

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Not So Fast: Petitioners Take Issue With Skydance-Paramount Deal

Paramount Global and Skydance Global may have been able to find a deal structure that worked for them, but not everybody is on board with a combination of the two companies.

The Center for American Rights was among those submitting a petition this week asking the FCC to not grant the merger outright, but to instead condition it on a series of specific commitments related to concerns the organization has around Skydance Media's ties to foreign governments and the ideological views of CBS News.

One of Skydance's major investors is Chinese-owned Tencent Holdings, and CAR would like the FCC to investigate reports that Tencent is aligned closely to the Chinese Communist Party. "Even if this minority ownership stake by a Chinese company does not transgress technical foreign ownership limits, this Commission can still—under the public interest standard—evaluate whether an American-owned company is willingly subject to undue foreign influence," CAR said in its petition. "Moreover, this Commission's charge is to guard against 'undue foreign influence,' which gives it room for judgment, to distinguish between foreign influence from a NATO or treaty ally and foreign influence from this nation's global competitors."

As for CBS News, CAR argued its coverage of the 2024 elections was far more positive of Democratic candidates, including Vice President Kamala Harris, than it was of Republicans in the running. CAR has a pending consumer complaint with the FCC arguing "Sixty

Minutes" was guilty of news distortion for editing an answer from Harris in response to a question regarding foreign policy.

Incoming FCC Chairman Brendan Carr noted the petition on X, saying the agency needs to address the concerns posed by the filing. "This filing from CAR raises what it describes as significant concerns, including ones that go to CBS's adherence to the public interest standard," he said. Carr has previously said the news distortion complaint is something likely to come up as the agency reviews the Paramount-Skydance transaction.

Also filing a petition to deny the transaction was LiveVideo. AI Corp, which claimed it wanted to participate in the sales process for Paramount Global but was not given a fair shake. While Fuse Media didn't pen a petition to deny, it did submit comments with its own concerns over how the combination of Paramount Global and Skydance could bring a number of challenges for small, independent programmers. Fuse argued Paramount Global has a history of anticompetitive practices against those programmers that is likely to only be exacerbated by the change in ownership to a member of the Ellison family.

It used some of its own experiences with Paramount-owned Pluto TV as an example. Fuse launched Shades of Black, a streaming channel aimed at African American audiences, in early 2021 and reached a distribution deal with Pluto in December of the same year. Less than a year later, Fuse noticed a drastic drop in audience exclusively on Pluto TV compared to other comparable distributors.

At the same time, Fuse claims it was required to share the

# Corporate Licenses

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channel’s programming calendar ahead of time, and it alleges Pluto used that data to schedule the same programming at the same time on its proprietary channels. Fuse also said Pluto placed its proprietary channels in more attractive locations on the service’s programming guide.

“From December, 2022, to May of 2024, the Shades of Black channel experienced an 80% audience decrease on Pluto TV, while all other platforms carrying the same channel saw either minimal declines of less than 20% to growth of 30% over the same time period,” Fuse said.

The company also questions whether anticompetitive behavior could become more harmful should Paramount receive access to the technological resources owned by Oracle, which was co-founded by Skydance CEO David Ellison’s father, Larry Ellison.

“The introduction of Oracle’s AI capabilities would allow Paramount to further control both content acquisition and distribution on Pluto TV. Independent networks would find it increasingly difficult to compete on visibility, advertising revenue and audience engagement if Paramount owns and controls not just the platform itself but the entirety of the available data the platform provides,” Fuse said. “Without access to comparable tools and data, independent networks without access to similar analytics may struggle to attract or retain audiences.”

## PROJECT KUIPER WINS BIG IN NEVADA BEAD PLAN

Nevada is the latest state to move forward with its BEAD plans, releasing its final proposal for public comment and revealing its initial selection of subgrantees. As for the provisional awards, Amazon’s Project Kuiper recorded a major victory, especially when you consider the service is not yet commercially available. It was awarded \$14.49 million to serve 4,891 locations. But it wasn’t the biggest award winner. That honor goes to SkyFiber Internet, which would use \$180.62 million to build to 12,043 locations. Other notable winners include Stimulus Technologies of Nevada (\$142.58 million to serve 17,073 locations), AT&T (\$18.7 million to serve 819 locations), Comnet of Nevada (\$50.62 million for 5,136 locations) and Cox Communications (\$22.91 million to serve 3,273 locations).

## RIP AND REPLACE FINALLY FUNDED

Congress passed the National Defense Authorization Act Wednesday, and industry watchers are applauding the action with an enhanced vigor due to some of the measures included in the legislation. The FCC’s Rip and Replace program was established to reimburse providers for the removal of equipment from Huawei and ZTE as well as the purchase of replacement

goods, but was severely underfunded. Now, funding for the program will be paid for with proceeds from an FCC auction of AWS-3 spectrum. “Full funding will not only help protect our Nation’s communications infrastructure but also ensure that rural communities who rely on these networks maintain vital connectivity,” FCC Chair Jessica Rosenworcel said in a statement.

