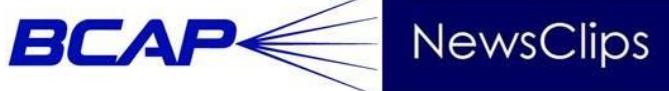




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***Investor's  
Business Daily  
NBCUniversal's  
Peacock Aims To Be  
The Comfort Food  
Of Streaming TV***

***Politico  
Facebook sticking  
with policies on  
politicians' lies and  
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***Washington Post  
At CES, it's robots  
and rainbow slides.  
In Washington, tech  
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***Zap2It  
Cable Top 25 for  
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***Pennlive  
Pa. Sen. Mike Regan  
to seek a second  
term; 'there is more  
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***Pennlive  
Special election to  
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vacated after  
lawmaker's arrest;  
What you need to  
know***

Verizon Communications is getting rid of hidden fees and cable bundles that lock customers into long-term contracts, hoping to win over consumers ditching pay-TV for cheaper online streaming. The company said Thursday that it is letting Fios customers choose internet speeds and TV packages separately, without signing annual contracts that often leave customers paying more after a year or two. Verizon will also offer customers personalized TV packages based on their favorite channels.

Verizon is rolling out the new pricing plans during a disruptive time in the TV industry, with cable companies losing hundreds of thousands of video customers every quarter to online streaming services. The company's plan addresses some common complaints with cable, such as "hidden fees" that jack up monthly bills. Although Verizon claimed its new strategy would disrupt the cable industry, the company is still a small player in the pay-TV market, and it could be taking steps to abandon the cable TV business altogether, industry analysts said.

Under the new model, called Mix & Match, Verizon will sell three tiers of internet speeds, ranging from \$55 to \$80 a month, including a \$15 fee to rent an internet router. Customers will then choose one of several TV packages, from \$50 to \$90 a month, plus \$12 per set-top box. The cheapest TV plan will offer consumers roughly 125 channels based on their five favorites. The company also offers a YouTube TV streaming subscription with about 70 channels for \$50 a month.

Fees for broadcast television and regional sports networks will be baked into advertised rates, instead of being itemized on monthly bills. Such **fees have skyrocketed in recent years** and gotten the attention of consumer groups and lawmakers, who've said the "hidden fees" should be included in promotional prices. "Customers are tired of having to buy a bundle with services they don't want to get the best rates, and then discover that those rates didn't include extra fees and surcharges," Frank Boulben, Verizon's senior vice president of consumer products and marketing, said in a statement.

**Philadelphia Inquirer**  
[Op-ed by Franklin & Marshall College professor: How do we fix democracy in Pennsylvania and elsewhere? Local elections.](#)

**Philadelphia Inquirer**  
[Elizabeth Warren is gearing up for the 2020 Pennsylvania primary with a new Philly field office](#)

Verizon's strategy is targeting a growing share of consumers who want to save money and have more control over what they pay for, creating a market for online streaming competitors such as Netflix and Amazon, said Jeff Kagan, an independent telecommunications industry analyst. "The customer is getting disillusioned with rising cable TV prices, and they're just looking for options," Kagan said. "What Verizon is offering is a good idea. Verizon is not a heavy hitter when it comes to pay-TV, so I don't know if it will impact the pay-TV industry. If it does, then it could enable more companies to offer this a la carte pricing and let the customer choose what they want to buy."

Verizon is a small player in the pay-TV space, with nearly 4.3 million video customers as of the third quarter last year. By comparison, Philadelphia-based Comcast Corp., the nation's largest cable TV provider, has 21.4 million. Comcast declined to comment on Verizon's announcement. Verizon has reported net losses of video customers each quarter since 2017, according to data from MoffettNathanson, a New York market research firm. The company has lost 171,000 video customers through the first nine months of 2019.

The company has never made money in video and the new pricing plan could be the first step in eventually leaving the TV business, according to industry analyst Craig Moffett of the MoffettNathanson firm. "By abandoning promotions, they are effectively stepping back from competing for video subscribers," he said. "The bottom line is that their new pricing of broadband is competitive. Their pricing of video is not. This is their way of at least beginning to get out."

