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Alexicon *insider*

INFORMATION AND ADVOCACY FOR THE
RURAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY

Regulatory Headlines

Broadband in Biden Infrastructure Plan

The Biden administration unveiled some details about its infrastructure plan which calls for significant investment in broadband. The plan does advocate for $100 billion in funding to "Build high-speed broadband infrastructure to reach 100 percent coverage," that is "future proof." There are other interesting issues that this infrastructure plan encourages with respect to broadband public policy.

Parties Seek to Deny RDOF Award

The Minnesota Telecom Alliance and the Iowa Communications Alliance have filed a joint petition with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) asking the agency to deny LTD Broadband's long-form application that it submitted in the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) auction.

EBB Program Participants

The FCC released a preliminary list of companies electing to participate in the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program.

988 10-Digit Dialing Transition

Dialing procedures are changing in 36 states and 82 area codes in advance of the establishment of 988 as the three-digit abbreviated dial code to reach the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, which is set to take effect on July 16, 2022.

FCC Announces Outreach Initiative

As part of the Broadband Data Collection program, the FCC has announced it will be collecting first-hand experiences from consumers about access to broadband. Through an online portal, consumers are now able to input their feedback on their broadband availability and service quality.

Think Tank Calls for USF Auctions

A Big Bang of cash is needed to bring rural Americans into the Information Age, according to a report released Monday by a Washington, D.C. think tank. Nearly one-in-five rural Americans don't have broadband Internet access, but that could change with the use of carefully targeted subsidies...

Market Watch

Facebook Lays Fiber Across Indiana

WISPA Path to Gigabit Plan

Telco Fiber Footprint May Cover 68M Homes

Pandemic Drove Upstream Broadband Traffic

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Questions? Comments?
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Technology Trends

New and notable technology and services

How Good is Starlink Internet?

Back in October, SpaceX announced it would be recruiting beta testers for its satellite broadband offshoot Starlink's "Better Than Nothing" service. As soon as the announcement was made, I signed up to be notified when a spot opened up in my area -- Walnut Creek, about 30 minutes east of San Francisco. Fast-forward to February and I forked over $594.30 (tax, shipping and one month of service included) to see what it's like using Starlink.

Ransomware Tops U.S. Cyber Priorities

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said on Wednesday that dealing with ransomware will be a top priority, highlighting the growing threat of the data-scrambling software. Ransomware - which effectively holds files and networks hostage unless a payment is made - has steadily climbed to the top of America's security agenda as the criminals behind it become increasingly well-resourced.

Keep Data Safe While Working From Home

Organisations have had to adapt quickly to the realities of staff working remotely and that has come with a number of challenges, particularly surrounding cybersecurity. Businesses that previously relied on employees using work-issued computers and being protected behind a corporate firewall have had to deal with staff using their personal devices and their home internet connection.

AT&T Upgrading FirstNet

AT&T is adding 5G to its public sector FirstNet network as well as tower-to-core network encryption. The telecom giant said Thursday that it has upgraded its FirstNet network to deliver 5G service for devices as well as Internet of things and video intelligence use cases. With 5G updates, FirstNet will be better equipped to deliver low latency and enable applications that can transmit data from an ambulance to emergency room and other bandwidth intensive files.

Wi-Fi vs 5G Speed Report

In its W-Fi vs. 5G testing Opensignal found 5G mmWave is fastest over all Wi-Fi and in both directions, though home/office Wi-Fi is faster than sub 6 GHz 5G in both directions. Even 4G LTE is faster than public Wi-Fi for downloads, while public and home/office Wi-Fi uploads are faster than those for LTE.

IN FOCUS

Emergency Connectivity Fund

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP) contained a provision for $7.171 billion of funding for eligible schools and libraries to cover certain devices and services at locations other than schools and libraries (think WiFi on school buses). The FCC's Wireline Competition Bureau issued a Public Notice on March 16, 2021 to gather input on exactly how to implement and administer the Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF).

The ECF is to cover eligible devices that schools and libraries can purchase to assist students, school staff, and library patrons connect for educational purposes. Eligible devices include Wi-Fi hotspots, modems, routers, devices that combine a model and router, and connected devices such as desktop and laptop computers, tablets and similar end user devices (the WCB proposes to exclude mobile and smart phones).

Eligible services will likely include those currently defined as category 1 in the E-Rate program (generally data transmission and internet access services). Due to the emergency nature of the program, the WCB proposes to exclude dark fiber and constructed networks.

The WCB proposes to define eligible schools and libraries in the same way as they are defined in the E-Rate program. This includes schools and libraries located on Tribal lands.

For service locations, the WCB recognizes that most students, school staff, and library patrons would need connectivity at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the Bureau notes that many of the contemplated users may be unhoused or otherwise unable to engage remote learning at home. Thus, some schools or libraries may choose to purchase and provide, for example, Wi-Fi hotspots that are able to serve many students at once (e.g., school bus Wi-Fi hotspots).

According to the ARP, the ECF is to run from 1/27/2020 until the June 30 that first occurs after the date that is one year after the COVID-19 pandemic ends. Because of the apparent retroactive nature of the program, the WCB proposes and requests comment on allowing eligible schools and libraries to request reimbursement for already-purchased services and equipment, even if they were purchased outside of the E-Rate's normal competitive bidding requirements (with certification that any applicable procurement rules have been followed).

Of course, the WCB, and in compliance with the ARP, proposes to lean heavily on USAC to administer the program. Specifically, USAC is to open a 30-day filing window for eligible entities to requires reimbursement for purchases between 1/27/2020 and 6/30/2021 (the end of the current E-Rate funding year). Otherwise, USAC will likely run the ECF similar to how the E-Rate program is administered.

Comments are due April 5, and replies are due April 23.

Reminders

⇒ **988 Suicide Prevention Hotline**. Mandatory 10-digit dialing transition has started for certain area codes containing 988 NXXs. See the 8/19/20 *Special Bulletin*, 8/20/20 email distribution of the NANPA transition schedule, and 11/18/20 & 1/28/21 email distributions of NANPA's latest guidance. Permissive 10-digit dialing in the affected area codes begins on April 24.

⇒ **Emergency Broadband Benefit Program**. There is still time for interested broadband providers to submit an election to USAC to participate in the EBB program. If interested, the election form can be found here.

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