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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

C-SPAN Change-Up: Co-CEOs Retiring, Hunt on for Successor

While the industry found out about the upcoming retirement of longtime **C-SPAN** veterans *Rob Kennedy* and *Susan Swain* as **CFX** broke the news Tuesday, it's been a carefully thought-out process.

"Rob, Susan and I started having that conversation last February. Maybe it's our generation, that we think we shouldn't talk about that stuff, but you have to because it's such an important transition, especially with leaders like Rob and Susan," said C-SPAN board chair *Pat Esser*, who knows a bit about succession planning having exited his role as **Cox Communications** CEO at the end of 2021 after leading the company for 15 years. "We started going through internal candidates, what other succession planning should we be doing. And then they had a fair amount of changes they were leading us through, with COVID, the investment in the technology platform and [new offices](#). You've just got to make sure that stuff doesn't get lost in the process. And it hasn't. Things are going really, really well."

It's a rare changing of the guard for the non-profit public affairs network, which turns 45 on March 19. C-SPAN founder *Brian Lamb* served as CEO since the company's founding in 1978, with Kennedy and Swain (then co-presidents) stepping into the co-CEO roles in 2012. The duo has led the organization through a sea change, rolling out new digital initiatives, increasing product licensing, launching advertising on its digital platforms and initiating individual donor solicitation. In fact, right now C-SPAN is running its [inaugural "Founder's Day](#)

[Campaign](#)" with a goal of \$45,000 in support.

As succession planning got underway, C-SPAN VP, Finance *Matt Deprey* was confirmed to replace Kennedy as CFO, another role he holds at the network. But when it came to the CEO role, the board decided it made sense to look outside the organization. **Carlson Resources** was brought in earlier this year to tackle the search with what Esser described as an impressive slate of candidates interviewing this month. He hopes to have a successor named by May or June, with a search committee that includes himself, Lamb, Swain and Kennedy that will make a final recommendation to the executive board.

"People always say does it have to be a media leader? There are a number of media leaders we're talking to. Does it have to be? Maybe not, but it sure helps," Esser said. "Things we're looking for are probably no big surprise—critical thinking skills, interpersonal communication skills, team leadership skills... [Someone who] can go run a C-suite team of people. There's an energy, passion and optimism that we think is a requirement to run and head up C-SPAN. Someone has to believe in the mission. That's really, really, really important."

Kennedy decided on a mid-May 2024 retirement. Swain's departure plans are more fluid as she intends to assist through the transition. Observant viewers may have noticed that she has stepped back from all on-air hosting duties, with the "Q&A" series starting 2024 with Peter Slen in the host seat.

As a public service created by the U.S. cable industry, C-SPAN's mission is to provide audiences with access to live



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gavel-to-gavel proceedings of the House and Senate as well as other forums where public policy is discussed—all without commentary or analysis. The venerable institution prides itself on being all business so as not to distract from the work being done on screen. C-SPAN operates 3 TV networks, a D.C.-based FM station, a website and video archive with more than 300,000 hours of contemporary political programming, and programs several digital products for mobile users and connected TVs.

“Today, 99% of the funding for C-SPAN comes from the cable industry. It’s a nonprofit that’s fully funded by the cable industry. We know we have to diversify that revenue stream, and it will diversify over time,” said Esser. “In the meantime, we’re very blessed. We have a really well funded organization. We have a fair amount of money put in reserve that we’ve done over the last 20 years to buy us a lot of time. But you obviously want to get on stable footing and not have that be the way you survive over a decade.”

Asked about whether he’s concerned that the search is taking place during a presidential election year, Esser pointed to the “humble” but “very experienced” group of leaders at C-SPAN that drive the engine and will still be in place during the search as well as its very engaged board.

“The challenge probably of our government today is stuff that’s very predictable becomes very unpredictable,” Esser said, pointing to the decision that gave C-SPAN’s cameras special access to the historic Speaker of the House vote in January 2023. “We had to scramble and it was unbelievable that they covered all that. You got to see stuff with a House you’ve never seen in your lifetime. You got to see how a Speaker is elected. Usually, the parties are very protective of that because they don’t have to share that. They can control where the cameras are, what you can see and can’t see. My point is, given our current environment, who knows what can happen at any time.”