An October study of roughly 800 cable bills by Consumer Reports, a consumer advocacy group, found that company-imposed fees cost customers \$37 a month on average, or nearly \$450 a year — effectively adding a 24% surcharge on top of the advertised base price. The report estimated that cable companies could be collecting \$28 billion a year from such hidden fees. On Thursday, the group praised Verizon's plan to get rid of fees. "Finally, a major cable company has gotten the message," Jonathan Schwantes, senior policy counsel for Consumer Reports, said in a statement. "Consumers are fed up with paying hundreds of dollars in extra fees each year that weren't always clearly disclosed when they signed up for service." — **Philadelphia Inquirer**; [see also "Verizon's great FiOS offer to me: Pay \\$50 extra for slower Internet" in Ars Technica](#)

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Almost six months after Facebook Inc. agreed to [a \\$5 billion settlement](#) of privacy violations, the issue is anything but settled for the social-media giant. The deal with the Federal Trade Commission announced in July to settle allegations that Facebook broke its promises to protect users' privacy is still under review by a federal judge, who has been weighing objections from opponents who believe the deal is inadequate. Judge Timothy Kelly of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia has ordered Facebook and the government to file by Jan. 24 written responses to privacy advocacy groups critical of the settlement.

The groups' chief complaint is a provision releasing Facebook from liability for past missteps, including any unfair or deceptive actions the FTC was aware of as of June 2019. That provision, they say, could nullify long-held complaints about Facebook that aren't addressed in the proposed settlement, including about its use of facial-recognition

technology or its collection of personal health information. “The proposed release is so vague, and the scope of immunity Facebook would gain is so indeterminately broad, that the Court should reject it as procedurally unfair,” Marc Rotenberg, president of the Electronic Privacy Information Center, said in a filing to the court.

Facebook and the FTC have defended the record penalty and related requirements for the company, saying it will reshape how the company considers users’ privacy. The settlement is based on charges that Facebook violated a 2012 FTC order by deceiving users about their ability to control their personal information. James Kohm, director of enforcement in the FTC’s consumer protection bureau, said the agency was aware of other privacy complaints about Facebook, and the settlement addresses violations “that we determined were actionable.” He said in an interview that he expects the court to approve the deal.

Facebook said it has been taking the necessary steps to implement the agreement. “We’ve put dozens of teams in place, made many of the necessary structural and technical changes and expanded privacy protections across our products,” said Michel Protti, chief privacy officer of product. Still, Facebook isn’t concerned the deal with the FTC will fall apart, people familiar with the matter said.

Inside the social-media company, senior officials have been putting in an increasing amount of money, people and time to comply with requirements of the FTC deal, the people said. At a Facebook off-site gathering for senior officials in Hawaii last month, compliance with the FTC settlement was one of the focus areas, some of the people said.

The settlement requires Facebook to restructure its privacy practices from the board of directors down. That includes an independent board privacy committee, mandatory privacy reports to senior leaders and personal certification from Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg that Facebook is complying with regulatory requirements. The company also must hire an independent assessor that will report to the board’s privacy committee. Some aspects legally can’t be activated until after the court gives final approval, Facebook said. There are additionally a number of privacy requirements that have taken longer than expected to implement given the number and complexity of Facebook’s databases and servers, the people familiar said.

Company officials in Hawaii also heard updates about other potential headaches, one of the people said, including investigations by state attorneys general. The states are probing, among other things, what **Facebook knew** about the activities of Cambridge Analytica, a former political consulting firm that used harvested Facebook user data. Dozens of states in 2018 wrote a joint letter asking Facebook for information about its privacy practices in the wake of reports about Cambridge Analytica. State investigations are continuing, with New York and Pennsylvania among the most aggressive, according to the person. Facebook said it is cooperating with the probes.

Mr. Zuckerberg, at the time of the settlement announcement, said the new requirements “go beyond anything required under U.S. law today. The reason I support them is that I believe they will reduce the number of mistakes we make and help us deliver stronger privacy protections for everyone.” Facebook has also resisted some states’ requests.

Attorneys general representing California, Massachusetts and the District of Columbia have each taken Facebook to court demanding access to internal company documents. In California's case, the state is **subpoenaing emails** from senior executives. "Now that the court has compelled Facebook to respond I think they will be more diligent in producing information," California Attorney General Xavier Becerra said in an interview last month.

