

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Order Up: Manufacturers Ready to Meet BEAD Moment

There's been a lot of focus on the dynamics between operators, NTIA and state broadband offices as anxious watchers wait for the first shovels to break ground on BEAD-funded projects. But the equipment manufacturers are sending a clear message that they will be ready to supply their industry partners as soon as the money starts to move.

"We feel very prepared. We feel like we're in a very good place. It's just really a matter of the states getting their processes cleared by the NTIA and then picking their subgrantees and who those subgrantees are. It becomes a commercial exercise as a competitor within the marketplace to win those jobs," *John Chamberlain*, CTO for CommScope's Connectivity and Cable Solutions Business Segment, told **CFX**. "But I think we're all going to be ready. I don't know if one person's going to be ready before the other one. We all have the same expectations, probably the same kind of projections because they're all publicly available—how many people, how many passings, what the homes per mile is."

CommScope and others have been gearing up for what is expected to be a huge increase in demand since the introduction of the Build America, Buy America rules that require that all of the iron, steel, manufactured products and construction materials used in infrastructure projects are produced in the U.S. In March 2023, **Corning** opened an optical cable manufacturing campus in Hickory, North Carolina, and CommScope unveiled plans to expand fiber-optic cable production and rolled out its HeliARC fiber cable

line designed specifically for rural deployments. **Vecima Networks** is another that has been preparing to meet the moment, teaming up with **Mara Technologies USA** to build fiber-to-the-prem OLTs at its Holly, Michigan, facility to support BABA requirements.

Things became a lot less stressful for the manufacturers as well once NTIA released the official BABA waiver in February, with Chamberlain saying that made the expectations very clear. CommScope is executing a huge push this summer and expects to be ready in the third quarter with the capacity needed for full volume. "There's always a few things that are up for discussion, but in general, it was very clear. There's nothing that keeps me up at night in regard to meeting BABA requirements," he said.

There may be some preordering before the end of the year to fill up warehouses, but generally, CommScope isn't expecting significant movement until sometime next year. In the meantime, there are other government funding programs, including ARPA and ReConnect, that are still feeding the funnel.

Beyond reading the rules and preparing a game plan that lines up with NTIA's requirements, BABA or otherwise, CommScope feels like it is in a particularly good place to help its operator partners because of the business it has done with RDOF awardees over the last five years. The densities associated with those rural networks are wildly different from the typical setup for an urban network when you look at not only layout, but the types of equipment used as well. To make things more complicated, things are changing all the time.

Architectures have already evolved since the RDOF buildouts began, and Chamberlain said those changes have been led

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sometimes by the operators and in other cases have been done in conjunction with the manufacturers. That activity is only going to continue in the coming months and years as all stakeholders try to find the best way to serve those areas that have much lower densities.

**Charter** was the big winner of RDOF funding with more than \$1 billion in winnings, and that has given it a lot of experience with the pain points that come to these hard-to-serve areas. Chamberlain believes the other Tier 1 providers, both MSOs and telcos, will have to adjust their thinking as they try to win BEAD funding with perhaps less experience than smaller operators that have been serving those areas for decades.

“They’re not used to servicing these rural areas like we’re talking about. It’s the Tier 3’s and maybe some Tier 2’s that are typically used to servicing these areas,” he said. “If they’re going to be competitive as a subgrantee, I feel like they’re going to have to rethink their approach to the architectures.”

There are still interesting conundrums to tackle in the inner city spaces as well, particularly when you look at MDU environments. Fiber might be able to be built to the premises, but individually connecting each unit to a fiber connection is still a major challenge.

“If you could use drop coax for that last 100 feet, it’s not an issue. But fiber to the actual ‘U’ in an MDU application for inner city is a different architecture as well and a different build cycle,” he said. “There’s going to be some different applications and different architectures from a, we’ll say, building aspect that are going to be more prevalent than, for instance, centralized split that doesn’t play in a lot of places where these government funds are going, which is mostly rural and some inner-city regions that may be difficult to get to or didn’t have the business case associated with them for the operators.”

