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Taking on a new role in a pandemic is tricky. For Toni Murphy, that's meant working at a company whose services have become crucial for many of us working and learning from home — and whose services had to adapt to the new normal. In the third quarter of last year alone, her employer Comcast reported picking up 633,000 new high-speed internet customers.

[Ms. Murphy, 38, from Peters Township, was recently named senior vice president of Comcast's Keystone Region](#), where she will oversee operational, strategic and financial performance for the Philadelphia-based company in parts of Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia and Maryland. She's worked in the cable and telecommunications industry since 2008. The interview has been edited for space.

Let's start with talking about your job. What are your responsibilities?

— I just assumed my post in January as our regional lead and essentially what I'm responsible for is all of the financial, operational goals associated with the Keystone region. I have the distinct pleasure of leading a large team of diverse leaders across a variety of functions and essentially I'm responsible for thinking about the strategies and the landscapes to make sure they are able to do their very, very best work. I lovingly say that if I do my job well, I get out of my team's way.

What's a regular day like for you?

— I usually start my day with just assessing where the business is and I do that a couple ways. We obviously are very engaged in customer feedback ... so I'll check in and see what were some of the comments of their experiences the day before and make sure that we are giving kudos to our leaders who have done a great job and our employees who have done a great job. And then I obviously look at our business results to make sure we're performing where we want to be and assessing where the market is. I'm always trying to stay ahead of where customer sentiment is in terms of products and services just in the industry. Obviously, right now with the change in administration that has implications, too.

You mentioned the change in administration. How does that change your role at Comcast?

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– We're just very conscious that we're in the middle of a pandemic so that's going to help us think about how we take care of our employees, around the virus and making sure people get vaccinated. Our industry really hinges upon what's happening in the home: Are people going back to work? Are they going to be staying home still? So certainly want to be staying abreast of those changes as well.

How has COVID-19 impacted your role and what is going on at Comcast?
– Right away we knew as a company that with this change of folks working from home that we were going to have to step up and support the U.S. economy in whatever way we could, in a very thoughtful way. So one of the things we did, we extended our internet essentials program all throughout last year. We created partnerships with different organizations such as Pittsburgh public schools, Ambridge school district, the housing authority, and giving all these organizations 60 days of free internet essentials to make sure we were keeping families connected. We didn't want to have the internet being a reason why students would be left behind.

How has the financial and strategic planning side of it changed?
– It hasn't changed much. We've always been a company that is ready for any outcome and any adjustment and change. We're very flexible in our thinking and we're really guided by our customer feedback, we're guided by customer sentiment. We're constantly looking to innovate. I think that last year taught us that we were always ready. We haven't really talked about the racial injustice side of this but as a company, with the aftermaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and certainly Breonna Taylor, we did make a commitment to fighting racial injustice in our own way — upwards of a \$100 million commitment. That incorporates things like the Comcast RISE program where we are supporting local businesses all across the U.S. through marketing efforts and renovations and all sorts of things to give those businesses what they need to stay on their feet. I think you've heard about the Black experience, which is a new channel that we've created that allows people to see the great content that amplifies Black voices.

What are some of your specific goals for the role? What are you hoping to accomplish?

– One of the first things I did with my team when I took on this role was to come up with our team charter, who do we want to be as an organization and a team? Part of what I'm trying to do right out the gate is create an environment where that vision can come to life, so listening to our employees, listening to our customers. We do call back customers often to get feedback from them on how we're doing, I like to get out in the field to spend time with our technicians and our retail associates to see what their experience is like and how we can improve our business there. – **Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**

The Federal Communications Commission is getting a lot of help in deciding how to spend the \$3.2 billion — and potentially much more — set aside by Congress in a [December COVID-19 relief bill](#) for an Emergency Broadband Connectivity Fund (EBB), as well as new pandemic-driven investment being teed up.

The FCC has been seeking input from stakeholders, since it was only given 60 days from when the bill became law at year-end to come up with rules and regulations to implement the fund. Congress is requiring the agency to make all that money available for an internet service available at a \$50-per-household discount (\$75 on tribal lands).

