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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

New Era: Rosenworcel, Carr Prepare for FCC Leadership Transition

Thursday was something of a passing of the torch moment at the **FCC**. Ahead of the agency's November open meeting, Chair *Jessica Rosenworcel* officially laid out her intention to depart the Commission on Jan. 20 when President-elect *Trump* is inaugurated.

She'll make way not only for Commissioner *Brendan Carr* to ascend to the chair seat, but also for another GOP nominee to be named to the FCC to create a 3-2 majority. Carr took a moment during the meeting to congratulate Rosenworcel on what he called an exceptional and consequential run that he believes will end up being historic.

"I was an intern here in the early- to mid-2000s when I was still in law school and I remember being in the old FCC cafeteria and seeing you staffing [Commissioner *Michael Copps*] at the time. It's been amazing to see the run and everything you've accomplished," he said. "And just to me personally, you reached out to me within days of being chair and offered to do events together on telehealth, and that was something that was just very, very meaningful to me. I think it set a tone for us to be able to collaborate on a lot."

Commissioners *Geoffrey Starks*, *Nathan Simington* and *Anna Gomez* also congratulated Rosenworcel on her tenure, and the agency unanimously approved items launching the first major comprehensive review and update of licensing rules for submarine cables and establishing rules for the use of third parties in the caller ID authentication process. Rosenworcel also

spent a moment speaking on some of the achievements she's most proud of, including setting up the Affordable Connectivity Program, setting up the Space Bureau at the Commission and the establishment of rules around digital discrimination.

The collegial tone shifted slightly during the press conference following the meeting as Rosenworcel was peppered with questions around Trump's criticisms of certain television networks, including calls to revoke broadcast licenses from some that aired content he found unfavorable.

"The First Amendment is a cornerstone of our democracy. The FCC should not be in the business of taking away a broadcast license simply because a public official does not like the coverage or content on that station," Rosenworcel said. She repeated the answer in response to asks around a pending petition to set up brightline rules for when broadcasters are behaving in the public interest and what authority Carr could have in cracking down on what he has called the censorship cartel.

Heavy are the pressures that can weigh on an FCC chair, and that's something *Ajit Pai* knows well. The former Chair under Trump and current **Searchlight Capital** Partner spoke at the Broadband Leaders Summit in New Orleans on Thursday, touching on everything from spectrum auction authority to net neutrality. Should Carr ever want advice, Pai said he'll always make time for his friend.

"Brendan was an advisor of mine when I was a commissioner, and he was the general counsel, and then a commissioner himself when I was chairman. He's a longstanding friend," Pai said. "I

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think it's a very important role at a challenging time. I'm hopeful when it comes to issues... he will approach it with the same care and thoughtfulness that he has on other issues in the past."

He also reflected on some of the shortfalls with one of his landmark programs, the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund, but also used the moment to spotlight unique ways RDOF award winners are offering their locations to other providers without going through a default process. For example, in Virginia, RDOF winners are transferring their locations to other providers that have a greater interest in serving those locations, and such moves are being supported by *Tamarah Holmes*, Director of Virginia's Office of Broadband.

"I bet a lot of them just don't want to turn in their RDOF award because they worry about what that might mean, but here's a safe space for them to relinquish it," he said. "We back companies that do exactly this and want to build into those, we view them as valuable locations. I don't know if **NTIA** has put out guidance along those lines, or the FCC might just put out a notice saying 'Hey, we encourage this type of inter-company transaction and cooperation within your state.'"

He also encouraged state broadband directors to look to private capital options as they look to how to close the digital divides within their borders. While he recognized he may have a stake in the game given his current position, he also fully believes private capital can make public sector efforts make that much more of a difference

"I truly believe this, state broadband directors should think of private capital as an aid to what you're trying to do because, at the end of the day, public sector funds are only going to go so far," Pai said. "If they don't have private capital, they're essentially going to have to self-fund, which limits their build ambition. That's where private capital can really step into the breach."

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OPTIMUM HITS 500K CUSTOMERS

Optimum revealed it eclipsed the 500,000 residential customer milestone for its fiber network. It has spent the last few years growing across New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, reporting more than 2.9 million homes passed within its footprint that can get symmetrical speeds of up to 8 Gbps as well as mobile, TV and home phone services. Optimum is planning on expanding to new markets such as Montclair and West Orange, New Jersey, in addition to other areas in the NY tri-state region.