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ISPS ASK FCC TO WAIT ON MORE DIGITAL DISCRIMINATION RULES

Organizations representing ISPs of all sizes sounded off against an **FCC** FNPRM proposing to add a number of compliance measures to its digital discrimination rules. The FNPRM asks whether the agency should require providers to submit an annual report on projects that were completed during the preceding calendar year and what communities were served by those projects. It also probes whether a mandatory internal compliance program should be instituted that would require regular assessment of whether company practices could violate the digital discrimination rules. **ACA Connects**, **WISPA-The Association for Broadband Without Boundaries** and **NTCA** filed joint comments with the FCC arguing that it was not necessary and unduly burdensome considering the Commission’s base

set of digital discrimination rules haven’t yet gone into effect. The FCC has already said it would not initiate any enforcement investigations solely concerning conduct that produces differential impacts under its new rules until at least six months after they go into effect. The group of commenters believe the agency should also take that time to evaluate the effectiveness of those rules and then determine whether more are needed. If the FCC determines that it needs to move forward with more measures, small and rural providers should be left out of the conversation. “As noted by the Joint Commenters in their respective initial comments, there is no evidence that smaller and rural providers have reason or motive, or have indeed engaged in, digital discrimination of access,” the group said. **NCTA** agreed in its comments that the FCC should take a step back, arguing the requirements could force providers to engage in race-based decision making that would be in conflict with existing civil rights law. Instead of a new annual report, NCTA asks that the FCC rely on existing broadband data collections and information gathered from informal complaints under the new rules to identify any trends, including geographic or demographic patterns, that aren’t justified by issues like technical or economic feasibility. On the internal compliance issues, NCTA warned the Commission not to be overly prescriptive with one solution. “The new digital discrimination rules cover a wide range of providers, and the Commission should allow companies to undertake their own measures to ensure their compliance with the prohibition on digital discrimination that are appropriate and customized to be effective within their systems,” it said.

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IGER EXPLAINS HOW THE SPORTS JV, ESPN DIGITAL FIT TOGETHER

Disney CEO *Bob Iger* stands by his previous statements that the sports streaming *juv* his company has engaged in with **Fox** and **Warner Bros. Discovery** is really designed to capture a group of potential subscribers that either have never subscribed to a linear bundle or have cut the cord, and he hasn’t been convinced by those that have argued that it will be disruptive to the linear bundle. “I’m not sure, by the way, that the bundle was ever going to get some of those consumers back or for the generation that our kids are part of, getting them into it. This is a way to do that,” he said during an appearance at an investor conference Tuesday. He also spoke about how **ESPN** going digital fits into the picture as Disney prepares to take it over-the-top in 2025. Discussions are still underway on how exactly to make it available to those that are subscribers to the sports streaming *juv*. “I think ultimately, way down the road, ESPN will be a fully-digital platform, and the flagship service, the true rich app that will become ESPN will also have far more integration of essentially other features like sports

betting, for instance,” Iger said. He had no update on ESPN’s hunt for strategic partners other than that the company continues to engage in conversations with folks on the distribution, tech and content sides of the business. Sports rights are a constant conversation, but Iger isn’t on the hunt for any additions in particular when he looks at where ESPN’s portfolio is today. “If you look at ESPN’s menu of sports today, it’s about right in terms of what we feel we need to continue to basically grow the business and also to make the transition to a digital platform,” he said.

