

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Last Mile: NCTA Highlights Crews Dedicated to Building Out America

NCTA is giving everyone a hard hat with the release of “Every Last Mile: The Untold Story of Connecting Rural America.” The 20-minute documentary premiered Wednesday on NCTA’s [website](#) and offers a glimpse into the reality of bringing broadband to the unserved in every last corner of America.

Featured in the documentary are **GCI**, **Mediacom** and **Cox Communications** and the crews who are braving tough conditions to connect homes in rural parts of Alaska, Minnesota and Arizona. The teams touch on every challenge that can come with a buildout, including permitting delays, pole attachments, extreme temperatures, dangerous wildlife and struggles to locate utilities.

For GCI, the conversation also included the challenges that come with ensuring crews don’t disrupt archaeological sites with the operator, even having an archaeologist on-site to ensure that any findings are dealt with in a way that protects the historical integrity of the site or finding.

“But Every Last Mile is not just a film about obstacles,” NCTA President *Michael Powell* said ahead of a screening event hosted by Washington Post Live. “It is a testament to the strength and character and ingenuity of the men and women committed to ensuring that no one is left behind.”

In 14 months, the crews featured in the film deployed 122 miles of fiber to nearly 3,000 homes and businesses. And

the work continues. **RUS** Administrator *Andy Berke* noted that he was on a project in Arizona a few months ago to reach 400 homes that required roughly 1,100 miles of fiber.

“These are remote locations and oftentimes they’re little clusters of places where there are homes or businesses, but then you might go another five or 10 miles without seeing anything,” Berke said during a panel following the screening. “Being able to do that across the country just takes a tremendous amount of effort and ingenuity.”

Tamarah Holmes, Director of Virginia’s Broadband Office, was also on hand, and she noted the importance of being technologically agnostic as states begin to look at how they can serve every household and business within their borders. She highlighted her state’s Roanoke County as an example of a local government that established a plan that integrated not only fiber service, but also fixed wireless and coax.

“With four different companies and those projects that will be done in the next several years, over 98% of their community, residences and homes and businesses, will have broadband access,” Holmes said.

She also noted she is confident funding through the BEAD program will connect the remaining unconnected in Virginia and provide opportunities for the state to invest in digital literacy training, digital navigator programs and device distribution.

DIVERSITY
& THE PRIDE LIST
+ WORKPLACE CULTURE IN 2024 & BEYOND

PRESENTED BY CABLEFAX



It’s time to nominate for The Cablefax Diversity and Pride List! Cablefax annually recognizes influential multi-ethnic execs for their dedication to diversity in the industry. Our issue spotlights The Pride List, honoring impactful LGBTQ+ execs. Other categories include D&I Mentor of the Year and Thrivers Under 30.

NEW: A Celebration of Work Culture in 2024—We’re looking for innovative employers who are at the forefront of providing attractive and inclusive work environments.

NOMINATE NOW

Entries Close: July 19th, 2024

RAIMONDO ON NOT SUPPORTING RATE REGULATION

Commerce Department Secretary *Gina Raimondo* rebuked any assertions the NTIA is engaging in rate regulation through the BEAD program once again during an appearance before the House Innovation Subcommittee on Wednesday. She was present to discuss the budget of the Commerce Department overall, and while questions around the BEAD program did not dominate the conversation, Raimondo was asked plenty of times about the program's requirement that any subgrantee offer a low-cost broadband option to customers and whether or not that constituted rate regulation. "The statute does not permit us to engage in rate regulation and I'm following the law. The statute does require us though to make sure that every state gives a low-cost option," she said. "I'm not a regulator. I don't want to be a regulator." She also spoke out in support of the defunct Affordable Connectivity Program, calling its shutdown a life-or-death situation for individuals in rural America who relied on their subsidized internet service to access telehealth. "If you don't renew that, and I will do anything I can to work with anybody to get that renewed, it's pulling the rug out from under 23 million Americans who just deserve a shot," Raimondo said. "\$100 or \$200 a month is not affordable. Sometimes \$50 a month isn't affordable. This is not a luxury."

VERIZON UNVEILS NEW PROGRAMS, LOGO TWEAK

Verizon is introducing new programs and benefits for customers, and it's celebrating the rollout with a new logo. The new logo features a red V with a yellow glow that anchors the "Verizon" moniker and ditches the brand's signature checkmark. It'll be featured across Verizon's marketing, digital properties and in retail stores going forward. The company's new plans begin with an extension of its myPlan mobile offering. The new myHome plan targets home internet customers and combines entertainment and connected home offerings. Customers can choose content perks from streaming services including **Netflix** and **Max** with ads, the **Disney** bundle with **Disney+**, **Hulu** and **ESPN+**, **YouTube Premium** and **Walmart+**, which comes with a **Paramount+** subscription, for \$10/month. myHome also includes guaranteed pricing for internet service for up to four years, with internet plans starting at \$35/month. Verizon is also launching a premium access program that offers pre-sales, free giveaways and events to customers. That includes tickets to concerts, music festivals and sporting events, beginning with pre-sale access Thursday to *Jelly Roll's* upcoming tour.

