

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Meet & Greet: C-SPAN's Incoming CEO Ready to Solidify Network's Future

Given C-SPAN's vaulted position in both the cable industry and the nation, there is a lot of pressure on the shoulders of its new CEO, only the third in the public affairs network's 45-year history. Not only will Sam Feist be expected to retain and build on C-SPAN's sterling reputation, but he also will need to find new audiences and revenue streams as the distribution landscape continues to shift. Not to mention that he's got some big shoes to fill following in the footsteps of Brian Lamb (who remains on C-SPAN's board), Rob Kennedy (who is set to retire May 17) and Susan Swain (who will serve as sole CEO until Feist takes the reins). Given these divisive times, Feist, who will step down in June as CNN D.C. Bureau Chief, also will have to assuage any concerns that he could drive non-partisan C-SPAN in any particular direction. Perhaps then it's notable that news of his hiring was greeted Tuesday by well wishes from Trump senior advisor [Jason Miller](#) as well as [Brian Stelter](#), author of "Network of Lies – The Epic Saga of Fox News, Donald Trump, and the Battle for American Democracy." Cablefax chatted with Feist, who was about to head over to meet with C-SPAN staffers for the first time, about why the role appealed to him and what's ahead.

Let's start with the basics. Why did you take the job?

Because it's one of the great media jobs in Washington. C-SPAN is an American treasure. It's an essential institution. I've been a C-SPAN viewer since I was a teenager and, obviously,

as a Washington journalist, we all watch C-SPAN. Having an opportunity to work with the C-SPAN team to figure out the future is just an incredible honor. It is one of the few media outlets that almost everyone has a good opinion of, and that's an extraordinary accomplishment in today's complicated and divisive media world. To have an unfiltered view of your government is something that is, frankly, unique to this country, and something that has happened because of C-SPAN. And so, for me, it'll be an honor to continue that tradition and help make sure that C-SPAN's available for many decades to come.

It is a departure though. You'll be leaving the world of personalities, having worked closely with Wolf Blitzer and John King at CNN. C-SPAN has always been low key. Is that still what you envision for it?

I won't start at C-SPAN until September, so I'm not going to begin to decide what may or may not change at some point in the future. Suffice it to say, C-SPAN is incredibly important. And it works. It has a very loyal following, so I don't see my role as making any material or major changes to the programming anytime soon. I see my role as to get to know C-SPAN—I have the luxury of overlapping with Susan Swain, who's an extraordinary CEO—and learning the business, learning the people, learning the operation. Obviously, the most important thing I will be working on is helping to futureproof C-SPAN for years to come to try to identify new distribution opportunities and new ways to fund the important work C-SPAN already does.

Is this something very different from what you were doing at



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CNN, in terms of finding new revenue streams, etc.?

I've been on the executive team at CNN for quite a while. I run the Washington operations and run politics. But starting last year I became the executive in charge of CNN en Español, which has been a really valuable experience for me. Like all cable networks, distribution and new revenue opportunities are really important. That network—which is distributed domestically, distributed internationally—will be launching FAST channels this summer. You wonder how is the Washington Bureau Chief for CNN involved in distribution issues, but my role at CNN en Español has really been in distribution issues and distribution plans have been at the heart of that. I am going to spend a lot of time this summer and fall listening and learning about C-SPAN's business. Then we'll work together to figure out how we'll distribute those channels, if differently.

What about the timing of this role coming so close to November elections. Does that create any sort of pressure for your colleagues at CNN or for C-SPAN?

CNN will be fine. CNN has a great and large team, and I have no doubt that they will be in good shape for election season. It's a terrific team, and I'm honored to be a part of it. And as far as C-SPAN, I think that the timing will actually work out well because I will get to work alongside Susan for a time and learn the place. And I think there's no better time than an election season to see how C-SPAN flexes all of its muscles.

It feels like everyone in Washington has been on C-SPAN at some point. Do you know how many times you've appeared on the network?

