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## NewsClips

October 29, 2020

**Fierce Video**  
**Why is T-Mobile**  
**selling TV services?**

**TV Answer Man**  
**Hulu & YouTube TV**  
**vs. Sinclair Sports:**  
**When Will It End?**

**USA Today**  
**'Who the hell elected**  
**you?' Tech CEOs**  
**accused of bias**  
**against Trump and**  
**conservatives days**  
**before election**

**Fierce Wireless**  
**FCC adopts 5G rural**  
**fund, new coverage**  
**maps still needed**

**New York Times**  
**Facing Gap in**  
**Pennsylvania,**  
**Trump Camp Tries**

Comcast on Thursday reported third-quarter earnings that beat analyst estimates on the top and bottom lines. Comcast also reported better-than-expected net customer additions for high-speed internet service and further growth to its new streaming service, Peacock. The stock was up more than 4% in the premarket during the company's earnings call.

Here are the key numbers: Earnings per share: 65 cents, adjusted vs. 52 cents expected, according to Refinitiv survey of analysts; Revenue: \$25.53 billion vs. \$24.74 billion expected, according to Refinitiv; High-speed internet customers: 633,000 net adds vs. 534,000 net adds expected, according to FactSet

NBCUniversal's Peacock now has nearly 22 million sign-ups. The service, which offers free and paid options, had 10 million sign-ups when Comcast last reported earnings in July. Comcast said in its report that Peacock is "proving to be a differentiating factor for customers considering Xfinity broadband and is also improving churn." "Peacock has exceeded every internal engagement metric without the benefit of the Olympics or content like The Office (Jan. 2021)," Comcast said.

The company reported its best quarterly customer results in its history, adding more than 633,000 high-speed internet customers. Cable added more broadband customers in the first nine months of the year than in all of 2019, Comcast reported, including nearly 1 million customers in the second and third quarters. Comcast said its Europe-based Sky division has continued to add higher-priced customers and reduce churn. Its quarter was strengthened in

[to Make Voting Harder](#)

*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

[For now, Pa.'s ballot-counting extension intact as Supreme Court declines to hear GOP appeal](#)

*Spotlight PA*  
[Potentially thousands of requested mail ballots lost in Pa. county, official says](#)

*The Hill*  
[Rubio warns that election interference may ramp up around Election Day](#)

part by the return of sports, including record Premier League viewership on Sky Sports.

Comcast's theme parks business, which is part of its NBCUniversal division, has suffered the most during the pandemic as closures and capacity restrictions strain revenue. Theme park revenue fell nearly 81% to \$311 million, according to the report. Comcast said that excluding theme parks, NBCUniversal earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization grew by 9% year over year.

California has kept theme parks closed under strict reopening guidelines that allow them to resume operations only after their counties reach a Covid infection rate of less than 1 case per 100,000 residents. Universal's parks in Florida and Japan have been able to reopen with limited capacity. Filmed entertainment has also suffered during the pandemic, which interrupted movie production and theater premieres. Revenue for the segment fell 25% to \$1.3 billion. The dip in theatrical revenue was partially offset by increased licensing and home entertainment revenue, including from the at-home release of "Trolls World Tour."

Comcast's Universal Pictures [struck a deal](#) with AMC Studios in July that could help navigate the changed behaviors of consumers during the pandemic. Under the deal, AMC will show Universal films in its theaters but shorten the window of time before Universal can bring movies to consumers on-demand.

Here's how Comcast's divisions did for the quarter: Cable communications accounted for \$15 billion in total revenue, up 2.9% year over year; Cable networks accounted for \$2.7 billion in total revenue, down 1.3%; Broadcast television brought in \$2.4 billion in total revenue, up 8.3%; Filmed entertainment brought in \$1.3 billion in total revenue, down 25%; Theme parks brought in \$311 million in total revenue, down 80.9%. – **CNBC**

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Political pundits and prognosticators from across the land agree on this: As Pennsylvania goes in 2020, so goes the presidency. While some may quibble with the definitive nature of that pronouncement, few argue that Pennsylvania's bloc of 20 electoral votes will be pivotal again this year.

In 2016 the Keystone State went for President Trump by 0.7 percent. It was the first time in almost three decades that a Republican presidential candidate had carried the state. Trump's 44,000-vote win was working proof that, once again, every vote counted. So when tens of thousands of 2020 ballots began showing up with obvious errors, red flags popped up all over the rolling hills of Penn's Woods.

