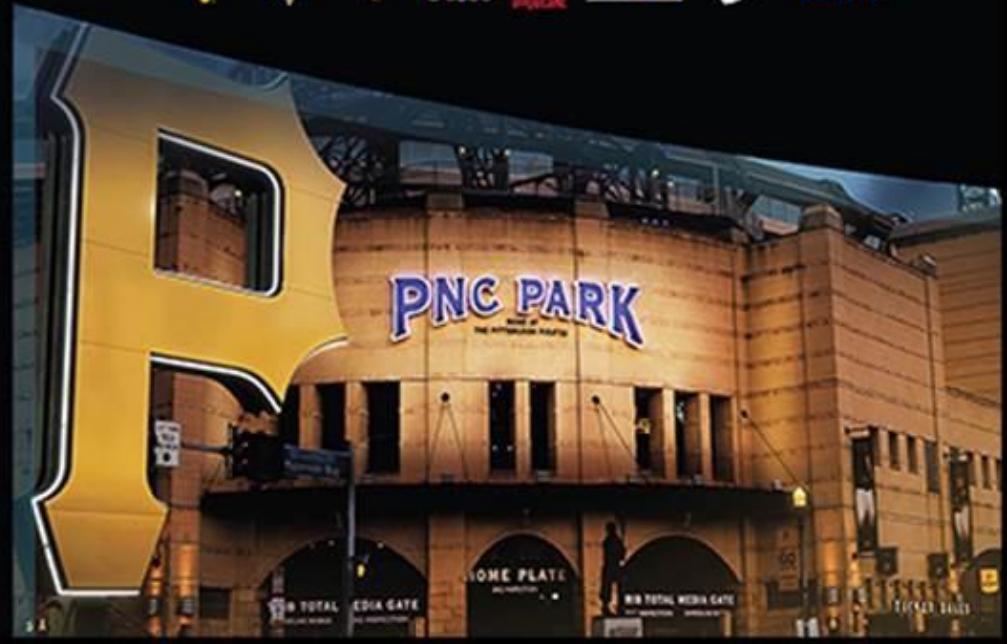




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February 5, 2021

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A decade ago, Douglas Boldt fought to save the 814 area code. The Erie resident helped to create a Facebook group and start an online petition to convince the Pennsylvania Public Utilities Commission not to divide the area code, which stretches from Lake Erie south to the Pennsylvania-Maryland border.

The northern part of the territory, which includes Erie and Crawford counties, would have been forced to switch to the 582 area code. Businesses and individuals would have had to change their signage and advertising. "It would have been really expensive for a lot of people," Boldt said. "So we drew people's attention to the problem." More than 40 petitions were signed and sent to the PUC. A website, [www.savethe814.com](http://www.savethe814.com), was created.

The strategy worked. In April 2012, the PUC voted 5-0 not to split the 814 area code, reversing its 2010 decision. Now the PUC is finalizing plans to add the 582 area code to the entire 814 area, a process called an overlay. Adding a second area code is needed because there are few 814 numbers left to assign to new residents or businesses. An area code can handle about 7.9 million different phone numbers.

Despite the inconvenience of having to dial 10 digits for every call, there has been little resistance to the change this time, PUC spokesman Nils Hagen-Frederiksen said. There have been no petitions, no protests and few complaints. "That's probably because it's an overlay and not a split," Hagen-Frederiksen said. "No one is having to change their phone number. It doesn't affect the identity people might have with the 814 area code."

It's a significant change for the 814 area code, which was created in 1947 when area codes were adopted, Hagen-Frederiksen said. The 814 is the state's largest area code in terms of square mileage and is the only one in the state that hasn't been split or overlaid since its creation. But since companies don't have to change their advertising or print new business cards, there has been little discussion about the overlay, said Ron Aldom, executive director of the Somerset County Chamber of Commerce. "It was more of a big deal 10 years ago, because it would have cost businesses money," Aldom said. "This costs just a bit of inconvenience, updating contact lists with the area codes if you need to do that." Unlike a decade ago, Boldt said he has no intention of fighting this change. "An overlay is probably what the PUC should have done back then," said Boldt, a solution architect for Amazon Web Services. "The future is 10-digit numbers."

An area code overlay occurs when more than one area code serves the same geographic area, the PUC said on its website. The new area code operates within the same geographic area as the old area code requiring relief. With an overlay, all current customers keep their same area code and telephone number. Numbers from the new area code may be assigned to new telephone customers or those adding additional lines. – *Erie Times-News*

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House Homeland Security Committee Chairman Bennie Thompson (D-Miss.) warned tech companies on Thursday to take greater action on content moderation or risk changes to a landmark law that provides the companies a legal liability shield over content posted on their platforms by third parties. "It's obvious that [Section] 230 we'll look at," Thompson said, referring to the law during a hearing on the threat of domestic terrorism. "If the companies don't assume the interest in policing their own platforms, then you leave government no choice." "So for those companies that might be listening to this hearing, it's absolutely essential that they step up in a big way, because obviously from a question and responses there's interest on the right and left — Democrat and Republican — that we have to look at it. And I assure you as chair we will," he added.

Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act has come under fire from both sides of the aisle over social media platforms' content moderation policies. Democrats have widely ramped up scrutiny over platforms' handling

of misinformation and hate speech since the Jan. 6 riot at the Capitol. Posts on some major and fringe platforms were identified as being used to organize the riot, as well as to amplify false claims that the election results were fraudulent.

