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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Storm Ready: Hurricane Season Continues as Milton Looms

Relief and recovery efforts are still ongoing amid the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, but another storm looms large in the Gulf of Mexico. Hurricane Milton is set to hit Florida's Gulf Coast on Wednesday and make its way through parts of the state including Tampa, Orlando and Jacksonville. Milton strengthened into a Category 5 storm Monday afternoon. While it is slated to weaken before making landfall, it's still expected to hit the U.S. as a serious, powerful storm.

Comcast is setting up crews across Florida to respond to any service interruptions to its network while also formulating emergency plans to ensure response teams and supplies can be safely deployed. The company is almost back to normal in Florida with Helene's aftermath, but there's still work to be done in Georgia and across the southeast. **Charter** is offering people free, unlimited access to WiFi access points in Florida that were originally opened ahead of Helene but will remain in use throughout Milton. **WOW!**, which has service mostly restored in its South Carolina and Florida markets, is prepping generators, fuel trucks and reserving hotel rooms for displaced employees and work crews ahead of Milton.

Speaking of Comcast, Universal Orlando remains open while offering visitors options to alter their reservations without additional fees. **Disney** is keeping its Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando operating as normal, but it's restricting park/hotel reservations from Tuesday-Thursday and waiving fees for those who want to

cancel or change trips with check-in dates through Saturday.

Milton's path isn't supposed to have much overlap with how Helene traveled through the southeast region. The **FCC** still has its Disaster Information Reporting System from Helene activated for 30 counties in Georgia, 21 in North Carolina, 46 in South Carolina and seven in Tennessee as of Sunday. FCC Chairwoman *Jessica Rosenworcel* made the trip to Asheville, N.C., on Friday to meet with officials and support the Commission's recovery efforts. She noted that this area of the U.S. isn't used to a storm like Helene.

"This terrain makes communication more challenging, with many wireless towers in areas that are high up and hard to reach, often because the roads to them have been blocked by debris and decimated by flooding," she said. "Despite these challenges, I saw firsthand how the public sector and private sector are working together to help with recovery. I'm incredibly thankful for the thousands who are pitching in to help at the federal, state, and local level."

Approximately 4.7% of the cell sites in areas affected by Helene remain out of service. Though that's down from a high point of 12.1% recorded on Sept. 28, some states like North Carolina and Tennessee are still working through hurdles. The former still has 16.9% of cell sites in impacted areas reported as being out of service and the latter 9.2%. Cable and wireline companies reported that 332,701 subscribers are out of service in the disaster area of Helene, including loss of telephone, TV and/or internet services. Three TV stations in Georgia and

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two in North Carolina remain out of service, and several FM radio stations across Georgia and the Carolinas remain out. Only five AM stations in Georgia remain out of service.

Plenty of companies are continuing to pitch in with Helene's recovery efforts. On Sunday, the FCC gave emergency special temporary authority to **SpaceX** and **T-Mobile** to enable **Starlink** satellites with direct-to-cell capability to provide coverage for cell phones in areas of North Carolina that were especially hit hard by Helene. Starlink has deployed more than 1,000 kits in western parts of the state and has over 8,500 requests for additional kits, despite *Elon Musk's* [complaints](#) regarding FEMA and its response to Helene.

"The satellites have already been enabled and started broadcasting emergency alerts to cell phones on all networks in North Carolina. In addition, we may test basic texting (SMS) capabilities for most cell phones on the T-Mobile network in North Carolina," Starlink [posted](#) on X. "SpaceX's direct-to-cell constellation has not been fully deployed, so all services will be delivered on a best-effort basis."

FCC Commissioner *Brendan Carr* praised Starlink for its assistance despite not having fully tested its service yet. "It is important to manage expectations here. Starlink does not have a full constellation of direct-to-cell satellites in space yet. This service was not scheduled to go live until additional direct-to-cell satellites were in orbit. But Starlink is giving this a shot nonetheless to help address the serious need for connectivity in these disaster areas," Carr [wrote](#).

