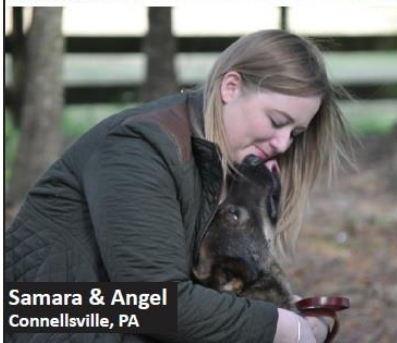




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The Atlantic
Right-Wing Social Media Finalizes Its Divorce From Reality

Altice USA, just days after euthanizing its \$8.4 billion bid for Canadian telecom company Cogeco, said it would repurchase about \$2.5 billion of its shares, a move that boosted its stock by more than 8% in early trading Monday. Altice USA shares were up about 8.4% (\$2.73 each) to \$34.99 per share in early trading Nov. 23, primarily because of the buyback plans. Analysts and investors have been looking for Altice USA to increase its share repurchase program after it pulled the plug on its bid to buy Cogeco Communications earlier this month.

Altice USA launched the Cogeco bid, with Canadian telecom giant Rogers Communications, on Sept. 2 for \$7.8 billion (\$3.4 billion for Cogeco's U.S. cable company, Atlantic Broadband). After being rejected by Cogeco's controlling shareholder and increasing its offer in October to \$8.4 billion, which was also rejected, Altice USA formally gave up on the pursuit on Nov. 18.

According to a press release, Altice USA said it has commenced a Dutch auction tender offer to repurchase \$2.5 billion of its shares, at a price not to exceed \$36, nor less than \$32.25 each. Altice USA's share price as of Nov. 20 was \$32.27 each. The offer will be open until Dec. 21 and is contingent on the completion of its sale of 49% of its Lightpath telecom unit to Morgan Stanley Infrastructure Partners, which recently received regulatory approval.

Altice USA also raised its share repurchase target for 2020 to \$5 billion from \$2.5 billion previously. The company said it repurchased about \$660 million of its shares between Oct. 1 and Nov. 20, putting its year-to-date buybacks at about \$2.5 billion. In a research note, Bernstein media analyst Peter Supino

Harrisburg Patriot-News

Pa. Gov. Tom Wolf signs no-new-tax budget bills to get state government operations through the rest of the fiscal year

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Pa. Supreme Court allows count of 2,000 ballots challenged by Nicole Ziccarelli

Harrisburg Patriot-News

Trump campaign asks appeals court to prevent certification of Pa. votes for president

Philadelphia Inquirer

Op-ed: Biden may have won the presidency, but the GOP won Pennsylvania's future

said the buybacks were expected, but was surprised at the timing and the amount.

"This offer seems to indicate the strength of the underlying business and the public LBO strategy of the company," Supino wrote. "While we anticipated that the Lightpath deal would potentially result in an increased capital return to shareholders, we did not expect the timing or magnitude of the transaction." The offer price of the buyback represents a 12% premium to Altice USA's closing price on Nov. 20, and will result in a 12.8% to 14.3% reduction of outstanding shares. According to Supino, Altice has bought back about \$5 billion of its stock at an average price of \$24 each since 2018. -- **Next TV**

A bipartisan group of U.S. states plans to file an antitrust lawsuit against Google as early as next month, according to two people briefed on the matter, potentially beating a more widely anticipated lawsuit from a different group of states led by Texas. The pending legal actions follow an antitrust lawsuit filed by the U.S. Justice Department against Alphabet's Google in October.

The bipartisan group -- made up of Colorado, Iowa, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Utah -- is sometimes referred to as the Colorado/Nebraska group and has said it planned to combine its case with the federal government's. Google has broadly denied wrongdoing in response to the government's lawsuit and other probes, and the company said that its search engine and other products are dominant because consumers prefer them.

Two people briefed on the matter said the Colorado/Nebraska group planned to file their lawsuit around mid-December, with one of the people saying a filing was expected in federal district court. Texas led a group of attorneys general from 50 states and territories which announced a probe of Google in September 2019. Fast forward a year, and Texas is leading a group focused on online advertising technology while the Colorado/Nebraska group has a broader probe under way. The Texas effort may be slowed by turmoil in the state attorney general's office.

One source pointed to disruptions after recent media reports said the FBI was investigating accusations that Attorney General Ken Paxton abused his office to help a political donor. Several of Paxton's aides, who had become whistleblowers, resigned or were fired, including people who were key to the Google investigation. Texas has been aiming to find replacements, and it has promoted Shawn Cowles to be the deputy attorney general for civil litigation. But the turnover has led to delays. The Texas attorney general's office could not be reached for comment.

The Colorado/Nebraska group states' broader inquiry contrasts with the Justice Department's relatively narrow lawsuit, which focused on Google's efforts to build and retain its dominance in search and its search advertising business. -- **Reuters**

Pennsylvania counties rushed Monday to certify results from the Nov. 3 election, even as President Donald Trump and his Republican allies continued to press their increasingly long-shot effort in court to stop the state from finalizing the vote tally declaring Joe Biden the victor. As county boards of elections convened for what is normally little more than sleepy formality, the impact of the president's push to undermine public trust in the integrity of the vote repeatedly surfaced.

In at least three of the state's most populous counties — Montgomery, Allegheny and Luzerne — boards split their votes along party lines. And in several others, speakers at public meetings urged elections administrators to reject the results, echoing baseless conspiracy theories of widespread fraud

and malfunctioning voting machines that Trump has propagated in recent weeks.

