First Amendment lawyer *Marvin Ammori*, who listed the 2016 **Charter-Time Warner Cable** transaction, the 2018 California net neutrality law and Europe’s net neutrality law as developments that should help inform the next iteration of the 2015

Open Internet order.

Of course, as with previous net neutrality proceedings, there is a plethora of public comments, mostly coming from a form letter available on **Battle for the Net’s** [website](#). Those typically read: “I strongly support the FCC’s current effort to reinstate net neutrality and Title II authority, which is critical for an open internet, expanding broadband access, privacy protections, and public safety. The agency must move forward a strong rule that rejects zero rating, ensures carriers don’t use interconnection to violate net neutrality, and allows states to add their own protections.” Given some of the [controversies](#) that have arisen over net neutrality comments over the years, Battle for the Net’s generated comments include language warning that technical limitations may result in a delay between creation and submission of comments and that a single individual might have submitted multiple comments.

Now that the FCC has a full house of five commissioners, it’s certainly not wasting any time acting on items. Take last week’s notice that it’ll vote on a proposal during the agency’s Dec. 13 meeting that would make it easier for customers to leave video services contracts prior to their expiration dates. The FCC has shown a lot of interest lately in cable bills, adopting an item in June seeking comment on enhanced pricing transparency requirements for cable and satellite TV providers that would have them offer consumers the “all-in” price for video programming services in promotional materials and on subscribers’ bills.

Amid that backdrop, MVPDs’ 2024 price increase notices are beginning to hit mailboxes. **Comcast** has started inform-



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ing customers of various increases for video and internet services, with most customers to have received notifications by the end of the week. It's even launched a [website](#) around the price increases. The average Comcast bill increase is about 3% (that is a weighted average that takes into account customers receiving promotional rates that won't be impacted as well as customers with one product or 2+ services), down from last year's 4% hike.

Price increases vary by market. For example, in Branford, CT, Comcast Choice TV Select will jump from \$37.50 to \$43.50 in 2024, while the internet-only Fast package goes to \$105 from \$102 and its Connect package rises to \$68 from \$65. Broadcast fees and regional sports fees vary by the channels in a market. The broadcast fee in Branford is going to \$32.75 from \$28.10, while the sports fee jumps to \$15.15 from \$10.85. Across the way in Danbury, CT, the broadcast fee hits \$26.70, up from \$19.55, while the RSN rises to \$12.40 from \$10.85.

“Rising programming costs continue to drive the highest increase in customers’ bills. We’re working hard to manage these costs for our customers while investing in our broadband network to provide the best, most reliable Internet service in the country and to give our customers more low-cost choices in video and connectivity so they can find a package that fits their lifestyle and budget,” a Comcast spokesperson said.

Comcast won't be the only provider raising rates, and streamers certainly haven't been shy about raising bills. Ad-free Disney+'s monthly price increased 27% last month to \$13.99, while Apple TV Plus recently went to \$9.99/month from \$6.99, its second increase in a year.

TEGNA RUFFLES DIRECTV WITH DISPUTE WARNINGS

The trademarks of Thanksgiving are two-fold—feelings of overwhelming gratitude, and rising tensions among family members. **DirecTV** and **TEGNA** couldn't escape the latter this year with the broadcaster warning customers over the holiday weekend that they could lose access to TEGNA stations. The expiration date of the pair's current retrans deal is Thursday. “TEGNA has once again made a private negotiation public in the hopes of creating unnecessary and premature concern among some of our customers to extract higher rates for local broadcast stations,” a DirecTV spokesman told **CFX**. “Unfortunately, that’s become the industry norm as the costs for free local stations have soared more than 20% year upon year despite declining popularity and less-compelling content.” TEGNA owns and operates 68 stations in 54 metro regions, and it had largely been conflict-free over the last few years as it worked to seek approval for its now-defunct merger with **Standard General**. In 2021, **Mediacom** and **DISH** lost access to TEGNA stations due to lengthy retransmission consent disputes, and **Verizon Fios** found itself embroiled in its own fight in early 2022. TEGNA, **Scripps**, **Hearst** and others pulled their stations from Fubo TV earlier this year in a stand to support **CBS Television Stations**. The broadcasters were fighting against a deal struck by **Paramount Global** with Fubo that the **CBS Affiliate Board** rejected and called “below market.”



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 DECEMBER 6, 2023

Have You Heard The News?
 Emmy Award winning journalist, **Alicia Quarles**, is the 2023 Keynote Speaker for The Most Powerful Women Luncheon.