Pennsylvania isn't used to widespread early voting. In fact, this is the first general election where it's been available to the commonwealth's [9 million voters](#). During the primary — held on its latest date in recent history, in June, because of the pandemic — there were [more than a few glitches](#). Folks prayed the kinks would be worked out by the time the general election rolled around. Then the U.S. Attorney in Harrisburg announced that he'd discovered a batch of military mail-in ballots, virtually all of them marked for Donald Trump, [in a trash can](#) in northeast Pennsylvania.

Shortly thereafter, in the opposite corner of the state in Allegheny County, home of Pittsburgh and its suburbs, [nearly 30,000 voters](#) got the wrong ballot. This is the same county where one of its left-wing council members recently posted pictures of herself and two other county Democrats in the nude as a way of highlighting "naked ballots." They've already had their share of unusual occurrences this election cycle, but this was an additional challenge. Nobody alleged fraud; it was a technical error by an Ohio company hired to print and distribute the ballots. But it was a gigantic snafu without an obvious solution nonetheless.

While heads were shaking, the same Ohio vendor was in the process of sending out another roughly 20,000 Allegheny County ballots. They were destroyed. In a bizarre and ironic twist, technical problems with this firm also delayed the mailing of 50,000 ballots in neighboring Westmoreland County. Allegheny County began by sending out a second set of ballots containing the correct lists of candidates. There was a problem with this solution, however. People had already voted using the incorrect ballots. This set up a number of unacceptable possibilities. Voters potentially could have voted more than once, or voted and not had their vote counted. The county didn't follow the Pennsylvania Election Code, but in fairness, there wasn't any instruction in the code for this particular issue.

Local Democrats began fighting among themselves over who was to blame for the mess. Others watched what was unfolding with both alarm and bemusement. President Trump tweeted about it. Enter two Republican congressional candidates and election law expert Thomas W. King III, an attorney who filed [a federal court action](#) on behalf of candidates Sean Parnell and Luke Negrón. Named as defendants were Allegheny County Council Members, including the one who had given voters more to look at than many would have preferred.

King's goal was clear. "We simply wanted to insure that every vote that should be counted is counted, but that no one votes twice and that no voter is denied their right to vote. ... Because there is no process to handle this problem in the Pennsylvania Election Code, we really had to go to court in order to ensure an orderly and legal process for resolving it."

The left piled on. The Pennsylvania Democratic Party, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, Rep. Conor Lamb (D-Pa.) and some local Democratic pols became intervenors in the case. The usual suspects, from the American Civil Liberties Union to Common Cause, filed amicus briefs. After several days of legal wrangling and negotiations between King and the various Democratic lawyers, the plaintiffs emerged with a consent order signed by federal Judge J. Nicholas Ranjan.

King was pleased with the final result, noting: "Sean Parnell and Luke Negrón demonstrated true leadership in challenging this mailed-ballot problem and pursuing a solution to ensure that every vote will be properly cast and counted in Allegheny County." Supporting the litigation was the Amistad Project of the St. Thomas More Society. Their director, a former state attorney general and now law professor, said: "Ballots for this year's election are integral to our fundamental rights as citizens and their integrity are essential."

All should be well that ends well. But just over the border in Ohio, [50,000 Buckeye State voters](#) received faulty ballots. In New York, it was nearly [twice that many](#). Universal mail voting isn't as easy as it looks. Proponents argue that some states have been doing it for years. That's a fact. However, the key phrase is "for years." Washington state is often cited as an example of early voting by mail. They've been voting by mail for almost 10 years. But their vote-by-mail system wasn't built overnight. "We've been at it for a decade," said Julie Wise, director of elections for the state's largest county. "It's not going to be an easy lift to make that transition (to mail-in voting). ... It's not going to be pretty." Ms. Wise scores the understatement of this political year.

"Pretty" obviously isn't the goal. A secure election — in which every vote that should be cast is, and every properly cast ballot is counted — is the goal. Even without addressing the issues surrounding fraud and the potential for it, the administrative problems of voting by mail for the first time present a huge challenge to achieving that vital objective. Perhaps introducing it in the biggest election of our history was not the best idea. — **Harrisburg-based political strategist — and frequent Cable Academy panelist — Charlie Gerow's op-ed in *The Hill***

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A prominent Republican I know well tells me, “A red army is ready to march” in Pennsylvania Tuesday to once again win the state for President Donald Trump and hand him four more years. A top Democratic numbers guy asks, “How many polls do you need to see?” He notes multiple state polls put Joe Biden ahead with numbers at or near 50% with too few undecideds left for Trump to win.