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FIBER M&A

The M&A activity isn't just reserved for big media companies. **Ritter Communications** announced its RightFiber brand has agreed in principle to purchase the fiber optic broadband

network in the City of Ruston, Louisiana. The transaction is expected to close in 1Q25, and RightFiber will continue serving business customers at that time. The company said it plans on expanding to residential neighborhoods around Ruston as well. Elsewhere, Ohio-based **Omni Fiber** is merging with **Lit Fiber**. Lit Fiber provides services in Medina County, Ohio, and is currently working on building a fiber network in Brownsville, Texas. Both companies are majority-owned by **Oak Hill Capital**, and Managing Partner *Scott Baker* said the move will enable both companies to "expand more quickly and improve the services offered to Lit Fiber's customers." Lit Fiber customers will be eligible for increased speeds of up to 10 Gbps once the network and systems integration activities are completed in early 2025.

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MIDCO PRESIDENT STEPS DOWN

Midco announced that *Tom McAdaragh* is stepping down as President in anticipation of his retirement. McAdaragh has been with Midco since September 2017 and has been President since January 2022. He will continue to serve the company in an advisory role. Succeeding him will be Midco's COO *Ben Dold*. Over the last 14 years, Dold has overseen Midco's marketing and central operations before assuming the role of COO in January 2023. Dold will step into the role of President while retaining his responsibilities as COO. These changes will take effect on Jan. 1.

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ESPN HAPPENINGS

ESPN and **Disney** are bringing the animated telecasts to the **NBA**. The three will collaborate on "Dunk the Halls," a real-time animated iteration of the Knicks vs Spurs game on Christmas Day. The telecast will use **Sony's** Beyond Sports technology to create a virtual set of the "Main Street, USA" from Magic Kingdom Park in Orlando. *Drew Carter* will be the play-by-play commentator will *Monica McNutt* will be the analyst. The two will be joined by Disney characters including Mickey Mouse, Minnie Mouse, Donald Duck, Pluto, Goofy and Chip and Dale. The telecast will be available on **ESPN2**, **Disney+** and **ESPN+**. While one door opens, another one closes. The *New York Post* [reports](#) ESPN is set to cancel "Around the Horn" next summer after a 23-year run, citing sources. It's unclear what the network will do next to replace the show, but the Post writes that it's working with EP *Erik Rydholm*—who's been with Around the Horn since 2004 and is also credited with creating "Pardon the Interruption"—on concepts for a replacement.

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MAX GETS SHOPPABLE

Warner Bros. Discovery Advertising Sales is implementing a pair of solutions onto Max. The first is "Shop with Max," a

suite of ad formats designed to streamline the path from viewing to purchasing based on the on-screen content. It uses AI and metadata to identify items within shows and films before pairing them with related items in an advertiser’s catalog via a QR code. They appear through a dynamic mid-roll ad format or by a second-screen experience that presents 12-20 products. The second ad format “Moments” takes audio and visual cues to identify relevant themes, sentiment and on-screen elements. WBD is working with AI company KERV to use its technology.

NCTC, ONE TOUCH INTELLIGENCE

NCTC named **One Touch Intelligence** an approved partner, allowing it to provide co-op members full access to its GigTRAK+ and StreamTRAK broadband and video intelligence services at rates that vary on the number of broadband customers a company has. GigTRAK+ helps companies with all things relative to multi-gig internet, including FTTH platforms, fixed wireless access, mobile 5G and satellite internet. StreamTRAK gives access to provider profiles that outline product features, original programming, content library inventories and ad load metrics.

FBA'S OPTIC PATH GETS NC APPROVAL

The **Fiber Broadband Association's** Optical Telecom Installer Certification (OpTIC Path) program received an endorsement from the North Carolina Workforce Credential Advisory Council. The program was submitted by Wilson Community College to get workforce credentials. The OpTIC Path program is now listed on the state’s careers site, which displays high-value, non-degree credentials that companies are looking for. It also opens the door for state funding opportunities, including scholarships and short-term workforce training support, meaning students could complete the certification at little to no cost. Currently, Wilson and the College of the Albemarle are the only two NC schools that offer OpTIC Path. Plans to offer the course to other NC schools are in the works for 2025.