## X GAMES ADDS ROKU

Netflix isn’t the only new entrant into sports. Roku inked a deal that will make The Roku Channel the exclusive U.S. streaming home of X Games Aspen and a to-be-announced major X Games event this summer. The events will be made available via Roku Sports Channel, and Roku has also launched an X Games TV FAST channel that’ll have a dedicated X Games Zone with highlights, clips, interviews, archival content and more. That’ll launch leading up to the first live events that are part of the deal. X Games Aspen will take place Jan. 23-25 from Aspen.

## BRAVES’ NEW (TV) WORLD

Though the MLB’s Braves have a regional home with Diamond Sports and its FanDuel Sports Network Southeast, the team is venturing into other means of distribution. The Braves and Gray Media entered a multi-year partnership to simulcast 15 regular-season games alongside FanDuel Sports Network starting the 2025 season. Gray will have the games available in 24 markets across six states, with OTA broadcasts coming on Atlanta’s CW-affiliate Peachtree TV and Peachtree Sports Network and throughout the southeast on other Gray stations. Also part of the deal includes 10 exclusive spring training games that Gray will produce.

## CINEVERSE TARGETS CONTENT RIGHTS WITH AI TOOL

Cineverse introduced a new AI rights management service called Matchpoint Reel Visuals AI. Made for companies that own libraries of films, TV shows and podcasts, the platform is a non-exclusive revenue-sharing offering that compensates content creators and rights holders for using their video content in AI training. It negates the associated delivery costs that can make profitability in AI training more difficult while also giving content partners the ability to ingest, normalize, deliver and store large volumes of video content with integrated rights management capabilities. Cineverse is actively licensing AI rights from third-party content owners that control large film and TV catalogs. The company represents AI training rights for over 350,000 hours of video and audio content to-date.

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A Cablefax feature highlighting industry doings spotted in the real world.

**Boingo Wireless Connecting More Military Families**

As providers look to make internet installation as seamless as possible for customers, Boingo Wireless is bringing that ease of access to housing communities on U.S. military bases. That's why the company celebrated launching the first "instant-on" fiber-to-the-home solution for family housing at Colorado's Fort Carson Army Base in October, making it as simple as using a QR code for families to log online instead of needing to wait on an installer or truck roll.

It's another milestone for a company that's intertwined with the military. Boingo has long-term contracts to serve the Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, Homeland Security and other areas of the military with 5G cellular service, WiFi and towers. The company reaches more than 100 bases around the world for a little under half a million service members. Additionally, Boingo was recently recognized with its fifth consecutive HIRE Vets Medallion Award, a program from the Department of Labor that honors companies that meet requirements for hiring and training veterans.



The experience of veterans was instrumental in developing the instant-on technology. "By hiring from the military, I think we're able to take our technology background, knowledge and know-how and be able to know what that service member needs," Rebecca Gray, SVP & GM, Military, told CFX. "Because we've lived in the dorms, we've lived in the barracks, we've lived in family housing. We know what we're talking about. So to have my team with the breadth and the depth of that experience is why I think we have designed something [that's], really, the first of its kind."



Boingo Fiber offers 1 Gig symmetrical speeds with no data caps, hidden fees or contracts. Customers can put the instant-on feature to use when they pick up a preinstalled Boingo Fiber router that has a QR code on it, enabling them to scan it and pair service. Gray noted that the network can be upgraded to include faster speeds down the line should there be a need to do so.

The benefits that Boingo's new solution brings are improved access to things like telemedicine, entertainment, training and education, but it also removes a burden for families undergoing a transitional period. "We've been in that situation when you're moving in with kids, and all the things that it takes to start a new job and have your spouse getting everything settled and the movers coming in, and the last thing you want to do is schedule an appointment and get equipment and pay for that equipment," Gray said.

Fort Carson is just the beginning for Boingo and the instant-on technology. More bases have reached out and inquired about how it could potentially help their own connectivity options. - Noah Ziegler

**CARRIAGE**

**Women's Sports Network** added **Samsung TV Plus** to its distribution list. WSN brings more than 1,000 hours of women's sports programming, including live games and studio shows like "Game On" and "The World According To..." Other platforms that carry WSN include **Roku**, **Amazon Sports**, **MyFree DirecTV** and **Fubo**.

**MORE DEALS FOR VIAMEDIA**

**Viamedia** is keeping the momentum going, revealing new deals to manage ad sales for five service providers: **TruVista** and **Pineland Telephone** (Georgia), **Star Communications** (North Carolina), **i3 Broadband** (Illinois) and **Ritter Communications** (Tennessee). The additions encapsulate markets such as Savannah, Raleigh and Memphis and expand Viamedia's total reach to 88 service providers across 73 DMAs in 27 states.

