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Nielsen is standing by its estimate showing an eye-popping subscriber loss at ESPN in the span of a month, but the sports network still isn't buying it.



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Tensions have run high between ESPN and Nielsen since the ratings specialist put out its November estimates of TV networks' subscriber s last Friday, showing that ESPN lost 621,000 subscriber s in a month. E SPN pilloried the numbers, calling them a "dramatic, unexplain able variation." The sports TV giant took a dig at Nielsen, noting "their demonstr ated failures

over the years to accurately provide subscriber data." ESPN said the numbers didn't track with its internal estimates but also declined to release those.

Given the backlash, Nielsen took the report down Sunday to investigate whether there was a measurement issue. In a statement Friday, Nielsen said after investigating the

WESA-FM, Pittsburgh How PA's Elections Really Are Rigged

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“larger than usual change,” it has verified that its original estimates were accurate. It said the declines that most cable networks experienced were driven by cord-cutting -- an overall decline of 0.55% in the universe of customers subscribing to pay-television through cable, satellite or phone companies. Now, about 98.4 million homes subscribe to pay-TV in the U.S.

ESPN isn't backing down. On Friday, it called the data a “historic anomaly for the industry and inconsistent with much more moderated trends observed by other respected third party analysts.” The network noted that the number doesn't measure new streaming TV operators like Dish Network Corp.'s Sling TV and Sony Corp.'s PlayStation Vue, which carry ESPN. “We hope to work with Nielsen to capture this growing market in future reports.”

Nielsen's subscriber estimates showed declines among many cable networks, not just ESPN, according to Pivotal Research Group analyst Brian Wieser. In a report last week, Mr. Wieser said that median cable network penetration fell by about 1.4%. Mr. Wieser said he believes Nielsen's data, though they are estimates, are “useful for assessing long-term trends around households subscription levels to different networks.” In a note Friday, he said the ESPN-Nielsen dustup “serves to highlight that complaints from media owners or others who would benefit from adjustments to the data regarding Nielsen...should generally be taken with a proverbial grain of salt. In fact, they should often be ignored.”

Bruce Leichtman, another industry analyst and **Cable Academy 2016 keynoter**, disagrees. He said that Nielsen's numbers “make absolutely no sense” given that the third quarter is shaping up to be an “okay quarter” and there has never been a fourth quarter where the industry has experienced an overall subscriber decline. “It is such a glaring aberration.” ESPN-parent Walt Disney Co. reports earnings for the September quarter next week. – ***Wall Street Journal***

Kristin Dolan isn't giving up on her love of TV technology **despite Cablevision's sale to Altice for \$17.7 billion** in June.

Dolan, the former Cablevision chief operating officer who is married to MSG boss James Dolan, is creating a new family fund to invest in data and analytics companies in the addressable advertising space. Kristin is founding Dolan Family Ventures, a private company based in Long Island's Oyster Bay, to spearhead such investments. Dolan won't say how much money the family will be spending, but she tells On the Money to expect some deals soon.

AT&T's proposed \$85 billion Time Warner get-together has put the topic of addressable advertising on the front burner. Dolan says TV hasn't been able to deliver Amish furniture ads to folks searching in Pennsylvania. “We never got that on TV — it was age and gender, and advances made through cable and satellite can do more targeted advertising. We want to continue to explore that opportunity.” On the topic of AT&T's proposed acquisition, she says: “It's big news, I'm excited for the Time Warner guys.” As for other M&A targets, she says to keep an eye on Cox Communications, a family-owned cable operator, which is still independent.

The Dolan family took a little time off before plunging back into the media business last summer. The family went to the Galapagos Islands with their six kids in the summer and then, in October, they celebrated Cablevision founder Chuck Dolan's 90th birthday. “He goes to the office every day,” and people still approach him about their ideas, she says. – ***New York Post***

President Barack Obama struck back at Republican U.S. Sen. Pat Toomey on Saturday for using footage of the Democrat praising Toomey's courage in a TV campaign ad in his life-or-death re-election bid in Pennsylvania.

In a statement to The Associated Press, Obama said Toomey needed to do more to show courage than taking one right vote on legislation to expand background checks all firearms purchases online and at gun shows. "Courage is telling Pennsylvania voters where you stand on the tough issues, not just the easy ones like background checks," Obama said in the statement. "Pat Toomey won't tell Pennsylvania voters where he stands on Donald Trump, trying instead to have it both ways by telling different people what he thinks they want to hear. That's not courage. Voting to shut down the government and against bills to close the terrorist gun loophole isn't courage. And playing politics with the Supreme Court isn't courage."

Obama has endorsed Toomey's opponent, Democrat Katie McGinty, who served in Bill Clinton's White House and was recruited by national Democrats to run against Toomey.

Toomey, who compiled one of Congress' most conservative voting records, is among the Senate's most vulnerable incumbents in a state where Democrats have a 4 to 3 registration advantage over Republicans. The race could help tip control of the Senate to Democrats. Toomey has been a tough critic of Obama, and opposed practically all of Obama's major policy initiatives, from health care to immigration. He routinely delivers a stump speech that labels Obama's economic and foreign policies as complete failures.

At a campaign event on Saturday, he lambasted the handling of economic policy in Washington, without naming Obama. On Saturday, Toomey told reporters after the event in West Chester, 25 miles west of Philadelphia, that he was not worried that his use of Obama in a TV ad would hurt him with Pennsylvania's Republican voters. "President Obama stood up publicly and praised my work of reaching across the aisle and trying to get something done on an important issue, which is background checks," Toomey said. "And of course the other side has tried to discredit and deny the work that I did. I think President Obama said it well, so we used his clip, it's his quote, him, it's what he said, in context."

In the 30-second ad, Obama is speaking outside the White House in 2013 and thanks Toomey for his courage, despite the bill's failure. "That was not easy," Obama said of the work by Toomey and Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va. It is the latest, and perhaps the most eye-opening, way in which Toomey is working to appeal to moderate voters whose support he will need to beat McGinty. The ad is running on cable in the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh markets.

The effort on the background checks bill cost Toomey endorsements from gun rights groups, including the National Rifle Association, even though Toomey voted more often than not with the NRA. But that vote by Toomey also helped him pick up the endorsements of two prominent gun-control activists, billionaire Michael Bloomberg and former Democratic congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords. – **Associated Press**



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