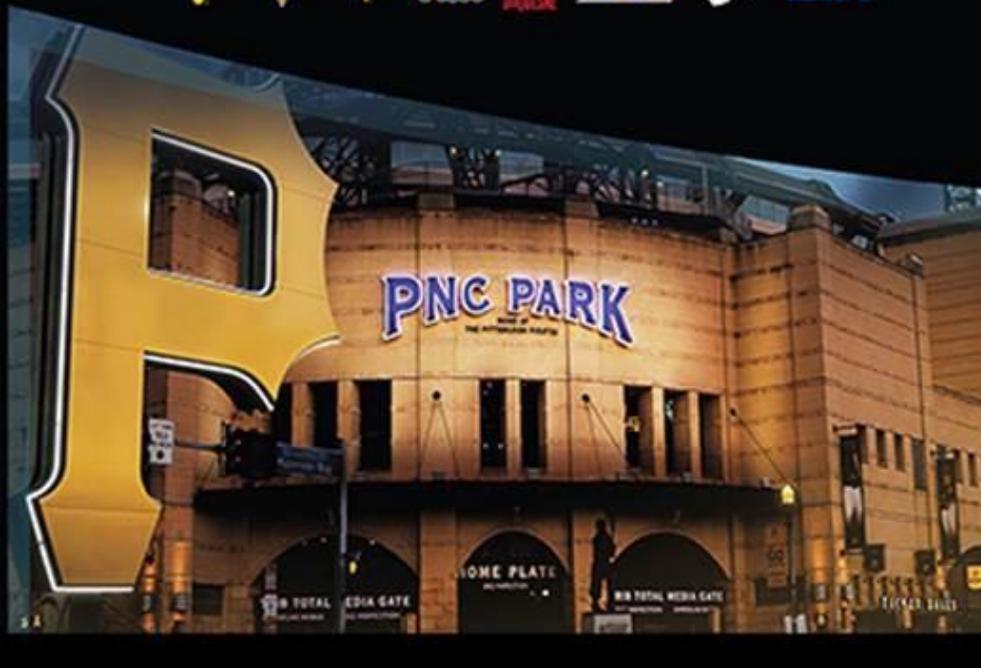




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## **Pennlive**

**Op-ed: Please say no to another decade of Harrisburg dysfunction**

Comcast Corp. is in advanced talks to acquire video-streaming company Xumo LLC, according to people familiar with the matter, as the cable giant prepares to launch its own streaming service. Talks between the two companies are exclusive, and it is possible that negotiations could break down, some of the people said. Financial terms of the prospective deal couldn't be learned.

Xumo is one of a handful of companies that offer a free, ad-supported video-streaming service across a range of internet-connected TVs. Others include ViacomCBS -owned Pluto TV, which was acquired for \$340 million in January, and Tubi TV. Irvine, Calif.-based Xumo TV was formed in 2011 by Viant Technology LLC, which was then known as Interactive Media Holdings. One of Xumo's shareholders is magazine and TV company Meredith Corp. Xumo's app is available on services including Roku and on smart TVs from manufacturers such as Vizio, Panasonic and Samsung.

The potential acquisition would come as Comcast's NBCUniversal prepares to launch **its streaming service, Peacock**, in April. Xumo could provide technical and business support for Comcast's streaming efforts across its pay-TV service, Xfinity, Peacock and European pay-TV giant Sky, which Comcast acquired last year, some of the people said.

Xumo also powers free, ad-supported streaming services from other companies. It is used by LG Electronics Inc. for its free video product LG Channels. Xumo also repackages traditional TV content into new digital channels, a capacity that some traditional TV programmers have used as they transition to video streaming.

Comcast has said that Peacock, which will have a library of original content and classic shows such as "The Office," would rely heavily on advertising rather than subscriptions. Comcast Chief Financial Officer Michael Cavanagh said at a recent conference that the company sees an opportunity for additional advertising-supported services as the market becomes saturated with more subscription-based streaming services on top of traditional pay-TV.