Not surprisingly, internet service providers are focused on making sure they can access as much of that money as possible. That means leveling the playing field with current participants in the FCC's Lifeline low-income subsidy, to which the new congressional money is tied. Ninety percent of Lifeline participants are wireless carriers, NCTA—The Internet & Television Association VP and general counsel Steve Morris told the FCC at a roundtable on the new subsidy.

In virtual meetings with FCC staffers, ACA Connects, the NCTA, internet and competitive networks trade group INCOMPAS and WISPA (the wireless internet-service providers association) **presented a united front** in calling for flexible rules regarding “the specific service offerings that are available for the EBB program, the categories of households that may participate, and the verification processes that providers will use to qualify households.”

For its part, NCTA said the money should be available to as wide a pool of consumers as possible. It urged the FCC to make sure all providers, including broadband cable operators that have not been Lifeline participants, have an equal shot at the money, rather than giving current Lifeline participants a head start, and by minimizing administrative and implementation “burdens.” One way that can happen, NCTA said, is by essentially preapproving the vast majority of NCTA members who took the FCC’s Keep Americans Connected pledge via their own existing low-income programs or launching new ones.

NCTA argues that for the new EBB program, the FCC should grant “automatic approval of an application for participation by a broadband provider with a pre-existing program,” such as Comcast’s Internet Essentials, rather than participating in Lifeline. The presumption is the low-cost broadband program’s verification process “qualifies as sufficient to avoid waste, fraud and abuse,” which the FCC can review under objective standards to make sure that is the case.

Another cable broadband ask is that the FCC make sure participants can access a full list of participating providers since the subsidy can only be used for one provider, Comcast Essentials administrator Trinity Thorpe-Lubneuski told the FCC at the roundtable. Commenters should likely be readying some of the same arguments.

Rep. **James Clyburn** (D-S.C.) has said he will reintroduce a bill that would spend \$100 billion to extend internet service to everyone in the country, and has pushed the White House to make that bill a part of any infrastructure package. If the most recent COVID-19 relief bill passes as currently written, the commission will have billions more in broadband dollars to give out, targeted to schools and libraries.

One thing is clear: The broadband subsidy spigot appears to be opening wide.
– **Next TV**

The Pennsylvania Republican Party will hold a committee meeting on Wednesday to discuss a path forward for the party and “issues arising out of the impeachment” of former President Donald Trump. It is not clear if the committee of Republicans will discuss censuring party member Sen. Pat Toomey for his vote to convict Mr. Trump. But the meeting comes after several county parties have moved to do so — claiming Mr. Toomey didn’t have the interests of the GOP in mind when he said Mr. Trump bore responsibility for the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol.

The state party’s chairman, Lawrence Tabas, emailed committee members across Pennsylvania last Thursday to call the meeting, which will be held virtually this week, according to a readout from a Republican official who received the dispatch. Moving to censure Mr. Toomey — or formally denote their disapproval of him — could risk dividing Republicans along ideological lines, as some think the party should defend Mr. Trump and others believe Mr. Toomey shouldn’t be punished for voting his conscience.

Sam DeMarco, chairman of the Republican Committee of Allegheny County, has said he doesn’t personally support censuring Mr. Toomey, and cautioned fellow party members to “act thoughtfully and not reflexively.” He’s said he worries that such a vote would send the wrong signal to Republicans who want to play a bigger part in the party but have genuine disagreements in some areas.

Mr. Toomey, joining six other Republican senators in voting to convict Mr. Trump, accused the former president of inflaming his supporters with disproven allegations of widespread voter fraud and pushed them to prevent Congress from certifying the results of the election — a betrayal “of the Constitution and his oath of office” that required conviction. “I understand that most Republicans probably disagree with the conclusion that I came to,” Mr. Toomey said during a radio appearance on WPHT-AM in Philadelphia last week, according to The Associated Press. “I don’t think it’s a good idea for the party to be deciding that they’re going to censure a particular elected Republican over a particular vote, and I think it sends a bad message to the many Republicans — even if they’re in the minority — the many Republicans who do agree with what I’ve done here.” – ***Pittsburgh Post-Gazette***