## CHICKEN SOUP FILES FOR CHAPTER 11 BANKRUPTCY PROTECTION

**Redbox** parent company **Chicken Soup for the Soul Entertainment** filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection Friday. Court docs show debts of \$970 million and total assets on a consolidated basis of \$414 million. CSSE has experienced a cash crunch for months. The company has filed a motion for relief to pay employees, saying that it was not able to make payroll for the two-week period that ended on June 14. It employs approximately 836 full-time employees and 197 part-time employees. CSSE estimates it owes employees approximately \$3.5 million on account of accrued but unpaid wages, all of which are either owed or will become due and owing within the first 21 days of the Chapter 11 cases. Creditors listed in the case include **Universal Studios Home Entertainment** (\$16.7 million), **Sony Pictures Home Entertainment** (\$9.1 million), **BBC Studios Americas** (\$9.02 million) and **Lionsgate Entertainment** (\$4.6

million). CSSE Board Chairman **William Rouhana** stepped down as CEO on June 24 prior to the Chapter 11 filing. Rouhana was founder and CEO of wireless broadband provider Winstar Communications, which operated from 1993 until its bankruptcy in 2001.

## OPTIMUM DROPS DIAMOND RSNS

**Diamond Sports Group** has lost another pay TV distribution partner with the company’s RSNS being removed from **Optimum’s** TV lineups. Some 12 networks are impacted by the carriage deal expiration. The pair are still in negotiations, but Optimum said in a statement that it believes Diamond is making unsustainable demands that would raise customers’ video bills. “At Optimum, we love sports and our local teams, but it is anti-consumer of Diamond Sports Group to request excessive fees while they are in active bankruptcy proceedings and content rights negotiations,” Optimum said. It is offering customers alternate viewing options for their favorite teams on its [website](#).

## RELIGIOUS BROADCASTERS SEEK STAY OF FCC’S EEO FORM

The **National Religious Broadcasters**, the **American Family Association** and the **Texas Association of Broadcasters** are asking the **FCC** to stay implementation of its order reinstating the collection of equal employment data from broadcasters. The Commission voted 3-2 in February to reinstate use of EEO form 395-B. NRB and several religious broadcasters have filed for review in the Fifth Circuit, claiming the order violates the equal protection provision of the Fifth Amendment and free speech rights under the First Amendment. “Petitioners and their members will incur unrecoverable costs by spending time and resources to categorize their employees by race and sex, to prepare and file Form 395-B, and to endure and respond to the trolling and harassment, online and elsewhere, the publication of the data will bring,” the stay request said, adding that no party would be substantially harmed by a stay. Without a stay or judicial intervention, broadcasters are required to file form 395-B by Sept 30.

## TNT SPORTS EXPANDS CFB PORTFOLIO WITH MOUNTAIN WEST

**TNT Sports** is continuing to make college football deals, with the latest coming with the **Mountain West Conference**. The two signed a multi-year agreement to air college football games exclusively on **truTV** and **Max** starting this season. truTV and Max will have 14 MW college football games in the first season of the deal. The two will have four Saturday doubleheaders—Sept. 7, 14 and 21 and Oct. 12—and single games on Oct.

5, 19 and 26 as well as Nov. 2. The first game under the deal will be between San José State and Sacramento State on Aug. 29 at 7pm. TNT Sports' deal will join the Conference's current agreements with **CBS Sports** and **Fox Sports**.

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## SO LONG, PAC-12 AND LONGHORN

The weekend signaled the official end of the **Pac-12 Networks** and the linear sunset of the **Longhorn Network**. Both moves come in the midst of a rapidly evolving college athletics landscape that decimated the Pac-12 Conference and saw two major programs—Oklahoma and Texas—move to the **SEC** amid many other noteworthy transitions. “Today marks the end of two college networks. Both had a profound impact on their respective conferences. Some good, some bad. RIP to Pac 12 Networks and Longhorn Network. Best of luck to the staffs of both,” [said Bob Thompson](#), former **Fox Sports** President and **Big Ten Network** co-founder, on **X in a Sunday post**. The Pac-12 Networks closed its doors with a montage before rolling credits with all current employees. Longhorn Network went the route of showing a replay of Texas' famous 2006 BCS National Championship win. LHN will at least [live on as a streaming product](#), but **ESPN's Stephanie Druley**, who was one of the executives behind the network's creation, took the time to reflect on the venture. “The network was truly the first of its kind and for many of us – alumni and native Texans—it was a passion project. The team we built and maintained in Austin was exceptional. We made incredible television while forging lifelong friendships and creating indelible memories,” she wrote.