I think one of us will have to look up the answer. I don't know—a half a dozen times or so? The C-SPAN library is second to none. There is no archive like it in the world. Everyone who has been on C-SPAN, it's possible to go find a clip of them on C-SPAN in a way that you just can't with any other television outlet, at least that I'm aware of. *[C-SPAN's Video Library puts his appearances at seven, including a memorial service for former CNN anchor Bernard Shaw and a 2016 presidential campaign discussion at the Georgetown Law Center that he moderated.]*

STREAMING BUSINESS QUESTIONED AS COMCAST TEASES NEW BUNDLE

Bundles are blooming once more this spring with **Comcast** set to introduce a "StreamSaver" package over the next month that includes **Netflix**, **Peacock** and **Apple TV+**. **Comcast** CEO **Brian Roberts** revealed the bundle at the **MoffettNathanson** Media, Internet and Communications Conference Tuesday, and he said it will be available this month at a vastly reduced price to anything in the market today, but held back on offering specific details. It will only

be available to new and existing Xfinity internet or video subscribers, and the ultimate goal is to strengthen customer relationships while also taking a larger share of the revenues from streaming subscriptions. "As people look at bundling and segmenting... how can we add value to consumers and at the same time take some of the dollars out of other people's relationships and put them into our relationships," Roberts said. "We think in the StreamSaver category, we've been bundling video successfully and creatively for 60 years, and so this is the latest iteration of that and I think this will be a pretty compelling package." He was also asked whether streaming is a good business, and he answered in the affirmative, particularly when a streaming business lives inside a media company like **NBCU**. At a session later in the day, **Liberty Media** CEO **Greg Maffei** remained skeptical that streaming is inherently a solid business. It has been great for Netflix, which has been able to rise to the top. He thinks a few more services can reach profitability, but who else can survive the scrappy fight for survival? "The bloodbath to get there has been brutal and there are clearly too many players and they're not of sufficient scale," he said. "Will this be a good business for somebody? Yes, but the carnage to get there was what we certainly couldn't stomach." Liberty Media completed its split-off of Atlanta Braves Holdings, which indirectly owns the **MLB** team, in July, and Maffei was asked for his thoughts on the future of RSNs. He's still not sure if **Diamond Sports** will be able to successfully exit bankruptcy, but he feels pretty good about the Braves' television future given the 14.5 million broadband households in the team's territory. "We have great ratings and a high degree of fan interest. If we had to replace the RSN deal we have, I think the management team is confident they can replace that. The team is profitable, quite profitable, so it is certainly not like we're going to go to a non-profitable status based on that," Maffei said. "We are perhaps unique in being with that bigger territory and the opportunity to monetize it in other ways."

CHARTER TO LAUNCH MOBILE CONTRACT BUYOUTS

Charter's gearing up to launch mobile contract buyouts, perhaps within the next few days, CEO **Chris Winfrey** said during an investor conference appearance Tuesday. "This is our opportunity from a subscriber acquisition standpoint to rip out multiple lines [ie, big family plans] that are stuck in contracts by these large MNOs that have locked up these devices and tied up these consumers," he said, while adding that the operator has no intention of offering up handset subsidies as an acquisition tool. Winfrey is confident that wireless net additions can continue to grow, citing the fact that Charter added nearly 500,000 mobile lines in 1Q24 despite it being "probably the temporarily lowest gross broadband market" for the industry. Charter shed 72,000

broadband customers during 1Q, something he attributed to lower household formation, fixed wireless and fiber competition and the loss of the ACP program. He thinks those factors won't last and then Charter will compete well on the strength of its network as well as its unique combination with mobile. Roughly 88% of the bits going over Spectrum Mobile phones are carried by Charter's network, with Winfrey describing its 5G radio lease with **Verizon** as Charter's "back-up" carrying only about 12% of traffic. As for BEAD, Charter thinks it probably won't be until the end of the year before it has a real idea of how big an opportunity the government program represents. "We're committed to being part of that so long as it can happen under the right rules and regulations. At the same time, we're going to be disciplined to recognize that we're in a different capital market environment that we were just a couple years ago," Winfrey said. **MoffettNathanson** analyst *Craig Moffett* asked if when you're trading at lower cost per connected home than what you're building in rural areas, would Charter be better off buying back stock. Winfrey acknowledged that the answer might be yes on a temporary basis, but said Charter's confronting a unique organic growth investment opportunity that's not going to come around again. "Making the organic investments actually preserves and accelerates the return of your buybacks. And it also increases the terminal value of the company which is where you really want to go," he said.

