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Joe Biden camp to Mike Pence before visit: Pa. needs leadership, not a 'photo-op'

Harrisburg Patriot-News

Comcast Corp on Thursday reported second-quarter revenue that beat expectations, as strong sign-ups for broadband offset weaker advertising sales at cable networks and broadcast TV. In the three months, Comcast gained 323,000 broadband subscribers, beating analysts' average estimate of 247,000 net additions, according to research firm FactSet. Revenue from the business grew 7.2% to \$5 billion.

Comcast's NBCUniversal segment, which includes NBC Entertainment and Universal Pictures, reported revenue of \$6.12 billion, down 25.4% from a year earlier. Revenue at the filmed entertainment unit fell 18.1% from a year earlier due to shuttered movie theaters. Theme park revenue plummeted 94.1%. Broadcast TV advertising revenue was down 27.9% and ad revenue at Comcast's cable networks fell 27%. The company said it had 10 million signups to its Peacock streaming service, launched nationwide on July 15.

On Tuesday Comcast and AMC Entertainment Holdings Inc, the world's largest theater chain, announced a deal that will allow Universal Pictures' movies to be made available to U.S. audiences at home after three weekends in cinemas - a model that upends the traditional practice of keeping a movie in theaters for 90 days before releasing it on other platforms.

Comcast's video losses in the second quarter were better than expected. The company lost 477,000 video customers, fewer than the 513,000 loss estimated by FactSet and more than the 409,000 video customers it lost in the first quarter. Comcast reported second-quarter revenue of \$23.72 billion, beating the Wall Street consensus estimate of \$23.57 billion, according to IBES data from Refinitiv. British pay-TV group Sky generated second-quarter revenue of \$4.08 billion, beating the average estimate of \$3.91 billion. Net income attributable to Comcast fell to \$2.99 billion, or 65 cents per share, from \$3.13 billion, or 68 cents per share, a year earlier. -- **Reuters**

Atlantic Broadband, the nation's eighth-largest cable operator, today announced its participation in a statewide initiative to bring internet connectivity to households in Connecticut with school-aged children to support remote learning solutions. Through the program, the state will access federal CARES Act funding to obtain internet services and other remote learning tools for students living in households that currently lack connectivity. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) was passed by Congress in March to help the public and the business sector to manage through the health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak.

"We are committed to bringing reliable, high-performance broadband internet to homes that need it most, as work-from-home and online learning has become necessary in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic," said Juan Dominguez, Vice President of Sales for Atlantic Broadband. "We are pleased to help make this initiative possible and will work closely with state officials and our local school districts to ensure that serviceable households with students currently lacking connectivity will have great internet backed with local customer care and professional technical support."

Local school districts will identify those families that live in serviceable areas but have not subscribed to internet. The districts will then work with local internet providers to provide those families with internet service to support remote learning solutions during the new school year. -- **ABB news release**

Even for people who haven't contracted COVID-19 — or haven't lost someone they loved — the pandemic has upended their lives. We all know someone who's lost their job. Parents are working in overdrive to keep their children

**New poll shows
Trump struggling in
Pa., with many
planning to vote
'against' him**

**Associated Press
Political
Conventions Largely
A Mystery**

occupied at home, or to find care for the kids if they have to go to work. Every decision to go outside is fraught with trepidation.

One important policy that hasn't been getting much attention, and is saving many Pennsylvanians from additional worry, is the moratorium on utility shutoffs. Put in place in the pandemic's early months, this has been a crucial protection as many Pennsylvanians struggle to find jobs, put food on their table, and keep their families healthy. In fact, the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission found that without the moratorium, more than 790,000 customers and 45,000 businesses across the state would qualify to have one or more of their utilities shut off, with the number rising every day. This is affecting people in every county, across rural and urban communities.

In March, as shutdowns were beginning, the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission passed protections so that companies cannot shut off customers' water, gas, heat, electricity, and telecommunications services even if they cannot pay their monthly bills due to the pandemic. If the moratorium were lifted today without critical steps to protect consumers, all of those households and businesses could lose their utility services.