Comcast has said subscribers would receive Peacock free, and the company is working to reach deals with other cable providers that would allow it to be free to pay-TV subscribers. The company is also considering offering different subscription tiers. Like its rivals, Comcast has been losing pay-TV customers as more consumers opt to cut the cord and subscribe to streaming services and web-based live-TV bundles. In addition to Peacock, earlier this year the company entered the streaming hardware game **with its Flex device**, which it decided to make available free to all of its broadband-only customers. – ***Wall Street Journal***

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In a rare bipartisan achievement, Congress has moved to combat the scourge of robocalls inundating Americans. Just don't expect the phone to stop ringing any time soon. The robocall law, which **passed both the House and Senate** by wide margins, prods phone companies to cut off illegal marketers or scammers before the phone rings by spotting suspect traffic.

The legislation also **boosts penalties** for breakers of telephone consumer-protection laws and mandates that government agencies and companies work more closely together in stemming robocalls. The bill must still be signed by President Trump, which is expected given the near-unanimous support by both parties. Lawmakers, industry and consumer groups say the bill represents significant steps forward, but they also concede that the calls are likely to continue—a reflection of how a lasting solution continues to elude the companies and regulators that control the telephone system. “This isn’t going to eliminate every robocall,” said Sen. John Thune (R., S.D.), one of the bill’s prime sponsors, in an interview. “But we think it will go a long way toward getting at some of these not only annoying nuisance calls, but more importantly a lot of scam artists that prey on vulnerable populations.”

Even the new law’s name—the TRACED Act, for Telephone Robocall Abuse Criminal Enforcement and Deterrence—makes clear the goal is to deter robocallers rather than eradicate them. Lawmakers have previously **tried and failed to stop robocalls**, most prominently with the opening of the National Do Not Call Registry about 15 years ago. (Criminals ignore the list of off-limits numbers.) Implementing this latest anti-robocall law is likely to take years, telecom industry executives and robocall experts say. New consumer-protection rules will take months to craft and longer to implement. Lawmakers also left aspects of the problem for future study, calling for eight new reports and two new working groups.

Some of the billions of robocalls Americans receive are legitimate, such as calls from a pharmacy telling a customer a prescription is ready. The calls are illegal when used for scams, or when they violate consumer-protection rules such as those against calling someone without their permission using a recorded message. Here is a look at what the TRACED Act does, and what it doesn’t do:

What the act does: The **Federal Communications Commission** now has a longer shot clock to bring a robocall case—up to four years, instead of one or two currently. In an effort to speed up enforcement, the agency also now may take legal action against violators without issuing a warning first, as they have previously been required to do. The law is designed to push prosecutors to jail violators of telephone consumer-protection laws, recognizing that the government struggles to collect on big-ticket fines from civil litigation. The new law requires the FCC to share evidence of robocall violations with the attorney general, and to disclose how often it does so.

What it doesn’t do: More prosecutions won’t necessarily solve the “Whac-A-Mole” problem: Mass dialing with internet-based technology is so easy that bad actors pop up constantly using new names or locations. The FCC doesn’t shut robocallers down immediately, instead following an enforcement process that takes months, if not years to play out while authorities gather evidence and make legal filings. On Dec. 12, the agency proposed a roughly \$10 million fine for calls that occurred in May 2018. An FCC official said the agency must follow due process.

What the act does: The FCC must empower phone companies to block more calls without fear of a lawsuit, all while not adding new line items on consumers’ bills. The agency has already written some rules with these goals in mind. The law also backs new requirements to prevent

“spoofing,” a practice where robocallers mask their identity with a faked caller ID. Major phone companies have already promised to use call-authentication technology, known as Stir/Shaken. Under the new law any laggards who don’t adopt this technology would have to show the FCC how they are mitigating robocalls.