**FIBER FRENZY**

**Ritter Communications** is setting sail on a \$5 million infrastructure project to bring its RightFiber internet portfolio to El Dorado, Arkansas. Construction is anticipated to wrap up in the summer, bringing residential speeds of up to 5 Gbps and business speeds of up to 100 Gbps.

**WEEKLY RATINGS**

After [clinging the yearly ratings crown](#), **Fox News** stayed in stride during the week of Dec. 9-15. The news net was atop the primetime chart with 2.5 million viewers P2+ as **ESPN** trailed in second with 1.9 million. **Paramount**, aided by the Season 5B finale of "Yellowstone," climbed into third with 1.1 million viewers. **Hallmark Channel** and **MSNBC** filled the top five with 981,000 and 590,000, respectively. Fox News (1.66 million) and ESPN (634,000) also filled the first two spots in the total-day rankings, but the holiday spirit carried Hallmark to third with 564,000. MSNBC checked in with 444,000 while Paramount recorded 404,000 in total day.

**PROGRAMMING**

**Paramount** struck a deal with **Warner Bros. Discovery** Content Sales to bring "The Big Bang Theory" to **Nick at Nite** and **MTV's** lineups. It's the first time the series is returning to the **CBS** umbrella after its original run. NAN will have a two-day stunt featuring holiday-themed episodes starting Dec. 24, while MTV will have an all-day marathon of Season 3 on Jan. 1. - **Investigation Discovery** is on the case for the killing of United Healthcare CEO *Brian Thompson*. "Who is Luigi Mangione?" (working title) will explore the psychology behind Thompson's alleged assassin *Luigi Mangione*. *Dan Abrams* will host and executive produce the doc. - **Leap Media Group** is adding the series "Samantha Brown's Places to Love" to its linear TV lineup. It'll join current programming from *Peter Greenberg* and **Expedia** during Leap's travel block of ad-supported syndicated shows airing weekends on broadcast and cable networks.

## Think about that for a minute...

### Yikes!

Commentary by Steve Effros

How did this happen? We're about to run into Christmas and New Years and it just caught me by surprise. This is my last column for the year. I was otherwise occupied, in part looking at all the crazy stuff that's been going on in the telecommunications world this year. Don't worry, I'm not going to do a "year-end review." I haven't done one of those in a long time. I figured out a while ago that in our business, especially in the political, legal, technology, policy and regulatory stuff I focus on, calendar dates don't make much difference. We tend to go in circles, or pendulum swings, if you will, and this year and next year are going to be no different!

Well, that may not be totally true. If there's going to be a difference in the coming year, it'll be in just how far the pendulum swings, but I have little doubt that at some point it'll start moving in the other direction, just as it has many times before. I'm going to be right here trying to make sense of it all, and I can say with certainty that the underlying conclusion I'll reach on many of the questions raised will usually be the same: "I don't know!" Be highly suspicious of anyone who suggests they do!

We're in a familiar cycle, to be sure. You all know by now, for instance, the swinging back and forth on the issue of "net neutrality." I don't need to repeat it. But there is a difference coming up. With the Supreme Court having eliminated regulatory reliance on the "Chevron Doctrine" focusing, instead, on a newly coined "major question doctrine," which is undefined, we have no way of knowing which current regulatory positions will remain intact. That's going to lead to much more confusion than usual. It would appear that a whole lot of issues will be thrown back to Congress. That's not good.

It's not that, theoretically, they can't argue through the policy issues and eventually come to some conclusion. They can. But the term "eventually" has far more significance today than in the past. It took many years to debate and ultimately adopt a new Communications Act. We're talking about multiple years, and in some cases decades! Heck, I was part of a committee

that worked on one small copyright deal with music rights holders when cable was in its most active growth period. It took us over eight years to come to an agreement! That just can't happen anymore. Technology is moving far faster now than ever before, and even the folks developing those technologies, like AI and quantum computers, which will be at the core of new telecom infrastructures and businesses, say they are amazed, and somewhat concerned about how quickly these new capabilities are coming on line.

The problem, of course, is that political dealmaking and Congressional action has never been able to keep up with what we are doing. A great example is broadband and "social networking," and how that has upended our society. That's why we have to keep watching closely what's going on. While the demise of "Chevron" is likely to dismantle a lot of "guardrails" which have been constructed by the regulatory state, there's no mechanism right now to make sure things like AI don't fly off the rails! So there's at least going to be a lot to talk about, and that's what we will continue to do, hopefully as a dialog, not a monologue (please join in!) in the coming year.

In the meantime, I just want to thank all of you, and the folks at Cablefax, for sticking with me and being willing to read my musings all these years, and yes, I will be back for yet another one! Happy Holidays.



Steve

T:202-630-2099  
steve@effros.com

*(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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