The FTC's investigation unearthed email exchanges appearing to connect Facebook's Mr. Zuckerberg to potentially problematic privacy practices, [The Wall Street Journal reported in June](#). When the FTC announced the settlement in July, it didn't disclose emails from Mr. Zuckerberg or other executives. Facebook at the time said it fully cooperated with the FTC's investigation and provided tens of thousands of documents, emails and files. The company then said Mr. Zuckerberg or others didn't knowingly violate Facebook's obligations under the FTC consent order nor do any emails exist that indicate they did.

Mr. Kohm of the FTC said evidence his agency gathered suggested "this was a company that wasn't paying attention to privacy the way they should, and part of that is reflected in the fact that the CEO wasn't as involved" in privacy decisions. Others at the FTC have said the agency should have pressed further to investigate the role of senior Facebook executives. FTC Commissioner Rohit Chopra, one of the agency's commissioners who voted against approving the Facebook settlement, last month told a gathering of state attorneys general, "There was a lot more to do, and I think that now the ball really is in your court." — *Wall Street Journal*

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Pennsylvania House Speaker Mike Turzai consistently casts himself as a fiscal conservative, a safekeeper of the Keystone State's tax dollars. But one duty of the speaker — calling for special elections to fill vacant state House seats — brings out the big spender in the Allegheny County Republican.

Turzai on Tuesday **called for three special elections** to be held March 17 — just six weeks before the April 28 primary election — for House districts that cover part of Bucks, Westmoreland, Mercer, and Butler Counties. County commissioners and election officials in three of those counties said they wanted Turzai to schedule the special elections on the same day as the primary.

They share three concerns: Counties are ramping up **with new voting machines**, there is more pressure to prepare this year because it's a presidential cycle, and it takes time for the state to reimburse counties for the six-figure expense of special elections. Diane Ellis-Marseglia, chair of the Bucks County Commissioners, called Turzai's move "a huge waste of money" that could be put to better use.

Jeff Greenburg, Mercer County's director of elections, called it "a tremendous waste of resources." Sean Kertes, chair of the Westmoreland County Commissioners, [\*\*told the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review\*\*](#) the state should pay for the special elections upfront if they are not held during other elections.

Turzai's defense? This is the way he always does it. His chief of staff, Neal Lesher, said Turzai has "consistently called special elections as soon as practically possible to ensure that all Pennsylvanians have a voice in the people's House." Turzai, now mulling a 2022 run for governor, declined to talk to Clout about that. He is consistent. Tuesday's action came soon after Turzai rejected a request from Philadelphia's City Commissioners to hold a special election for the 190th District during the primary. They have the same concerns as their fellow election officials in the other counties.

Turzai ignored that and scheduled the special election for the West Philly district on Feb. 25. It costs about \$175,000 to hold a special election in Philly. House Democrats, decrying Turzai's behavior this week, accused him of wasting more than \$1 million in tax dollars for the three special elections he just called, estimating the cost for each to be between \$300,000 and \$500,000. State Rep. Kevin Boyle, a Northeast Philly Democrat and his party's ranking member on the State Government Committee, on Wednesday said he will introduce legislation requiring that special elections be held concurrent to the closest primary or general election.

That legislation will be submitted in the Republican-controlled House, where Turzai calls the shots. The Republican City Committee this week named Wanda Logan, an employment agency owner, as its nominee in the 190th District special election, vowing that she will "change the tarnished reputation of politics-as-usual." The seat is open because former State Rep. Movita Johnson-Harrell, a Democrat, resigned last month after being charged with stealing more than \$500,000 from a nonprofit. Johnson-Harrell won a special election last year to replace former State Rep. Vanessa Lowery Brown, another Democrat, who resigned after being convicted of bribery and other charges.

Logan, the Republican Party said, "left the Democratic Party due to her dissatisfaction with its continued corruption." Logan ran unsuccessfully four times as a Democrat from 2012 to 2018 in the 190th District, where 87% of the voters are registered in that party. "I'm still the same person," Logan said. "I'm just hoping people will judge me as an individual."

Logan took a winding path to the GOP. She switched her voter registration from Democrat to Republican in June 2018. She switched back to Democrat in November 2018 and then registered as an independent 10 days later. She became a Republican again in January 2019. Logan will face Democrat G. Roni Green, a business agent for SEIU Local 668. – **Chris Brennan's "Clout" column in *Philadelphia Daily News***