What it doesn’t do: It isn’t known yet whether the bill will overcome carriers’ historic fears about blocking legitimate calls. For example, phone companies are loath to stop emergency calls, but those calls can be hard to identify. Curbing “spoofing” also won’t stop swindlers entirely, experts say. Robocallers could obtain blocks of real phone numbers, which are available for rent, and make millions of calls. The new law leaves this issue for future study and gives the FCC regulatory authority to address it. Lawmakers also dropped from the final bill a provision clarifying the legal definition of **“auto-dialer” technology**, the equipment used to make robocalls. Proponents of that provision said it would resolve conflicting court rulings about how businesses can legally contact consumers and ensure robocallers can’t tailor their dialing technology to get around telemarketing rules. Mr. Thune believes the FCC should address this issue, a spokesman said.

What the act does: The new law tells the FCC it may publish a list of phone companies found to be facilitating robocalls and “take appropriate enforcement action.” Scammers rely on such companies, paying them fractions of a cent for each call they send through.

What it doesn’t do: Publishing the list isn’t mandatory, and authorities have generally been reluctant to hold phone companies accountable for things their customers do. In one recent exception, the Federal Trade Commission and Ohio attorney general moved to shut down an internet-based phone company for allegedly participating in a robocall scheme—a first-of-its-kind action.

A senior FCC official said the agency is weighing what it can do when a company is found to be facilitating illegal calls. Options under consideration include taking enforcement action against the firms, or greenlighting phone companies to block calls from problem companies, the official said, without giving a timeline for drafting them. — *Wall Street Journal*

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The year 2019 ends the way it started for West Philly’s 190th state House District — with the Democratic City Committee seeking a replacement for another disgraced representative who just left office. The Democratic leaders of the seven wards in the district are set to interview a batch of potential nominees Friday afternoon for the Feb. 25 special election.

Given the district’s recent pedigree for criminal behavior and political infighting, this could again be a rocky process. Former State Rep. Movita Johnson-Harrell resigned two weeks ago after **being changed with stealing** more than \$500,000 from a nonprofit. She is expected to plead guilty to some of the charges. Johnson-Harrell was the party’s third pick for the last special election, in March, to fill the seat vacated by former state Rep. Vanessa Lowery Brown, who resigned a year ago after being **convicted of bribery and other charges**. The party’s **first two picks** for the March special election **bowed out after** Clout **raised questions** about whether they lived in the district.

Clout hears two potential nominees — G. Roni Green and Danyl Patterson — are now vying as front-runners for the party nomination, which is akin to a winning lottery ticket, since 87% of the voters in the district are registered Democrats. Green, a business agent for SEIU Local 668 and a Democratic committeewoman in the 38th Ward, said she has been an “activist and advocate” in the district for three decades. She’s looking to turn the page on the district’s past troubles. “What has happened in the past doesn’t dictate who we are in the future,” Green said.

Patterson, an attorney, **lost a primary bid** for a seat on the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas in 2017. And, with the Democratic Party **increasing scrutiny of potential nominees** after what has unfolded in the last year, she probably will face some questions about the campaign. Patterson **filed just one campaign finance report** that year, showing she raised \$39,000 but not detailing where it came from. Like many judicial candidates that year, she contributed \$35,000 to the Democratic City Committee. George Gossett Jr., her campaign chairman, said Patterson gave her campaign the \$39,000 and now will file corrected finance reports with the Board of Elections.

Patterson, who was a 2014 Daily News **“Sexy Singles” selection**, also cohosted a local television show, **Single on Saturday Nite**, a forum for racy talk and **risque issues**. Democratic Party boss Bob Brady notes that Green and Patterson both have strong labor union support. Brady also predicts that some contenders who don’t win the nomination for the special election intend to challenge whoever wins that race in the April 28 primary election.

Ray Bailey from Local 1291 of the International Longshoremen’s Association is seeking the nomination, having run for the 190th seat three times before. Bailey recently said the seat “seems to be cursed” by politicians using it as “their own private ATM machine.” Other contenders include Jabari Jones of the West Philadelphia Corridor Collaborative; marketing consultant Rashaad Lambert; and Amen Brown, who ran in the last special election as an independent. Pastor Pam Williams, who also ran as an independent, is considering another run outside the party. — **Chris Brennan’s “Clout” column in Philadelphia Daily News**

