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Growing concerns over political influence in 5G development by the U.S. military spurred a congressional inquiry announced Friday by Rep. Mike Doyle, D-Forest Hills, who heads the House Energy and Commerce Committee's telecommunications oversight panel, and Rep. Frank Pallone, D-N.J., the committee's chairman.

In a statement, Mr. Doyle and Mr. Pallone questioned the political motivations behind the U.S. Defense Department's "apparent moves to own and operate a national 5G network and lease federal spectrum for commercial purposes." "We have heard reports that the suddenness of this request and the short turnaround time frame have been prompted directly by senior White House officials" who are "pushing for the seismic shift in spectrum policy," Mr. Doyle and Mr. Pallone wrote.

The lawmakers raised red flags after the department's request for information on Sept. 18 that, in part, asked how the department could "own and operate 5G networks for its domestic operations" and whether it "should consider spectrum leasing as an alternative to reallocation." "DOD's partnership with industry is imperative in this extremely technical and competitive field," Dana Deasy, the department's chief information officer, said in a statement announcing the request for information. "What we learn in this effort has potential to benefit the entire nation and keep the U.S. as the global leader of 5G technology for many years to come."

But Mr. Doyle believes the questions demonstrated "a fundamental misunderstanding of the law," the lawmakers wrote. Spectrum allocated for federal use, such as the military, is prohibited from being used by nonfederal parties unless the Federal Communications Commission says otherwise, the lawmakers stated. The lawmakers also referred to news reports, including a Feb. 22 piece in Politico, that showed several political operatives or lobbyists with close ties to President Donald Trump or his staff — including Karl Rove, Peter Thiel, Newt Gingrich and Brad Parscale — stand to benefit from a quick rollout of the department's plan.

These reports suggested the Republican operatives are working for the benefit of Rivada Networks, a telecom company that has long championed a national network that Rivada would construct and operate. The lawmakers wrote to the Government Accountability Office to request an investigation. They also sent a letter to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, an arm of the U.S. Commerce Department that allocates federal spectrum, to request more information.

Many federal agencies have sought to usurp the NTIA's spectrum management authority by engaging directly in FCC dockets, the lawmakers pointed out. The Defense Department attempted to use legislative means — a provision of the annual defense bill last year — to "circumvent the NTIA's authority," the lawmakers wrote. Meanwhile, all five FCC commissioners have spoken out against the idea of a nationalized 5G network.

The Defense Department appears ready to move forward. Last week, a day before the lawmakers' letters were released, the department announced $600 million in awards for 5G experimentation and testing at five U.S. military test sites in Washington state, Nevada, Utah, California and Georgia. In June, the department expanded the number of military bases to 12 that it would use to conduct 5G testing.

The department has described its plans as the largest full-scale 5G tests for dual-use applications in the world. Each installation will bring together military services, industry leaders and academic experts to advance the Department's

5G capabilities, it stated. Projects will include piloting 5G-enabled augmented and virtual reality for mission planning and training, testing 5G-enabled Smart Warehouses, and evaluating 5G technologies to enhance distributed command and control. – ***Pittsburgh Post-Gazette***

Walt Disney Co. announced a major reorganization meant to give priority to its streaming-video services and ensure they get a steady flow of the company's best content, in a shift echoing similar moves by other entertainment giants.

Under the new structure, Disney is creating content groups for movies, general entertainment and sports. It is also forming a distribution arm to determine the best platform for any given content, whether that is a streaming service, a TV network or movie theaters. The new alignment pushes Disney's streaming platforms, including Disney+ and Hulu, even closer to the center of the company. The various programming arms, including movie and television studios, will be aiming to feed those streaming services, not just legacy outlets.

Disney Chief Executive Bob Chapek said the moves are a recognition of how consumers are changing their consumption habits, favoring streaming platforms over movie theaters and traditional broadcast and cable channels. "There is a seismic shift happening in the marketplace, and you can either lead or follow and we chose to lead," Mr. Chapek said of the company's push into streaming, adding that the focus is now on "what platform is best to meet those consumer needs."

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to slam the entertainment industry, and Disney has been particularly hard hit. Its Disneyland theme park in Southern California is still closed, and attendance at parks that have been reopened hasn't returned to normal. Many movie theaters around the nation remain closed or at limited capacity. Streaming services have been among the bright spots for Disney and other media companies during the coronavirus crisis, as consumers who are working from home and skipping vacations watch more content. Disney+, which said in August it had over 60 million subscribers world-wide, has been a big beneficiary of the pandemic's streaming surge.