The **WHO** and the **WHY**

CFX's spotlight on recent new hires & promotions



ROBERT Gibbs
CHIEF COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER
WARNER BROS. DISCOVERY

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- Warner Bros. Discovery is looking to streamline corporate and business communications as well as public affairs, and it's appointing Robert to a newly created role to oversee those areas. He'll begin duties Aug. 5 and report to CEO David Zaslav.
- While Robert has been based out of Chicago during his most recent stops, he spent a number of years in senior communications and advisory roles in the Obama White House and his presidential campaigns. He began working for the former president in 2004 as Communications Director for his U.S. Senate campaign, eventually rising to be the Obama Administration's first White House Press Secretary and an Assistant to the President from 2009-11. Robert also was a Senior Advisor to Obama's re-election campaign in 2012.
- After his time as Senior Advisor, he became a Founding Partner for the PR firm The Incite Agency. Robert then joined McDonald's as Global Chief Communications Officer/EVP, Corporate Relations from 2015-19, where he globalized the communications function of the company, led the communications strategy for its delivery service launch and played a part in several campaigns including the "America's Best First Job" initiative. Most recently, Robert was a Partner at Bully Pulpit International.

For **Verizon Business**, it's getting a new end-to-end smartphone management solution that focuses on flexibility for customers regarding how they procure and supply phones for their businesses. Additionally, Verizon is refining its trade-in program to offer guaranteed value for devices despite their condition.

NTIA PUSHES FORWARD WITH DIGITAL EQUITY PROGRESS

NTIA has accepted Digital Equity Plans from American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands. Each territory received \$150,000 from the State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program to create a plan aimed at addressing disparities in digital access, skills and affordability across their areas. NTIA has now accepted the plans from all states and territories, and in the coming months, it will launch the Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program to make funds available for the implementation of digital equity projects.

– NTIA awarded more than \$9 million to Nevada for the implementation of the state’s Digital Equity Plan, marking the state as the first to receive funding through the \$1.44 billion State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program. Nevada plans to use the funding

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PEACOCK DOUBLES DOWN ON PERSONALIZING OLYMPICS

Peacock is using artificial intelligence to enhance users’ personalization for the upcoming Olympic Games in Paris. The streamer’s “Your Daily Olympic Recap” will offer fans a customized playlist featuring highlights of the events from the previous day that are most relevant to them, but with the added enhancement of Hall of Fame announcer *Al Michaels*. The compilations will be narrated by Michaels thanks to generative AI and AI voice synthesis technology. Michaels’ past appearances on **NBC** helped train the AI re-creation of his voice. Your Daily Olympic Recap will be available to Peacock subs beginning July 27.

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MAJOR LEAGUE CRICKET SIGNS BROADCAST PARTNERS FOR 2024

Cricket is having a blistering start to the summer on the heels of the Men’s T20 Cricket World Cup, and it’s continuing that momentum with broadcast partnerships in the U.S. for the upcoming Major League Cricket slate that’ll begin July 5. **Willow** will air all MLC matches of the three-week tournament in the U.S. and Canada. However, RSNs across the country will broadcast regular-season matches of their respective home team, such as **YES Network** airing MI New York matches. **Monumental Sports Network** is another RSN joining the party with Washington Freedom matches. Additional RSNs will be announced soon.

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DISH OFFERING NETFLIX BUNDLE

DISH is giving its TV subscribers a streaming treat. The operator is adding **Netflix** to DISH TV subscriptions at no additional cost for two years. Customers have a limited time to sign up for the streamer’s Standard with ads plan, or they can get the Standard plan for \$8.50/month after bill credit or the Premium option for \$16.00/month. Netflix Standard with ads costs \$6.99/month.

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FIBER FRENZY

Schurz Communications saw some of its brands make news this week. **Burlington Telecom** is responding to the expiration of the Affordable Connectivity Program with its own Internet Assistance Program. BT’s IAP offers two speed choices: Basic 50 Mb/50Mb for \$9.95/month and Enriched 150 Mb/150 Mb for \$24.95/month. Both plans come with smart WiFi and free installation for a single outlet. To qualify, customers must live in the BT service area, have no outstanding debt with the company and the program applicant’s name must match with the BT account. Customers will be required to confirm eligibility each year.

Arizona-based **Orbitel Communications** launched Schurz’s Flight Fiber brand in Amarillo Creek, making it the first community in Orbitel’s footprint to be onboarded with 100% Flight Fiber. The move derives from a \$6 million local investment to bring more choice and multi-gig internet to Amarillo Creek residents and businesses. Flight Fiber offers symmetrical speeds as well as unlimited data with no throttling at no additional cost.

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ON THE HILL

House Commerce announced a markup of 11 bills for Thursday at 10am ET. On the docket are the Kids Online Safety Act as well as the American Privacy Rights Act of 2024, the bipartisan federal privacy framework spearheaded by Rep. *Cathy McMorris Rodgers* (R-WA) and Senator *Maria Cantwell* (D-WA).