MOFFETT NATHANSON BOOSTS CABLE ONE TO ‘BUY’ RATING

MoffettNathanson is upgrading **Cable One** from “Neutral” to “Buy” with an updated target price of \$615 (from \$860 previously). The lower target price is largely because Cable One has one growth engine at the moment—broadband ARPU growth. It lacks a wireless option at a time when converged offerings are really becoming differentiators. But at the same time, the firm believes Cable One’s valuation is too low and its assets are too attractive. It pondered in a note to clients whether **Charter**, which has been rumored to be considering a bid for **Altice USA**, would look instead at a purchase of Cable One, an arguably simpler transaction. “Private equity investors could conclude the same. If one is willing to build fiber networks with 100% competitive overlaps, would one not at least want to consider whether one’s capital would be better spent on a much more favorable mix of competitive and non-competitive locals... at a substantially lower cost per connected home?” MoffettNathanson said, adding the caveat that it’s not suggesting that Cable One is “in play.” “We make the observations about private market/M&A valuations only to highlight that Cable One’s valuation is low enough that it provides for significant upside optionality.”

MAX’S PASSWORD CRACKDOWN

After seeing **Netflix** experience great success with its strategies to prevent password sharing, **Warner Bros. Discovery** is going to follow suit. It’s not a big shock, but CEO/President, Global Streaming and Games **JB Perrette** took time during an investor conference appearance to share a little about the timeline moving forward. Max is scheduled to launch in a number of European markets in the second and third quarters, and the password sharing crackdown will also be coming later this year and move into 2025. Perrette described it as one of seven different vectors that will help Max drive acquisition and reduce churn in highly-penetrated markets. “Netflix was in the market for 17 years, that means people were sharing passwords for 17 years. We’ve been in the market for four if you count the **HBO Max** launch, and obviously we’re not quite at the same scale,” he said. “But we think there’s, relative to the scale of our business, it’s a meaningful opportunity.”

AT THE COMMISSION

FCC Chair **Jessica Rosenworcel** shared a proposal with her fel-

low commissioners Tuesday that would seek comment on how it could lower costs and encourage competition in multi-tenant environments. It would propose banning bulk billing arrangements that require tenants to pay for broadband, cable and satellite service from a specific provider even if they choose not to take that service, or allowing tenants to opt out of such agreements. It also seeks comment on practices that may be limiting consumer choice in multi-unit buildings.

WEEKLY RATINGS

Fox News made it seven straight weeks leading all cable networks in primetime and total-day viewers. It recorded 2.09 million viewers P2+ in prime, beating what was a close battle between **MSNBC’s** 1.22 million and **ESPN’s** 1.14 million. **HGTV** followed with 740,000 while **History Channel** snuck into the top five with 739,000. Fox News garnered an average of 1.36 million viewers in total day. MSNBC secured second with 822,000 and ESPN third at 496,000. **CNN** (470,000) and **HGTV** (422,000) followed in fourth and fifth, respectively.

FIBER FRENZY

Vexus Fiber is declaring Canyon, Texas, a certified gigabit city now that the company’s fiber network is available to a majority of households and businesses. Vexus has installed about 125 miles of fiber in the area over the course of its \$9.5 million project. Vexus began servicing Canyon in 2020 and has since expanded to nearly 7,000 residents and 500 businesses. Customers can access multi-gig speeds of up to 5 Gbps for residents, while businesses can get customizable options. – Construction of **Sparklight’s** \$27 million network is well underway in Payson, Arizona. Its service is already available to over 2,400 residential and business customers, with the ultimate goal of connecting nearly 8,500 locations. The project is expected to be completed in summer 2025. Payson residents can get symmetrical speeds of up to 6 Gbps and businesses up to 5 Gbps. – **Archtop Fiber** has launched internet service in Kingston, New York. Customers can get symmetrical speeds of up to 2 Gbps for \$89.99/month. Archtop has plans to expand to the greater Kingston area following weeks of service for test homes, with additional expansion slated for the Town and Village of Saugerties and multiple markets across the Hudson Valley.

PEOPLE

Charter made a pair of VP, Field Operations appointments. Regional VP, Field Operations for the Northwest region **Wally Bakare** is moving to southern California to take on the same role for the West region. He’ll replace and report to **Shannon Atkinson**, who was promoted to Charter SVP, Field Operations. Filling in Bakare’s previous role will be **Chris Fulton**, who’s been Charter’s Group VP, Call Center Operations since July 2017. Fulton—who’ll also report to Atkinson—and Bakare will oversee their respective field operations workforces in addition to managing local broadband networks.