HALLMARK CRUISE RETURNS

After embarking on its first Christmas Cruise this month, **Hallmark Channel** is offering fans another chance to get on the “most festive vacation at sea.” It is working with festival and music cruise planner Sixthman on the Hallmark Christmas Cruise 2025, which will run from Nov. 6-10 from Miami to Cozumel, Mexico. The cruise will boast an immersive winter-themed site with

Hallmark stars. Activities include a Christmas tree lighting, crafts and a premiere of a new Hallmark holiday movie. Presale signups start today.

GAMING WITH SLING TV

Sling TV is introducing several games to its in-app Arcade platform. Originally launched in March, the new batch of games includes PAC-MAN, Trivia Crack, Dots, Wordleful and Haunted Castle. Arcade, which now has 16 games, is currently available for users on **Fire TV, Android TV, Samsung, LG, Vizio** and **Comcast**.

ADARA ASSISTS DOMINICAN OP

Adara Technologies has completed the rollout of its PowerKEY 2024 Conditional Access Time-Wrap solution that'll let the Dominican Republic-based **Aster Tecnodisa** continue operating its set-tops beyond their timeout date in late November. The PowerKEY solution addresses the issue that the set-top boxes’ internal conditional access system time clock was set to roll over to zero, which would prevent the boxes from decrypting video. Aster provides telecom services to approximately 45,000 subscribers in the DR.

CARRIAGE

DirecTV's FAST platform **MyFree DirecTV** added eight channels: **Drool, Hipstr, GoTraveler, America's Test Kitchen, MagellanTV Now, True Crime Now, History & Warfare Now** and **Space Science Now**. MyFree DirecTV has over 70 total channels in its lineup.

FIBER FRENZY

ALLO Fiber is expanding to Hickman, Nebraska. Construction is slated to begin this month. – **Sparklight** is rolling out 1 Gbps symmetrical speeds to Sioux City, North Sioux City and Dakota Dunes, South Dakota; Sergeant Bluff, Iowa and Dakota City and Sioux City, Nebraska. The expansion stems from the company’s two-year, \$13.3 million investment in local fiber infrastructure.

RATINGS

Telemundo's broadcast of the 73rd Miss Universe pageant became the most-watched entertainment special on Spanish-language TV in 2024 with 2.1 million total viewers, according to **Nielsen**. The show averaged 568,000 A18-49 on linear TV and had 243 million engagements across TV, digital, **Peacock** and social platforms, which is a record for Telemundo. The pageant was the No. 1 program in its timeslot regardless of language in the LA, NY, Miami and San Francisco markets among A18-49.

BASIC CABLE		
P2+ PRIME RANKINGS*		
(11/11/24-11/17/24)		
MON-SUN	MC	MC
	US	US AA
	AA%	(000)
ESPN	0.933	2960
FNC	0.917	2908
HALL	0.246	781
MSNBC	0.215	681
PRMNT	0.213	676
TNT	0.159	503
USA	0.150	475
TBSC	0.146	463
HGTV	0.144	457
HIST	0.144	456
CNN	0.144	456
FOOD	0.142	450
DISC	0.133	423
TLC	0.132	418
INSP	0.130	413
HALLMYS	0.128	406
TV LAND	0.096	306
ID	0.093	294
NWSMX	0.086	273
A&E	0.079	250
GSN	0.079	250
FX	0.073	233
OXY	0.069	220
BRAVO	0.069	219
LIFE	0.068	217
REELZ	0.064	203
BET	0.063	200
WETV	0.063	200
FRFM	0.061	192
COM	0.057	182
GAF	0.056	179
NAN	0.056	178
LMN	0.056	176
NATGEO	0.055	174
AMC	0.055	174
ADSM	0.055	173
CMT	0.052	164
TRAVEL	0.050	160
E!	0.049	155
FETV	0.046	146
ESPN2	0.045	141
NFL	0.043	137
HLN	0.042	134
SYFY	0.039	125
FX	0.039	125
SNDNCE	0.039	123
IFC TV	0.037	118

*P2+ L+SD rankers are based on national Nielsen numbers, not coverage.



