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From grass turf to the video stream inside your home, Comcast Corp. will have a hand in Super Bowl XLIX between the New England Patriots and the Seattle Seahawks. "Top-to-bottom, it's really a Comcast event," John Page, president of Comcast-controlled Global Spectrum, said of the Feb. 1 NFL championship.

Global Spectrum, part of Comcast-Spectacor and based at the Wells Fargo Center in South Philadelphia, manages the state-of-the-art University of Phoenix Stadium in Glendale, Ariz., where 12,000 people are expected to work on game day - opening the gates for fans, shuttling the Katy Perry halftime show on and off the gridiron stage in the allotted time, and managing security.

The Comcast-owned NBC-TV network will broadcast the game for an audience that could top 100 million - and 20 million subscribers can watch it on Comcast cable-TV and Internet network. The company also will use the popularity of the game to promote the TV Everywhere platform - that is, watching the game on laptops, desktops or tablets away from the television. With "Super Stream Sunday," NBC will make the streamed game and related Super Bowl shows available for free and without authentication. This can be accessed at www.NBCSports.com/liveextra.

On tablets, game-watchers will have to use a free NBC app. A TV viewer typically authenticates, or uses a password, to watch NBC-streamed content on TV Everywhere. Comcast hopes that the huge audience will experiment with TV Everywhere, boosting its usage. The event is likely to generate \$350 million to \$360 million in advertising revenue for NBC and, thus, Comcast, according to industry experts.



Seth Winter, executive vice president of sales and marketing for the NBC Sports Group, said the advertising rates for this year's Super Bowl were \$4.4 million to \$4.5 million for 30 seconds. "We are asking and getting record pricing in the game," Winter said during a press call earlier this month. Most of the advertising spots had been sold. But Winter noted that participation by automakers, historically a big Super Bowl advertising category, declined noticeably. According to Kantar Media, Chrysler, Hyundai and Volkswagen were the

second-, fourth- and fifth-largest advertisers, respectively, in the Super Bowl coverage between 2010 and 2014, spending a combined \$227.4 million. NBCUniversal has replaced the automakers with 15 new advertisers, Winter said.

John Swallen, chief research officer for Kantar Media, said the controversies over Baltimore's Ray Rice knocking out his wife in an Atlantic City hotel and the class-action concussion lawsuits filed by former NFL players in federal court in Philadelphia did not seem to affect the TV audience or the ad market for NFL games this past season. But Swallen was concerned that automakers softened their advertising support for the Super Bowl - perhaps because of escalating costs for 30-second spots. "When your leading category begins to cut, you sit up and take notice," he said. Swallen thought it would be interesting to see if the automakers pull back again next year. But that will be an issue for CBS Corp., which has the rights to televise the Super Bowl in 2016.

Toomey could face tight Senate re-election race

Comcast likes to say that it is at the intersection of technology and media, with some diversified businesses that include theme parks at Universal and stadium management at Comcast-Spectacor. "We can take advantage of lots of opportunities and synergies with the companies we own - like NBCUniversal - to get our customers fun, interesting and essential content like the Super Bowl," said D'Arcy Rudnay, Comcast's chief communications officer. "We can then package special pieces of content for our Xfinity customers on our video-on-demand service, like 30-minute highlights from all the previous Super Bowls, or our Sports App on X1, which will deliver live stats throughout the Super Bowl program." Added Rudnay: "When you add the fact that we manage the stadium in which the Super Bowl is being played through Comcast-Spectacor, it becomes a very exciting and proud weekend for us." – *Philadelphia Inquirer*

The debate on Capitol Hill over the future of the Internet spilled into public view on Wednesday, as a pair of hearings took up a Republican proposal to put the issue in lawmakers' hands. The two hearings, one in the House and one in the Senate, both addressed the Republican proposal, which would create new rules for so-called net neutrality — the concept that Internet traffic should be open and treated equally. And after a morning of harsh rhetoric in the House hearing, hints of a possible compromise emerged in the Senate.

The Federal Communications Commission is set to rule in late February on how it will regulate Internet providers to ensure an open Internet. The commission is widely expected to propose rules that treat the Internet much like a public utility, preventing Internet providers from blocking or slowing any sites. President Obama has publicly endorsed treating wireless and wired broadband service as a regulated public utility, and raised the issue once again in his State of the Union address Tuesday night. His position is supported by a coalition of online retailers and consumer groups.