ACA Connects is offering members support with seeking federal resources, updates on preparation and recovery efforts and connections with other affected providers to accelerate the rebuilding process. The association is pointing members to its "Preparing for Weather-Related Emergencies and Ensuring Compliance with Related Regulatory Obligations" member advisory for information about government programs for weather-related events as well as assistance available through the FCC.

Optimum is setting up WiFi hotspots and local assistance in hard-hit areas of western North Carolina. The company has two WiFi trailers in Hendersonville and has set up internet and TV services for a makeshift emergency shelter that's open to community members. Additionally, Optimum customers impacted by Helene will get a proactive full-month credit and not be charged for lost or damaged equipment, and Optimum is donating \$500,000 to local organizations and in-kind PSAs to support relief efforts.

Sparklight opened a free WiFi hotspot for those in the community of Reidsville, Georgia, who were impacted by Hurricane Helene. The hotspot is located in the Sparklight (formerly Hargray Communications) office parking lot in Reidsville and will remain available as recovery efforts continue. **Cox Enterprises** announced that the James. M. Cox Foundation is donating

\$450,000 to support relief efforts. It'll give \$250,000 to the Metropolitan Ministries in Tampa, Florida, \$100,000 to the Food Bank of Central and Eastern NC in Raleigh and \$100,000 to the golden Harvest Food Bank in Augusta, Georgia.

MAD FILES FOIA REQUEST ON FCC'S CARR, SIMINGTON

The **Media and Democracy Project** filed a FOIA request Monday asking for insight into any connections between **FCC** Commissioners *Brendan Carr* and *Nathan Simington* and Project 2025, challenges to the 2020 election results, January 6 and MAD's petition to deny the license renewal of **Fox** broadcast station **WTFX**. The battle over WTFX, which MAD claims knowingly broadcasted fake news about the 20202 election, started in July 2023. Project 2025 is a controversial plan laying out a wide range of expansive overhauls that could be made by the next Republican president, if elected. Carr and Simington are both listed as contributors to the blueprint with Carr writing a whole chapter on FCC policy, and MAD wants clarity around how potential political connections could impact the impartiality of the Commission as it applies its policies to the WTFX petition and beyond. "Given the background of the MAD Petition, it is obvious that candidate and former President Trump would oppose the MAD Petition, even though he has suggested that content- and viewpoint-based station licensing decisions are appropriate," the FOIA request said. "These simple facts make contacts among Commissioners Carr and/or Simington, on the one hand, and the Trump campaign and the think tanks and other organizations producing Project 2025, Agenda 47 (the Trump campaign's version of Project 2025) and other policy blueprints for the next Republican administration on the other, matters of extreme interest for members of the public who wish to ensure that the Commission impartially applies its policies to the MAD Petition specifically, and to station licensing more generally." Those joining MAD on the filing included former Republican FCC Chair *Alfred Sikes*, former Democratic FCC Commissioner *Ervin Duggan* and former Fox executive *Preston Padden*.

VANTIVA, HARMONIC HELP PROVIDERS SWITCH TO PON

Vantiva and **Harmonic** shook hands on an expansion of their strategic relationship to include interoperability of Vantiva's PON consumer premises equipment and Harmonic's cOS portfolio of optical line terminal network edge devices. The partnership is designed to give service providers an easy path to walk to transition from DOCSIS-based technologies to fiber, and there will be options available for enhancing existing fiber speeds.

XR EXTREME REACH SHOWS OFF NEW INCLUSIVITY METRIC

Technology company **XR Extreme Reach** teamed up with **The Female Quotient** to launch the Representation Index, a global metric quantifying inclusivity in advertising and creative content. Representation Index scores are meant to give brands another tool to align their content with goals around representation. Using AI models, the Representation Index provides real-time analysis of assets like age, gender expression, body type, skin tone and will soon also examine accessibility and authority. Every XR customer has access to the metric.