One of them is right. But behind the bluster and data crunching in a state labeled *the* election decider, is a landscape of variables, some rooted in facts, some rooted in feelings, to influence the final tally – whenever that may come. Structurally, the race here is Biden’s to lose. Not because he’s a great candidate. He’s not. Never was.

But the state has more Democrats than Republicans (686,000 more). Voting patterns since Trump took office favor Democratic candidates. Huge numbers of mail-in votes favor Biden. Polling favors Biden. [Pennsylvania pollsters say their methodologies are better](#), more accurate than four years ago when they missed the extent of Trump’s support, especially among voters without college degrees.

Biden isn’t the polarizing candidate Hillary Clinton was. And Biden isn’t Trump. He’s running against an incumbent who never got to a 50% approval rating in [Gallup polling](#), a president who was impeached, who snubs civility, eschews the truth, denigrates science, and downplayed and still downplays an ongoing pandemic that sickens and kills Americans. Also, Biden pushes personal empathy to contrast with, for example, Trump tossing paper towels to hurricane survivors in Puerto Rico in 2018 and claiming, [at an Ohio rally last month](#), the coronavirus “affects virtually nobody.” (So far, 8.7 million U.S. cases, 225,000 deaths, including Pennsylvania’s 200,000 cases, 8,700 deaths; plus, impact on family and friends of the stricken, businesses lost, workers unemployed, etc.)

And yet. Trump’s run a real race here. Multiple rallies with tons of free media. Summertime door-to-door voter registration drives. And fear-factor messages of higher taxes, economic ruin, falling 401(k)s, job losses in fracking areas, and less law and order if Biden’s elected. Campaign visuals are stark. We’ve seen an energized Trump before adoring crowds versus Biden in a mask talking to people in cars.

A Washington Post/ABC News poll of the state found 71% of Trump supporters “very enthusiastic” about supporting him, and 51% of Biden supporters “very enthusiastic” about supporting Biden. A 20-point spread. Feelings about candidates differ. In a Franklin & Marshall College poll, 84% of Trump supporters say their vote is more a vote for Trump than against Biden. But the majority of Biden supporters, 56%, say their vote is more against Trump than for Biden. Trump is both loathed and loved. Biden isn’t disliked, but neither is he embraced.

In fact, Biden’s middling persona is key among reasons [I wrote in July he’d win the state in November](#). Still, I recently told a Gettysburg College class on the presidency I won’t be surprised by a Biden blowout, a Trump repeat, or results too close to call. That’s because I wonder about [national Gallup tracking](#) that shows a majority (56%) of registered voters say they and their families are better off than four years ago.

I wonder about retirees, especially in the state’s northeast and southwest, anxious about their savings and IRAs. And GOP registration gains in rural areas. Do they add up to a new, decisive bloc of Trump support? Or does a combination of Philly turnout well above 2016 and Democratic voting trends in Philly’s collar counties far outweigh whatever Trump gains elsewhere? And my big underlining question is this: In a pandemic, amid economic uncertainty and anxiety about the future, can culture issues drive an election?

Rich Lowry, editor of the conservative National Review, (not a Trump fan; writes of Trump's "abysmal conduct and maladministration") makes a case for maybe. In an article indelicately titled "[The Only Middle Finger Available.](#)" Lowry says if Trump wins it's because he offers a way to deliver an emphatic, if crude, "no" to the cultural left. It's because for those annoyed by everything from MeToo to Black Lives Matter, Trump represents resistance to "the overwhelming woke cultural tide that has swept along media, academia, corporate America, Hollywood, professional sports, the big foundations and almost everything in between."

No doubt that's in Pennsylvania's mix. As is Trump's pandemic performance. And voters' finances/quality of life. All of which weigh differently. Some more or less. Pennsylvania might well decide who wins the White House. But Democrats have won the state and lost the election (John Kerry in 2004; Al Gore in 2000). And Republicans won the state and lost the election (Thomas Dewey in 1948; Herbert Hoover in 1932).

So, will the Keystone State see a "Red Army" or a "Blue Wave?" Yes. – **John Baer's column in *Harrisburg Patriot-News***