Republicans have also issued calls to reform or repeal Section 230. Former President Trump sought to repeal the law through executive action, but his plans were abandoned shortly before he left office due to time constraints. Republicans' push to reform the law largely lies in unsubstantiated claims that social media platforms are censoring content with an anti-conservative bias. The argument has been amplified since Twitter and Facebook took action to ban Trump after the riot. A report released by New York University earlier this week found the [bias claims were not backed](#) by any evidence and were in themselves a form of disinformation.

Despite some disagreements on reasoning, there may be a chance for bipartisan support for a version of Section 230 reform as Thompson signaled during Thursday's hearing. The Biden administration has also indicated it may be open to amending the law. During his presidential campaign, President Biden said the law should be revoked, but he has largely not detailed plans moving forward. Biden's nominee to serve as secretary of Commerce, current Rhode Island Gov. Gina Raimondo (D), also said last week during a Senate confirmation hearing that the law needs some reform. She advanced to a Senate-wide vote in a bipartisan 21-3 commerce committee vote on Wednesday. – *The Hill*

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Voting-machine company Smartmatic USA Corp. sued Fox Corp.'s Fox News, seeking \$2.7 billion in damages for what it alleges were defamatory on-air comments about the company's products in the aftermath of the presidential election. The suit, filed Thursday in a New York court, focuses on a series of statements made about Smartmatic on Fox News by lawyers who supported former President Donald Trump's claims that the election was rigged, including Rudy Giuliani and Sidney Powell. The lawsuit also mentions remarks made about Smartmatic by Fox News Media anchors including Lou Dobbs and Maria Bartiromo.

Smartmatic's complaint claims that the segments on Fox News contained numerous errors involving the reliability of its technology, and that Fox News knew its statements about Smartmatic were untruthful. A group of federal and state officials have said there is no evidence that any voting system changed or deleted votes in the 2020 general election. "Fox News Media is committed to providing the full context of every story with in-depth reporting and clear opinion," the network said in a statement on behalf of Fox News and the Fox hosts named in the complaint. "We are proud of our 2020 election coverage and will vigorously defend this meritless lawsuit in court." Fox Corp. and Wall Street Journal parent News Corp share common ownership.

Ms. Powell said in an email that she hadn't been notified about the lawsuit, but that it sounded like "just another political maneuver motivated by the radical left that has no basis in fact or law." Mr. Giuliani said, "Discovery will be even better." London-based Smartmatic produces voting technologies that have been used in multiple countries. But Smartmatic has a limited footprint in the U.S. Only one county, Los Angeles County, Calif., used Smartmatic's technology in the 2020 general election, the company said.

The 285-page lawsuit accused the defendants of "inventing a story" that the election was stolen from President Trump. The lawsuit says that Fox News, Mr. Giuliani and Ms. Powell needed a "villain" so they scapegoated Smartmatic. "They needed somebody to blame," the lawsuit says. "They needed someone whom they could get others to hate." The company said the comments on Fox News damaged its reputation irreparably. "Smartmatic's clients and potential clients began to panic," the complaint says. The lawsuit cites statements made by Fox hosts and on-air guests including Jeanine Pirro, Ms. Bartiromo, Mr. Dobbs, Ms. Powell and Mr. Giuliani.

The suit points, for example, to Mr. Dobbs's interview of Mr. Giuliani on Nov. 12, in which Mr. Giuliani stated that Smartmatic's systems can be hacked. Mr. Dobbs endorsed that view, according to the suit, and added that Smartmatic sends voting records overseas, where states can't audit them. "They have no ability to audit meaningfully the votes that are cast because the servers are somewhere else," Mr. Dobbs said, according to the suit. "They have a terrible record, and they are extremely hackable," Mr. Giuliani said, according to the complaint.

In December, Smartmatic sent letters to Fox News, Newsmax TV and One America News Network accusing the networks of airing false and defamatory statements. Smartmatic said in a press release that the networks engaged in a "disinformation campaign" against the company. In a statement on Dec. 14, Newsmax said it "never made a claim of impropriety about Smartmatic." Newsmax on Thursday declined to comment; OANN didn't respond to a request for comment.

Lawyers for another voting company, Dominion Voting Systems, have sent letters to Fox News, OANN and Newsmax TV asking the networks to preserve records related to their coverage of the 2020 election in the event of a lawsuit. In December, Fox News Media and Newsmax ran segments to clarify facts related to Smartmatic and Dominion. Fox News and Fox Business ran interviews on several shows, including programs hosted by Ms. Bartiromo and Mr. Dobbs, featuring voting technology expert Edward Perez, who pushed back on claims that Smartmatic software was used to meddle in the voting process.

Newsmax also ran a clarification, saying that it found no evidence that Smartmatic used software that manipulated votes in the 2020 election. One of the lawyers representing Smartmatic, J. Erik Connolly, was one of the lead attorneys for Beef Products Inc. in its [2012 lawsuit against Walt Disney Co.'s ABC News](#) over use of the term "pink slime" to describe textured beef products. The lawsuit was settled in 2017.

The lawsuit comes as Fox News faces a serious ratings challenge from rival cable news networks for the first time in years. Fox News was the No. 1 cable news channel in 2020, its 19th consecutive year reaching that milestone. But the network has been surpassed by competitors CNN and MSNBC in several key viewership categories since the beginning of 2021, including total viewership, prime-time viewership and prime-time viewership among 25-to-54 years old, the key advertising demographic. Fox News has recently [made changes to its lineup](#), adding an opinion show at the 7 p.m. hour and moving anchor Martha MacCallum's show to 3 p.m. – *Wall Street Journal*