Still, the vast majority of certification votes — including those in Philadelphia, Bucks and Chester counties — proceeded Monday with unanimous, bipartisan support. And there were no reports of county boards voting against certification, even as they faced scrutiny that elections administrators described as like nothing they had ever seen before. “I understand that people have strong feelings about this and I understand that people get information from various sources, but I personally have faith in the process,” said Gerald Lawrence, a Democrat and chair of the Delaware County Board of Elections, moments before all three members of his panel voted to approve certification.

Before the board members cast their votes, county elections staff recounted threats and harassment they endured from skeptics while preparing the final tally. And Lawrence swatted away complaints from the public about a frequent Trump target — Dominion Voting Systems — noting the county did not use the company’s voting machines. As she addressed the Montgomery County elections board Monday, Kaitlin Destine, of Telford, repeated Trump’s false claims that GOP monitors had been excluded from watching the counting of votes there. “To hear that poll watchers, specifically Republicans, were not allowed to view these mail ballots, it’s just a fraud,” she said. “It’s against the constitutional rights to a free and fair election.

Joe Gale, the board’s Republican vice chair, cast the Montgomery County board’s lone vote against certification Monday. “There is no way to verify the authenticity of one half of the votes cast this year,” he said, making unsupported claims that mail ballots could not be trusted. “I believe the U.S. Supreme Court should review the travesty that has happened this year in Pennsylvania.” Certification votes in Allegheny and Luzerne counties — the latter of which Trump carried by 14 points — ultimately passed Monday morning but were also marked by partisan division.

Such debate is rare when it comes to the typically routine procedure of a board endorsing its county’s final results, said Kevin Greenberg, a Democrat election lawyer. But after Trump’s reported attempt last week to interfere with certification votes in Michigan’s Wayne County, home to Detroit, by personally contacting officials and encouraging them to block the vote, interest in the process in Pennsylvania has run high. “I’ve never seen this much focus on something that is a purely ministerial act,” said Greenberg. “These counties have already counted the ballots. They know how many there are. There’s no right under any statute for them to just refuse to send those numbers. ... It would be like a high school at the end of four years, after students have passed all their tests and all their grades have been submitted, simply refusing to print a transcript for that student.”

State law required all 67 of Pennsylvania’s counties to certify their results within 20 days of the election, in this case by Monday, so the Department of State can finalize the statewide returns. Some counties, including Monroe and Mercer, certified results last week. The Philadelphia city commissioners, who run elections, planned to certify their results Monday evening. At least four counties — Berks, Carbon, Schuylkill and Westmoreland — indicated they would not meet that deadline, citing various procedural roadblocks that would postpone final numbers for days, public radio station WITF reported.

But as Pennsylvania moved swiftly toward officially declaring Biden its victor by some 81,000 votes, Trump and his legal team scrambled in their efforts to avert it, saying that even if the state moved ahead they would pursue court orders seeking decertification. “Certification by state officials is simply a procedural step,” Trump campaign legal adviser Jenna Ellis said.

The president’s lawyers turned to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 3rd Circuit, asking it to review a scathing ruling this weekend from a federal judge, who dismissed the campaign’s case, calling it a “Frankenstein’s monster” of claims that would effectively disenfranchise all of the state’s 6.8 million voters. In

filings Monday, the campaign insisted it did not want to invalidate all ballots cast in the state, just those in seven Democratic-leaning counties including Philadelphia and its suburbs, where they have alleged with no evidence that mail ballots were purposefully mishandled to give Biden an edge. The appellate court did not indicate whether it intended to hear arguments on the matter but said it would expedite its ultimate decision given the state's looming deadlines.

Meanwhile, last-minute rulings by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court resolved questions still lingering around other disputed pools of votes in Philadelphia, Allegheny and Bucks counties. The justices rejected a Trump campaign effort to disqualify thousands of ballots in each that were submitted without required dates, handwritten addresses, or the printed names of voters. While the state election code requires voters to fill out each of those elements, Justice Christine Donohue, writing for the majority, said the absence of just one "does not warrant the wholesale disenfranchisement of thousands of Pennsylvania voters" who had otherwise made a good-faith effort to ensure their votes would be counted.

That cleared the way for Philadelphia's elections administrators to include 8,300 previously disputed mail ballots in the certified tally they approved Monday night. Of the four Pennsylvania counties that indicated their certifications would be delayed, only Westmoreland told WITF that it would not be able to complete the process until next week. While there are no hard legal deadlines for when the state as a whole has to certify its results, there are some practical ones.

The legislative session ends Nov. 30, meaning all 203 representatives in the state House of Representatives and half of the 50 state senators will officially end their terms next Monday. Lawmakers can't be seated in districts where the results haven't been certified, since there's no official winner yet. For the presidential election, the state has until Dec. 8, what's known as the federal "safe harbor" deadline, to officially name its 20 electors to the Electoral College, who meet Dec. 14.

Elections administrators expressed confidence that they would be able to meet that deadline. And some said they even welcomed the extra attention around the process this year. "I'm glad people are looking this closely at it, because it's sort of like a civics lesson in terms of how it works," said Bob Harvie, a Democrat member of Bucks County's election board. "It's a detailed process, it's a long process, and it's intentionally detailed and long to make sure you're doing everything properly." – *Philadelphia Inquirer*