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## COMCAST ADDS NOW TV LATINO

**Comcast** is expanding its NOW TV offering, introducing a NOW TV Latino package that comes with over 25 live Spanish-language streaming channels and **Peacock Premium** for \$10/month. NOW TV Latino features live channels ranging from **Estrella News**, **Caracol Televisión**, **WAPA America** as well as a mix of local and national FAST channels from **Telemundo**. Entertainment channels include **Cinelatino**, **Sony Cine** and **ViendoMovies**. It can be purchased standalone or as an add-on to other Xfinity streaming offerings. Comcast is offering NOW TV Latino with Xfinity StreamSaver for \$25/month, with NOW TV for \$30/month and NOW StreamSaver for \$40/month.

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## FUBO, TV5MONDE USA AND AFRICA CHANNEL READY FOR OLYMPICS

It's not just **NBC Sports** that's gearing up for the Summer Olympics. **Fubo** will be ready with multi-platform content from NBC Sports' coverage of the Games from July 26-Aug. 11. The vMVPD will have linear offerings such as **NBC**, **USA**, **E!**, **CNBC** and **Golf Channel**, but two new channels will be available throughout the Olympics: **Paris Extra 1** and **Paris Extra 2**. Both channels will have 24/7 Olympics coverage, with the former featuring sports like basketball, handball, water polo and field hockey and the latter coming with events like

judo, taekwondo, table tennis and more. Fubo will have Spanish-language coverage thanks to **Telemundo**. Other features for Fubo subscribers include on-demand full-event replays, pre-games on demand and 4K HDR coverage for those with compatible devices. French network **TV5MONDE USA** will have special programming highlighting sports and the city of Paris starting Wednesday. It'll also have documentaries available for **TV5MONDEplus** viewers including “L'odyssée des Jeux Olympiques” (The Odyssey of the Olympic Games) on July 18 at 11:30pm, “Suzanne Lenglen, le court de la liberté” (Suzanne Lenglen, the Court of Freedom) on July 24 at 3pm and “Le Rugby es tune Fête” (Rugby is a Party) on July 31 at 3pm. Elsewhere, **The Africa Channel** is ready to release the third iteration of its “Y’Africa” series. “Y’Africa: Sports Champions in Africa” will debut tonight at 7pm, airing every Monday with two episodes weekly repeating Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays at 4:30pm and Sundays at 6:30pm. It'll feature Olympic, Paralympic and hopeful African athletes vying for a spot in the Olympics, spanning 25 competitions. All episodes will be made available on demand starting Oct. 1.

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## FRONTIER CLOSES FIBER SECURITIZATION NOTES

**Frontier** wrapped up its \$750 million fiber securitization offering and term loan refinancing that it [announced](#) a month ago. It's the company's second fiber securitization and will help fund its fiber expansion strategy, also giving Frontier the flexibility to refinance higher-cost debt, extend term loan and lower overall cost of capital. Additionally, Frontier closed an amendment to its senior secured term loan facility with **JP Morgan** to extend the maturity of \$1.025 billion of commitments to 2031.

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## RATINGS

The final ratings are in from last week's presidential debate on **CNN**. According to **Nielsen**, 51.27 million people tuned in to the 90-minute event that was also simulcast on 22 networks. From 9-10:39pm, CNN led the way with 9.53 million viewers P2+ and 3.38 million A25-54. **Fox News** came second at 9.28 million P2+ and 1.77 million A25-54. Those figures rise to 13.42 million and 3.34 million, respectively, when including simulcast ratings from **Fox Business**, **FOX**, **Fox Nation** and FoxNews.com. **MSNBC** checked in with 4.12 million viewers P2+ and 615,000 A25-54.

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## PEOPLE

**Hotwire Communications** tapped **Pragash Pillai** as its next CTO. Pillai was most recently Principal of **Xtend Broadband Partners** and previously served as EVP, Chief Technology and Information Officer with **Altice USA** for 1.5 years, where he guided technical and management personnel across engineering IT, digital platforms, cybersecurity, network operations and construction. He also currently serves on the boards of **Astound**, **VCTI** and **Syndeo Institute at The Cable Center**.