Where: The Edison Ballroom • 240 W 47th St, New York, NY
When: Wednesday, December 6, 2023

REGISTER TO ATTEND

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NEARLY 3/4 OF U.S. SCHOOL DISTRICTS BEAT FCC GOAL

Approximately 74% of school districts in the U.S. currently meet or exceed the **FCC's** recommended bandwidth goal of 1 Mbps per student, according to **Connected Nation's** 2023 Report on School Connectivity. The annual [report](#)—which released its fourth and final edition—revealed prices are decreasing as well with a 16% reduction in median cost per megabit since the last E-rate cycle in 2022, with the current median cost sitting at \$1.01. However, school districts meeting or eclipsing that 1 Mbps per student mark saw their national median cost drop to \$0.85 per megabit compared to the \$1.55 for districts that don't meet the goal. When breaking it down by states, Arkansas, Hawaii and South Dakota have 100% of school districts serving as least 1 Mbps per student. North Dakota is close behind at 98%, while Kentucky—which was ranked 49th in 2022 at 15%—jumped to fifth this year with 97%. Alabama, Delaware and Ohio were among those toward the bottom of the rankings at 33% each and Rhode Island in last at 17%.

GO ADDRESSABLE GETS OFFICIAL

What started as an industry initiative is now a non-profit trade organization. **Go Addressable** made things official last week as it continues its push to expand the use of addressable advertising. **Charter's** Spectrum Reach, **Comcast Advertising**, **DirectTV Advertising** and **DISH Media** are the founding members, while **Altice USA's** a4 Advertising is an associated member. The initiative received a boost as well as it added its first programmer **Paramount Advertising**. The announcement comes before Go Addressable's third annual industry summit in New York on Wednesday at 8:30am.

RATINGS

NBC Sports recorded the second-most watched primetime Thanksgiving game ever for Thursday's game that saw the 49ers defeat the Seahawks 31-13. It averaged a total audience delivery of 26.9 million viewers across **NBC**, **Peacock**, **Telemundo**, **Universo**, **NBC Sports Digital** and **NFL Digital** platforms and peaked at 30.2 million during the 9:15-9:30pm window. Peacock had an average minute audience of 1.6 million viewers (including NBC Sports Digital and NFL Digital platforms). That's up 34% from last year's 1.2 million viewers. Telemundo and Universo teamed up for an average of 585,000 viewers, making it Telemundo Deportes' most-watched NFL game ever excluding the 2022 Super Bowl. – Last Monday's "Kelce Bowl" between the Eagles and Chiefs was the most-watched Monday Night Football Game in **ESPN's** history. The Eagles' 21-17 win garnered 29.02 million viewers across **ESPN**, **ESPN2**, **ESPN+**, **ESPN Deportes**, **NFL+** and **ABC**, with the broadcast peak coming in at 31.2 million even without a *Taylor Swift* appearance. The pregame show "Monday Night Countdown" had its best audience of the season with an average of 1.8 million viewers,

while the "Monday Night Football with Peyton and Eli" telecast on **ESPN2** reeled in 1.9 million viewers.

CARRIAGE

Hemisphere Media Group is launching a trio of Spanish-language FAST channels on **ViX: WAPA+**, **TODOCINE** and **TODO DRAMA**. **WAPA+** brings news, sports, entertainment and other content from the Puerto Rican broadcast network **WAPA TV**. **TODOCINE** features blockbuster Spanish-language movies while **TODO DRAMA** showcases programs from Turkey, Korea, Brazil and more.

FIBER FRENZY

TDS put a bow on the construction of its network in Santa Clara, Utah. About 2,800 addresses in the area now have access to **TDS'** speeds of up to 8 Gigs in addition to TV and phone services. Business customers can get up to 10 Gigs as well as **TDS managedIP** and a **VoIP** solution.

DOING GOOD

Comcast's small business initiative **Comcast RISE** is dishing out grant packages to 100 businesses in Multnomah County, Oregon. The packages come with a \$5,000 monetary grant, educational resources, business consultation services, creative production, a media schedule and a technology upgrade. The recipients for this round will gather for an in-person event Thursday. **Comcast RISE** has given more than \$125 million in grants since 2020. – **GCI** VP, Connectivity Products *Josh Lonn* and VP, Wholesale Business *Krag Johnsen* joined forces to raise over \$12,000 to go toward at-risk youth experiencing homelessness or trafficking. The two participated in **Covenant House Alaska's** Sleep Out: Corporate Edition, which encourages people to spend a night outside to experience the challenges of day-to-day life for those without a home.

PEOPLE

Matt Graham was named SVP, Direct-to-Consumer and Streaming Business Development for **Tennis Channel**. It's a newly created position that'll have him oversee the company's DTC strategy as it plans to launch a streaming platform in 2024. Graham will work alongside **Tennis Channel** President *Ken Solomon* on developing and launching the DTC product and will report to EVP/COO/CFD *Bill Simon*. Graham arrives from **AMC Networks**, where he was the GM of **Acorn TV** and **Sundance Now**, and also founded and led **PBS Digital Studios** during his six-year stint at **PBS Digital**. – **Ritter Communications** is promoting *Victor Esposito* from SVP, Engineering and Network Operations to CTO. He'll guide all of **Ritter's** technology-related components, filling in the seat left by *Greg Sunderwood*, who's retiring after 11 years with the company.