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RATINGS

With the confetti falling for the Tennessee Volunteers, **ESPN** recorded the second most-watched Men’s College World Series Finals on record and its second most-watched college baseball game ever on ESPN platforms. The Finals round averaged 2.82 million viewers across ESPN, **ESPNU** and **ABC**. Game 1 came in with 2.26 million viewers on ESPN/ESPNU, and Game 2 notched 2.92 million across ABC/ESPNU. The winner-take-all Game 3 averaged 3.34 million viewers on ESPN/ESPNU.

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PROGRAMMING

Fox News’ “Fox & Friends” began a new interview series with potential Vice President picks for the presumptive Republican nominee *Donald Trump* this morning. Interviews will be split into two parts, with candidates talking about their policy stances first before being joined by their significant others to talk about the qualities their partners could bring to the White House. First up was Sen. *J.D. Vance* (R-OH) and his wife *Usha*. Fox & Friends airs weekdays from 6-9am. – **HBO** handed out an eight-episode, straight-to-series order for the drama series “Lanterns,” which is based on the DC Studios title. – Ahead of its Season 2 finale, “Anne Rice’s Interview with the Vampire” was renewed by **AMC Networks** for a third season. – The next season of “Alex vs America” featuring chef *Alex Guarnaschelli* will begin July 14 at 9pm on **Food Network**. This season, which has \$15,000 on the line, will have 10 episodes.

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PEOPLE

Anais Lempereur is the new CFO of **Hallmark Media**, joining from **Pluto TV** where she was SVP, Finance/CFO. She’ll be based in the company’s LA office and manage Hallmark Media’s financial operations. Lempereur will join the company in August and report to Hallmark EVP/CFO *Jim Shay*. – **Tastemade** named *Elvina Payne* its CFO as the company continues to expand its streaming business. Payne will manage Tastemade’s financial strategy, planning and operations. She’s been with the company since 2016.

Think about that for a minute...

Net Neutrality Kabuki

Commentary by Steve Effros

The next several weeks will be a fascinating sideshow to the entire years-long dance we have witnessed regarding so-called “net neutrality” (NN). I’m not repeating the whole NN argument. Rather, I’ll summarize the fight thusly: if the FCC wins the current legal battle to impose NN rules, there will be lots more federal regulation of internet service providers (ISPs). If the internet providers win, there won’t be. Simple as that.

This performance has been going on for a long time. Depending on which political party controlled the White House, the rules were adopted, then withdrawn, and now they’re back. The latest written justification voted on by the Commission, declaring ISPs common carriers, took up 435 pages including 2,642 footnotes.

Again, a brief summary: “...yes, we have the power to do this and those who argue otherwise are wrong” to paraphrase the FCC. And on the other side: “...no, the Supreme Court will ultimately decide this case and it now opposes such vast regulatory overreach “

So here’s the fun part. The new rules are supposed to go into effect on July 22. The ISPs have filed legal briefs in the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals. It was chosen by random lottery to hear multiple legal challenges in different US Appeals Court Circuits of the Commission’s new rules. They’ve asked it to stop the rules from going into effect until the case has been decided. This is not a surprise. Such so-called “stay” requests are common. What’s different is that the FCC is trying to get the case moved to the DC Court of Appeals, which has heard, and supported the Commission’s powers in the past. They don’t want the 6th Circuit to rule on the stay. There’s a reason the Commission is trying to “forum shop,” even though random lotteries were supposed to end that practice.

As we all know, the Supreme Court’s philosophical preferences have shifted. One of those shifts is a decided turn against giving “deference” to regulatory agencies’ statutory interpretation of their own power. A seeming majority, led, in part, by Justice Brett Kavanaugh, has espoused the “Major Questions Doctrine”

which relies, instead, on saying if there is a major economic or policy change not specifically in the agency’s Congressional mandate, it’s for Congress to decide, not the agency.

Justice Kavanaugh, when he was on the DC Court of Appeals, made that exact argument, saying, in a dissent, that the FCC had overreached in the earlier case. Now he happens to be the Supreme Court Justice in charge of preliminary decisions made by the 6th Circuit. So if that Court rules against the Commission regarding a “stay” of the rules, it would be appealed directly to him to decide if there was a good chance the rules could be found unconstitutional in their current iteration. The FCC spent 435 pages trying to say he was wrong the last time. It’s no wonder the Commission is trying to convince the 6th Circuit to hand the case over to the DC Circuit before making a decision on the motion for stay!

Granted, if the rules do go into effect in July there will be a confusing mess as the Commission tries to enact and enforce rules while they are still being challenged.

But this is all really a Kabuki dance. Very stylistic, but ultimately not relevant in the long term because no matter who “wins” in either Circuit, the underlying question of whether the FCC can declare ISPs common carriers, and thus have extensive regulatory power over them is likely going to be decided by the Supremes. The last time this type of issue was before them, the “Chevron Doctrine,” giving great deference, held sway. The score, however, has now clearly changed. They’re likely to dance to a different tune.



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(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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