Congressional Republicans have responded by offering their own version of net neutrality, arguing that new legislation, not F.C.C. mandates they say are outdated, should determine how web access is treated. They are backed by cable providers and some wireless companies. The chairman of the House subcommittee, Representative Greg Walden, Republican of Oregon, called the expected F.C.C. plan the "nuclear option."

House Democrats argued adamantly against the Republican proposal, with one calling it "a march to folly." They said that the proposal contained major loopholes and that it would diminish the F.C.C. At an afternoon hearing in the Senate, however, the chairman and the ranking member of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, John Thune, a South Dakota Republican, and Bill Nelson, a Florida Democrat, struck a more conciliatory note that suggested a deal later this year was not out of the question.

Senator Thune said that he wanted to provide certainty to Americans that they have "unfettered access" to all websites, and that he did not "expect our draft to be a final product," but rather saw it as a way to "find common ground and forge a permanent solution." The Republican-led effort is unlikely to succeed without the aid of congressional Democrats, as it is widely assumed that Mr. Obama would veto a bill that did not have wide bipartisan support. Mr. Nelson, in a telling comment, said that "congressional prerogative does not cease" just because the F.C.C. is expected to move ahead in February. He indicated that the F.C.C. ruling could coexist with legislative action later in the year.

Paul Misener, vice president of global public policy at Amazon, who testified at both hearings, said American consumers want unfettered Internet access. He said legislation that allowed technical ways to get around net neutrality would inflame the public. "The consumer will not care where it occurs, only whether it occurs," Mr. Misener said.

The possibility of lawsuits, almost regardless of the outcome, was also made clear on Wednesday. Meredith Attwell Baker, president of CTIA-The Wireless Association, a trade group, told lawmakers that if the F.C.C. were to act on its own, "the wireless industry will have no choice but to look to the courts." Michael Powell, head of the National Cable and Telecommunications Association, said that the fight would be protracted, and that a final decision on the rules governing the Internet was probably years away. "It's not a complete exaggeration to say that 10 years we could still be sitting here," Mr. Powell said.

Litigation could take place no matter which side prevails in the current standoff. Jessica Gonzalez, general counsel at the National Hispanic Media Coalition, which is in favor of the F.C.C.'s taking action, said her organization and others would probably file a lawsuit to challenge the Republican proposal if it were to become law. "I think it's unavoidable regardless of the path," Ms. Gonzalez said of the issue winding up in court. – *New York Times*

When President Obama urged in his State of the Union address that broadband Internet service be made available to all Americans, it was the 21st century equivalent of calling for a chicken in every pot. So much commerce, information, education and entertainment has moved online that communities can't afford to be left without high-speed connections. Nevertheless, many Republicans oppose one of the means Obama

has proposed for expanding broadband: preempting the roughly 20 state laws that make it hard, if not impossible, for local governments to offer Internet services. There may be good reasons a municipal utility or local agency shouldn't try its hand at broadband service, a market that's prohibitively expensive to enter. But that decision should be made by local officials, not state lawmakers.

According to the White House, 99% of Americans can obtain some version of broadband, whether through a phone line, a cable modem or a mobile network. But almost half of rural America has no access to connections that offer at least 25 mbps — the kind of capacity needed for data-heavy online businesses and multiple high-quality video streams. And although such connections are more widely available in cities and suburbs, they typically come from only one provider per community.

Just as advances in microchip speed and hard drive capacity have led to more powerful software programs, faster broadband networks lead to more data-intensive applications and services. But the shortage of broadband competitors and the high cost of building networks in the United States have slowed the spread of the kind of ultra-high-speed services such as the ones found in much of Asia and northern Europe. The most notable exceptions have been in the handful of cities where Google has built ultra-high-speed networks, prompting the local phone and cable operators to upgrade.

Some local governments concluded that the only sure way to obtain an advanced broadband network was to build it themselves. Others added broadband service to fiber-optic networks used by municipal power companies for other purposes, such as meter reading. Still others have partnered with upstart broadband providers; New York City, for example, is leasing thousands of public pay-phone sites to a venture that will convert them to free, ultra-high-speed Wi-Fi hot spots. Los Angeles is pursuing its own public-private partnership with a broadband provider that would be granted access to light poles and other city assets.

Opponents of municipal broadband argue that many projects have been costly failures and that the ones that succeeded enjoy an unfair advantage over the cable and phone companies they're competing with. They're right about the spotty record, but that just proves any advantage a municipal utility may have isn't enough to guarantee that cities can compete effectively with entrenched cable and telephone companies. Regardless, the decision about whether a local agency should get into the broadband business should be left to the people who bear the risk — local officials and the people who elect them. — **Los Angeles Times editorial**



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