Disney has faced external pressure to pivot more aggressively toward its streaming business, especially given the struggles of its legacy businesses such as cable networks. Activist investor Daniel Loeb, whose Third Point Capital is one of Disney's biggest stockholders, sent a letter recently to Mr. Chapek calling for Disney to devote more resources to its streaming operations. Disney is the latest entertainment giant to reorient its business by separating decisions over which shows and movies should be produced from decisions over which platforms are best suited to carry them. Comcast Corp.'s NBCUniversal has restructured much of its content business with this goal in mind, looking to elevate its Peacock streaming service, while AT&T Inc.'s WarnerMedia is centralizing its creative operations in hopes of bolstering its HBO Max service.

The media and entertainment distribution unit Disney has created will be overseen by Kareem Daniel, who most recently was president of consumer products, games and publishing. That unit will handle the distribution of Disney content as well as advertising and technology. A Disney veteran, Mr. Daniel has also had stints in Disney's strategy and business development unit and its motion-picture distribution business. Mr. Chapek said having distribution under Mr. Daniel will allow the company to "make our distribution decisions in a less preconceived notion."

The content side will be headed by the same executives currently in charge of movies, TV and sports. Disney Studios Co-Chairmen Alan Horn and Alan Bergman will oversee the new movie arm. Peter Rice, who oversees TV production for Disney, will become chairman of general entertainment content, while ESPN head Jimmy Pitaro will head the sports unit. Disney Chairman and former CEO Robert Iger will also continue to have an active role in content creation, the company said. Mr. Daniel and the heads of the content units will all report to Mr. Chapek.

The new content structure could end confusion in Hollywood about who is calling the shots regarding television content for Disney+. There had been some tension between Mr. Rice's unit and Disney+'s own programming team, people familiar with the matter said. Mr. Chapek played down any friction between the two, saying, "The same people that have been collaborating in the past will be collaborating in the future."

Rebecca Campbell, who was brought in to oversee Disney+ just last May, will continue in that role but now reports to Mr. Daniel. She will also head international operations and report to Mr. Chapek. The bulk of Disney's revenue still comes from its legacy businesses, including cable programming networks such as ESPN, Disney Channel and Freeform, which have suffered declines in subscribers and ratings due to cable cord-cutting. Ratings for the NBA Finals between the Los Angeles Lakers and Miami Heat were far below past years, amid competition with other live sports such as the National Football League. The fact the basketball playoffs were played at all during the pandemic—in an Orlando "bubble"—was viewed by many in the sports world as a success that averted a disaster for the league and its TV partners. The NFL, meantime, has had to postpone games as it struggles to contain a Covid-19 outbreak.

The theatrical film business was already facing challenges before the coronavirus shut down theaters across the country. The virus has led some movie studios to shorten the time between when a film arrives in theaters and when it appears on other platforms such as on-demand and streaming services—accelerating what industry observers saw as an inevitable shift. Disney released its big summer movie "Mulan" on Disney+ at a cost of $30. It is also moving its Pixar movie "Soul" to the service but at no extra charge. Mr. Chapek said that the company still believes in the theatrical business but that Disney needs the "freedom to take a strong pipeline of content and place it where it makes the most sense." – ***Wall Street Journal***

YouTube has supplanted Facebook as the most popular social media platform for viewing sports highlights, according to a new survey from Ring Digital. The research firm surveyed 1,400 sports video highlights viewers in August and found that 53% of respondents use YouTube for sports highlights on a regular basis, compared with 45% of respondents who said they use Facebook regularly. Ring Digital said the new results represented a significant change over a similar survey from 2017, when 63% of respondents said Facebook was their go-to for sports highlights and 43% of respondents said YouTube. "This data shows that social media is still king for sports videos highlights. But the popular destinations have shifted dramatically. YouTube and Instagram rose, Facebook declined," said Brian Ring, principal analyst of Ring Digital, in a statement.

Ring Digital's survey also suggests that social media has grown in popularity as the primary destination selected by 44% of respondents for sports highlights, a gain of ten percentage points over 2017. Since the previous survey, TV network apps gained four percentage points, with 28% of respondents calling them a go-to source. "The good news for the TV ecosystem is that the TV networks are still in the game, at least, to monetize premium sports highlights. League Apps have lost ground. Rights holders concerned about re-balancing the dominance and economics of social media will see this data as a call-to-action to re-balance content strategies," Ring said. – ***Fierce Video***

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