FINAL COUNTDOWN FOR NTIA BEAD APPROVALS

NTIA has approved the Volume II BEAD plans for California and North Carolina. That opens the door for the states to request access to their allocated funding amounts of \$1.8 billion and \$1.5 billion, respectively. With these updates, 51 of the 56 entities eligible for BEAD funding have had their Volume II plans accepted by the federal agency.

COMCAST CAMPUS EMBRACES AI FOR ENERGY MANAGEMENT

Comcast's Boot Road campus in West Chester, Pennsylvania, is using SmartKit AI from its Comcast Smart Solutions division to transform the facility with its energy management solutions. The location includes data centers, engineering departments and back-office operations, and SmartKit AI will optimize heating and cooling systems, provide alerts when problems are detected to help reduce downtime, identify unusual energy usage patterns and offer energy usage forecasts for cost management. Comcast has set a goal of doubling its network energy efficiency by 2030.

DIGITAL INCLUSION WEEK BEGINS

AT&T, Connected Nation and the **International Center of Kentucky** kicked off Digital Inclusion Week 2024. On Friday, AT&T teamed up with Human I-T to host a device distribution event, offering 25 laptops to local high school students through the Bowling Green Area Chamber Foundation and SCK LAUNCH. The three organizations then came together at the International Center headquarters to recognize local students for helping community members learn technology skills. Connected Nation also used the event as a time to welcome another team to its Teens Teach Tech program, a digital literacy initiative that has provided training to nearly 20,000 individuals.

NBCU, GROUP BLACK CREATE EXCELLENCE! COLLECTION

NBCUniversal and media company **Group Black** have launched

Excellence!, a new content collection designed to serve cross-cultural audiences while promoting partnership and advertising initiatives. Starting today on **Peacock**, Excellence! will feature diverse programming from NBCUniversal's original catalog such as "Bel-Air," "Martin" and "The Real Housewives of Atlanta," as well as a selection of iconic series and new originals set to debut in 2025. The initiative builds on NBCUniversal's partnership with Group Black, which began with Peacock's Black Excellence 365 program in 2023.

RATINGS

Thursday's Buccaneers vs Falcons game on **Prime Video** had an average minute audience of 13.21 million viewers, according to **Nielsen's** Big Data+ Panel measurement. That was led by the P25-54 group with 7 million viewers, followed by P18-49 with 6.62 million and P55+ with 4.64 million. P18-34 came in with 2.92 million viewers. Through four games, Thursday Night Football is averaging 13.51 million viewers P2+. – The Sept. 29th episode of **TLC's** "Sister Wives" touted a 1.69 L+3 rating among W25-54 and a season-high 1.08 rating with P25-54. "90 Day Fiance: Before the 90 Days" also celebrated a season high with a 1.35 L+3 rating among W-25-54. It garnered a 0.92 L+3 rating among P25-54. Sister Wives and 90 Day Fiance: Before the 90 Days have drawn in 7.4 million and 6.9 million cross platform viewers, respectively, on **TLC, Max** and **discovery+** since their September premieres.

CARRIAGE

Amazon Freevee added 16 FAST channels from **AMC Networks** to its lineup. Available in the U.S. and select international territories, the channels include The Walking Dead Universe, MSG SportsZone, All Reality We TV and ALLBLK Gems.

FIBER FRENZY

Verizon is partnering with the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation to bring Fios broadband service to more than 3,000 underserved addresses in Jamestown and Westerly. The expansion includes \$3.6 million in ARPA funding and more than 54 miles of fiber will be deployed in connection with the build. – **Google Fiber** is now live in the Alameda neighborhood of Pocatello, Idaho. GFiber will build throughout the rest of the city and the neighboring area of Chubbuck. Plans go for 1 Gig for \$70/month, 2 Gig for \$100/month, 5 Gig for \$125/month or 8 Gig for \$150/month. Businesses can get 1 Gig for \$100/month or 2 Gig for \$250/month.

PEOPLE

FOCUS Broadband named *Brent Brinson* its VP, Engineering. Brinson has been with the company since 1999, joining as an engineer before rising to his most recent role of Director of Engineering. During his 25 years, he's contributed to several projects such as FOCUS' entry into the FTTH market.