NEXSTAR BULLISH ON SPORTS

In the space of nine months, **Nexstar** spent somewhere in the neighborhood of \$1 billion to give **The CW Network** a sports makeover through multi-year media rights agreements. The network went from no sports to having 500 hours of local sports, even adding to that portfolio Tuesday with the addition of home **Pac-12** football games for the 2024 season (CW will air 11 of the league's 13 home games). It's been a surprisingly fast process according to Chairman/CEO *Perry Sook*, but sports are something he's been gung-ho on for quite some time. "We didn't anticipate to go that far that fast, but [we] took advantage of the opportunities and the increasing sentiment that we need broadcast, and a broadcast network with broadcast affiliates is a viable alternative to negotiations that [leagues] might currently be having," Sook said at **MoffettNathanson's** Media & Communications Conference on Tuesday. He even went as far as saying the reach broadcast offers leagues and teams is becoming more appetizing, even if the deals themselves would warrant less money. He cited Nexstar's agreement with the Los Angeles Clippers and how owner *Steve Ballmer* has witnessed boosts in merchandise and popularity because more people can watch games. "I think that there is an increasing appreciation for what broadcast reach can bring to the equation, and even to the extent that the leagues may be willing to accept less money in exchange for the reach that we can deliver," Sook said. "We can't deliver the economics of an RSN or some of these cable models, because last I checked, they went to bankruptcy.

So that's not a business we want to be in, and so any sports deal that we would do—and have done—are deals that we've penciled out to break even to make money."

DISNEY AND AMAZON GET THEIR TURNS AT THE UPFRONTS

The last time **Disney** CEO *Bob Iger* was on stage at an upfront was 30 years ago when he was at the helm of **ABC Entertainment**. He ended that three-decade absence at Disney's upfront Tuesday, and to say things have changed since 1994 would be an understatement. "While the whole business model and the way people consume media are drastically different, what hasn't changed is the fact that success in this industry is really predicated on one thing, and that is telling great stories," Iger said. Whether the reason for Iger's re-appearance on the upfront stage could be chalked up to giving reassurance of stability after Disney's proxy battle is unknown, but it does give credence to how much the industry is shifting. How will Disney respond to that shift? More content, of course. "Welcome to Wrexham" was renewed for a fourth season at **FX**. *Ryan Reynolds* was on hand for the announcement, even joining the upfront jabs by alluding to **Fox's** "spared no expense" comment [at its upfront Monday](#). **Hulu** will step into the stand-up comedy space to compete with **Netflix**, launching a "Hulu's Laughing Now" banner. It'll have new comedy specials each month, starting with one from *Jim Gaffigan*. In sports, *Jason Kelce* is joining the "Monday Night Countdown" crew as a commentator. *Serena Williams* will host the annual ESPYs come July 11, and *Chris Paul* is joining "NBA Countdown" for the upcoming 2024 NBA Eastern Conference Finals as a pre-game and halftime guest analyst. – **Amazon** sure made a big splash at its inaugural upfront, rolling out stars like *Reese Witherspoon*, *Will Ferrell*, *Jake Gyllenhaal* and several others to accompany the litany of programming announcements from **Prime Video** and **MGM Studios**. The upfront began with Prime Video ordering a "Tomb Raider" series based on the popular video game franchise. **MGM+** and Prime Video also ordered a live-action series "Noir" that'll star *Nicolas Cage*. "Mr. & Mrs. Smith" was picked up for a second season, and "Cross" will premiere in the fall with Season 2 already beginning production. Season 3 of "The Summer I Turned Pretty" was also picked up for a summer 2025 release. Ferrell and Witherspoon will star in "You're Cordially Invited," which will premiere Jan. 30 on Prime Video. Of course, Prime Video made sure to parade what it's got in store in the sports world. It'll have its first **NFL** playoff game in January after another season of hosting Thursday Night Football. On the race track, Prime Video will stream **NASCAR's** Coca-Cola 600 in Charlotte come Memorial Day weekend of next year. The streamer will also have *Dale Earnhardt Jr.* as a NASCAR analyst, which will coincide with a documentary about *Dale Earnhardt Sr.* Other sports docs include "Game 7," "ChiefsAholiC: A Wolf in Chiefs Clothing," an untitled piece on the "Madden" video game franchise and "Federer: Twelve Final Days." Lastly and certainly not least, Prime Video ordered a "Legally Blonde" prequel series "Elle" from Witherspoon's company Hello Sunshine.

NIELSEN ROLL OUT CONVERGENT TV VIEWING GAUGE

Nielsen launched a new multiplatform gauge looking at the media consumption across broadcast, cable and streaming, aggregated and ranked by media company. The first Media Distributor Gauge report found that 14 media companies achieved a 1% or greater share of total TV usage for the month of April, with **Disney** leading the way at 11.5% of viewing (42% of its share is attributable to **Disney+** and **Hulu**). Rounding out the list are **YouTube** (9.6%), **NBCUniversal** (8.9%), **Paramount** (8.8%), **Warner Bros. Discovery** (8.1%), **Netflix** (7.6%), **Fox** (6.1%), **Prime Video** (3.2%), **Scripps** (2.3%), **Weigel Broadcasting** (1.5%), **The Roku Channel** (1.4%), **A+E Networks** (1.3%), **Hallmark Media** (1.2%) and **AMC Networks** (1.1%). As for overall monthly viewing in April, time spent watching TV was down 2% month-over-month and down 0.6% on an annual basis. Cable was the only category of viewing to achieve an increase for April, moving up to 29.1% of TV viewing from 28.3% in March, bolstered by NCAA tournament coverage, the NBA playoffs and NFL draft. However, a year-over-year comparison shows cable viewing has declined 8.2% vs. April 2023, and its share has lost 2.4 points. Streaming share in April declined 1.9% from March to 38.4%, while broadcast was down 3% to 22.2% share.