BEYOND THE BANDWIDTH

Turning Data into Dollars with AI

Sure, AI can make it easier to organize your to-do list or rewrite that email, but how can it make money? Media and telecom companies are exploring new ways of generating revenue through AI and finding some success.

Driving Ad Sales

Media company **Spanish Broadcasting System**, which includes full-service digital marketing agency **Digidea**, has been using AI to expand its business. It's been working with **Futuri's** end-to-end sales intelligence system TopLine, which uses AI to automate consumer and audience research. By being able to use data and show a client specific areas that they aren't reaching, particularly with Latino audiences, it's opened up more than \$1.5 million in new revenue, **Dara Kalvort**, SBS' VP of Sales and Strategy, said during a panel at **NECTA's** annual convention this week. "If you feed AI with the right information, it's going to give you really amazing information back with the right prompt and that backend information. I'm really passionate about it, and I think it's changing the industry in a really good way, because at the end of the day, what we've lost in ad sales is the face-to-face time."

Exploring Efficiencies

Leap Media Group is going beyond the traditional ad agency role and actually acquiring and co-producing its own television shows that it distributes and syndicates with ads. That includes a current block of half-hour travel shows that includes branded shows from Expedia that offer deep dives on various destinations complete with ad breaks with QR codes to take the consumer to info to book a trip through Expedia. "In order to do that for a new program every week, for a different destination, we have to have a way to sort of automate that process. That's where AI comes in," explained co-founder **Chris Pizzurro**. "We took our voiceover guy and brought him in and we AI his voice so that we can update the destination and the voice just reads it. What used to take a long time to do in the voiceover is now instant."

But Pizzurro sees further possibilities for AI. Right now, Leap Media is using traditional media planning to buy up infomercial time—maybe that's 7am on a Saturday on AMC or noon on Sunday on a local broadcaster. "In my brain, I think that this is the right ad in this show with no other QR codes. It's very manual, which is fine, but the more the platforms grow, the more ads we have, the more platforms that it's available on, and the more shows we have, it just becomes unattainable," he said. "I would really just love a system that would be like, 'OK, here I have this ad. Should

it be on Roku in the Peter Greenberg travel show on a Saturday? And to be able to do that for every ad and decision that we're placing on the fly. That's where we'll hopefully get to."

Churn Buster

While AI is often mentioned in terms of content discovery, some think it could be the answer to DTC streamers' growing churn problem. "What you see generally with streaming services, streaming platforms is that they're in data-rich environments, but they're not really insight-rich environments. I feel like this is where one of the biggest opportunities is going to be with AI," **Damien Organ**, VP of Product Marketing for **Cleeng**, a SaaS platform specializing in subscriber retention management.

It's working with the **NFL**, **Sinclair**, **NHL** and others. Cleeng's Churn IQ platform uses advanced machine learning algorithms to identify subscribers who are at a high risk of canceling their subscription, and it's doing so with 95% accuracy. "Now we are at that point where we can really also use AI for the users to really explore that data themselves," Organ said.

While there was this idea 10-15 years ago of a democratization of data, it didn't really come to fruition. Analyzing data took teams of experts and technological tools, with multiple studies finding that only about 24% of the global workforce feels confident in working with, reading and analyzing data. In the streaming world, there's streaming data, viewer data and payment data all to sort through for actionable insights. But that's all clean data that AI does very well with. "The whole promise of data democratized will happen because you're going to be able to very easily tell stories and investigate data sets purely through Gen AI," said Organ. "It's not going to be something where you have to go to your data team and they have to spend a week building some charts that you don't like in the end anyway. The rigid pre-built analytics is also something that's going to change in that is going to be as easy as conversational prompts to generate a kind of insights environment."

When it comes to churn, that could mean using AI to glean data to personalize the streaming packages offered, what sort of value discount makes the most sense at different points in the user experience and how to best target re-subscribers—those who dip in and out of a service subscription. "The traditional Netflix idea was there was one subscription for everybody and that's it. That is definitely something that is on the way out, and it is much more about, how are you way more dynamic about this, how you tailor your offerings and how you target individual groups or customers with those offerings," Organ said.