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Alexicon *insider*

INFORMATION AND ADVOCACY FOR THE
RURAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY

Regulatory Headlines

[Pai: Help ISPs with "Pledge Costs"](#)

Sen. Jerry Moran (R-Kan.) expressed concerns about whether and how Congress could compensate internet service providers for their contribution to COVID-19 relief--in the form of investment in and payment relief for their customers via the Keep Americans Connected pledge. That came in a Senate Appropriations Subcommittee hearing on FCC spectrum auction oversight.

[FCC Action on 5G Deployment](#)

The FCC has adopted a Declaratory Ruling and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FNPRM) to facilitate the deployment of 5G networks across the United States. The FCC clarifies its 2014 rules regarding state and local government review of modifications to existing wireless infrastructure with regard to when the 60-day shot clock for local review begins.

[GOP Leaders Offer Broadband Framework](#)

House and Senate Republican leaders have drawn up their own plan for closing the digital divide in the age of COVID-19. Senate Commerce Committee chairman Roger Wicker (R-Miss.) and House Energy & Commerce Committee ranking member Greg Walden (R-Ore.) describe it as a foundation for legislative action related to the COVID-19 economic recovery.

[3rd Quarter USF Contribution Factor](#)

The FCC's Office of Managing Director has announced that the proposed universal service contribution factor for the third quarter of 2020 26.5%.

[FCC on ATSC 3.0 Transition](#)

The FCC has resolved some major outstanding issues in its framework for a transition to the ATSC 3.0 broadcast transmission standard, which will allow for higher-definition pictures, targeted ads, interactivity and "broadcast internet."



Market Watch

[Townes Enhances Broadband Experience](#)

[Ritter Finishes \\$16m Fiber Project](#)

[FirstNet Allocates \\$218m for 5G Core](#)

[Windstream to Charter: Pay Up](#)



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Questions? Comments?
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Technology Trends

New and notable technology and services

More Patients Expect to Use Telehealth

Most patients are expecting to use telehealth care access even after the COVID-19 pandemic subsides, according to new data from Doctor.com. This underscores a significant cultural shift around the technology in recent months. Before the COVID-19 pandemic mandated stay-at-home orders and increased patient fears they may contract an illness inside a health clinic, patient sentiment for telehealth was more tepid. An August 2019 Harris Poll revealed two-thirds of patients were open to the idea of telehealth, but only 8 percent had actually tried it.

COVID-19 Has Widened Homework Gap

It's a problem that many educators have been grappling with for years, but one that has been exacerbated—and made more public—by COVID-19: Many students lack sufficient internet connections at home to be able to complete their schoolwork. Educators and digital equity advocates have tried a number of solutions to close the so-called “homework gap.”

Wireline Embraces Open Source Slower

For the most part wireless operators have embraced the move to virtualized networks and away from closed proprietary systems because they realize it's necessary if they want to stay competitive, keep their costs in check, and be able to deploy new services rapidly. But many of their wireline counterparts in the telecom world are moving at a slower pace.

Work-at-Home Increases Attack Risks

Businesses use on-prem and cloud-based unified communications (UC) to connect distributed workforces but often don't realize the security threats hidden within popular UC services, but they should, and they should address them. There has been a sharp rise in eMeetings, Voice over IP (VoIP) and other UC capabilities as companies shift to a work-from-home (WFH) model because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Don't expect this trend to abate any time soon as 93% of CXOs that responded to a ZK Research study say they see a permanent 30% uplift in the number of remote employees.

Optical Transport Moves to 400G

Is 2020 the year of 400G? It's the kind of question telecom industry observers love to ask, though it is a far too general one. It speaks to our fascination with big numbers as milestones to be reached and put in the rearview mirror as we push toward the next milestone. In reality, 400G adoption and usage is guided by more practical considerations. Deployment decisions depend on the type of company adopting the technology...

IN FOCUS

Funding the Keep Americans Connected Pledge

FCC Chairman Pai announced the [Keep Americans Connected](#) pledge on March 13, which would voluntarily tie broadband providers to a promise to (1) not terminate service to any residential or small business customers because of their inability to pay their bills due to the disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic; (2) waive any late fees that any residential or small business customers incur because of their economic circumstances related to the coronavirus pandemic; and (3) open its Wi-Fi hotspots to any American who needs them. The original pledge was to last 60 days, but was subsequently [extended](#) (again, voluntarily) to June 30. Nearly [800 providers](#) have signed the pledge.

The Chairman has made it clear that the pledge will not extend beyond June 30, but that he also does not want consumers and small businesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic to be subject to disconnections. As a result, he is [asking carriers](#) to work with customers (not an extension of the pledge) who have fallen behind in payments as a result of pandemic mitigation measures, in a good faith effort to arrive at payment plans or deferred payment arrangements.

One of the consequences for carriers signing the original and/or extended pledge has been the adverse affect on customer-derived revenues. The Chairman acknowledges this fact in a [letter](#) to leaders in the House and Senate:

“But these companies, especially small ones, cannot continue to provide service without being paid for an indefinite period of time; no business in any sector of our economy could.”

In recognition of this financial hardship faced by small carriers, the Chairman specifically referenced a congressional initiative called the “Broadband Connectivity and Digital Equity Framework” as a possible solution to this problem. This framework would presumably lead to legislation, and includes 1) authorizing funding for the FCC to complete accurate broadband mapping efforts, something FCC chair Ajit Pai has been calling for; 2) making sure students have access to broadband, 3) making sure those having trouble paying for broadband can still get it, 4) promoting digital equity; and 5) helping carriers “working tirelessly to keep Americans connected” during the pandemic.

Finally, the Chairman asked the rural associations (NTCA, WTA) to survey members on the costs incurred over the past 3 months as a result of committing to the pledge. This will assist the Chairman and Congress with the magnitude of the financial effect of small carriers keeping the pledge.

Also in progress are two bills ([S3569](#) and [HR6394](#)) that would allocated \$2b with the purpose of reimbursing small carriers (<250k customers) for not disconnecting customers for nonpayment who were adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Both bills have bipartisan support, but have yet to make it out of committee.



Alexicon at Work

For the most part, Alexicon personnel continue to work from home on the usual June/July projects. These include Form 481, due on July 1, various data collections, including what should be the final local rate floor filing, and of course cost studies.

In the review mirror, for now, is the annual Alexicon FCC tariff filing and attendant CAF ICC calculations.



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