CONNECTICUT AG SUES ALTICE USA

Connecticut Attorney General *William Tong* filed a lawsuit against **Altice USA** over what he sees as unlawful network enhancement fees. Since at least Jan. 2019, Altice has charged **Optimum** customers in the state a monthly “network enhancement fee” that has increased over time to \$6/month, and Tong believes the fee is a violation of the Connecticut Unfair Trade Practices Act because a customer’s base rate should cover network maintenance and improvement costs. He also alleges further violations from the burying of disclosures about the limits of Optimum’s advertised speeds and the distribution of Spanish advertisements with English-only disclosures. The investigation that led to the lawsuit was launched in Nov. 2022 following more than 500 consumer complaints about hidden fees, poor technical support and slow broadband speeds. Altice USA said in a statement that the lawsuit doesn’t hold water and that it has invested hundreds of millions of dollars to deploy fiber across two-thirds of its footprint in the state with symmetrical speeds of up to 8 gig. “Altice USA provides customers with various offers at different speeds and price points, delivering reliable speeds and service with transparent pricing to customers throughout the state,” the company said. “We remain proud to serve our Connecticut customers and communities and believe that the Attorney General’s lawsuit is without merit.”

NTIA GIVES PENNSYLVANIA BEAD GREEN LIGHT

Another state has successfully moved its BEAD initial proposal

across the finish line. **NTIA** approved Pennsylvania’s initial proposal, allowing it to move forward with requesting access to more than \$1.1 billion for closing the digital divide within the state’s borders. Pennsylvania was one of the states that put forth a plan that raised red flags for broadband providers operating in the state, with some worried that it allowed [de facto rate regulation](#).

PARAMOUNT WATCH

CNBC’s David Faber [reported](#) Tuesday that his sources indicate that the likelihood of a bid for all of **Paramount** from **Sony** and **Apollo** appears to be fading some. “That does not mean that there would not be some sort of bid potentially forthcoming, but will it be restructured? Would it perhaps simply look more like some of the other things that we’ve heard about as well trying to take control of [National Amusements] and therefore exert control over the combined company in that way,” Faber suggested. Earlier this month, Sony and Apollo sent a nonbinding offer of \$26 billion for Paramount.

MEDIACOM UPGRADING XTREAM BROADBAND SPEEDS

Mediacom customers are getting a boost Friday thanks to a number of speed upgrades the company is making to its Xstream broadband plans. Xstream Internet 100 will become Xstream Internet 250 with downstream speeds rising to 250 Mbps. Xstream Internet 300 will also get a change to Xstream Internet 500, a plan touting downstream speeds of 500 Mbps. Mediacom is also replacing its Connect2Compete Plus service with a revamped low-cost broadband plan called Xstream Connect, and that offering will offer speeds of 100/20 Mbps. It is priced at \$14.99/month and includes the modem rental, and customers enrolled in the program will be able to add landline phone service for an additional \$5/month. Xstream Connect is available to any household in Mediacom’s footprint that participates in the National School Lunch Program, SNAP, Medicaid, Federal Public Housing Assistance, SSI, WIC and some other federal programs.

RATINGS

While rumors swirl about the future of the **NBA’s** media rights and whether it’ll remain with **TNT Sports**, the league’s playoffs are helping in the ratings department. **TNT** made it three weeks in a row at the top of the primetime ratings for the week of May 6-12, averaging 3.06 million viewers P2+. **ESPN** followed 2.57 million and **Fox News** with 2.01 million. **MSNBC** and **Hallmark Channel** wrapped the prime top five with 1.19 million and 652,000, respectively. Fox News held strong in total day with 1.31 million viewers. MSNBC came second at 863,000, followed by ESPN (790,000), TNT (714,000) and **CNN** (498,000). – **Netflix’s** “Mother of the Bride” accumulated 1.6 million U.S. households watched during the L+3D window, according to **Samba TV**. Hispanic households over-indexed the overall audience by 20%.