Right now, the moratorium is continuing — even though the Energy Association of Pennsylvania, representing the utilities, has fought to end it. A shutoff would have devastating consequences. Imagine not having electricity to run a fan or air-conditioner during the sweltering heat wave battering Pennsylvania. Or not being able to run your refrigerator and keep the food from spoiling because the electricity was shut off. Or trying to work from home, but not being able to run your computer or charge your phone.

The list of problems could go on and on, but the takeaway is clear: losing power, water, and communication with the outside world would compound the existing challenges presented by the pandemic. Fortunately, there is a short-term and a more long-term solution. First, the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission should not lift the moratorium. It has already resisted two attempts to do so, with a tie vote saving consumers from shutoffs in July. Second, leaders in the Pennsylvania legislature can act during their next session to take just a small portion of the funds allocated to the state from the federal stimulus in the CARES Act and use it to cover these outstanding utility bills for customers who are at risk of shutoffs. This will take consumers out of arrears, and make sure that utility companies are paid for the services they've been providing.

This is exactly the type of solution the CARES Act funding was meant for. It is supposed to help states address temporary problems created by the COVID-19 pandemic. More Pennsylvanians than usual are unable to pay utility bills, so we should use the funding to protect them. Our state leaders in Harrisburg must vote to allocate the \$150 million to utilities so that nearly a million people can get through this difficult time without worrying that their services will be shut off. Everyone should be focused on keeping each other healthy, and to do that we need those basic services. Without them, we will see more suffering — and likely lose even more lives. — **Op-ed by Emma Horst-Martz, campaign associate for PennPIRG, in *Philadelphia Inquirer***

The chief executives of Amazon.com Inc., Facebook Inc., Apple Inc. and Alphabet Inc.'s Google faced relentless criticism at a congressional hearing Wednesday, with Democrats and Republicans alike challenging their business practices over more than five contentious hours. The session, conducted via videoconference because of the coronavirus pandemic, laid bare deep-rooted frustration with some of the country's most successful companies, at a moment when Americans rely on them more than ever.

It also highlighted the threat to the companies from ongoing investigations by antitrust authorities, with lawmakers citing internal company emails and witness interviews as evidence that the platforms improperly abuse their

dominant position. The tone of the questions, directed at Amazon's Jeff Bezos, Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, Apple's Tim Cook and Google's Sundar Pichai, was almost universally hostile. Rep. David Cicilline (D., R.I.), chairman of the House Judiciary Committee's antitrust subcommittee, kicked off the hearing by declaring: "Our founders would not bow before a king. Nor should we bow before the emperors of the online economy."

The executives defended their companies' practices and said that they face stiff competition that forces them to serve customers and innovate. Lawmakers whipsawed between topics, from how the companies moderate social media posts to the tactics they used to gain sizable positions in markets from digital advertising to e-commerce. The CEOs had sought to testify jointly, an approach that made it harder for the interrogators to sustain pressure on any one witness.

Mr. Zuckerberg faced a series of questions about Facebook's [acquisition strategy](#). Mr. Pichai defended Google from a litany of accusations, ranging from taking advantage of its dominant online search engine to its work in China. Lawmakers in both parties accused Mr. Bezos of presiding over bullying of independent sellers on the Amazon marketplace, citing [reports in The Wall Street Journal](#) that employees had used seller data to launch competing products. Apple got fewer questions than the other companies, with Mr. Cook defending its policies on its App Store.

President Trump also weighed in on the topic Wednesday, tweeting, "If Congress doesn't bring fairness to Big Tech, which they should have done years ago, I will do it myself with Executive Orders." The CEOs rejected the accusations, saying they strive to remain politically neutral and focus on serving consumers, not denying access to rivals. Mr. Bezos, in [his first appearance before Congress](#), told lawmakers about how his mother became pregnant with him when she was in high school and how he was adopted at 4 years old by his Cuban immigrant father. Mr. Bezos also talked about his decision to leave a Wall Street job to start Amazon from a Seattle garage. "The retail market we participate in is extraordinarily large and competitive," he said, addressing broader concerns about Amazon's power. "There is room in retail for multiple winners."

Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D., Wash.), who has Amazon's headquarters in her district, asked Mr. Bezos whether Amazon employees violated an internal policy against accessing data from independent sellers. "I can't guarantee you that this policy has never been violated," Mr. Bezos said. He said [Amazon wants third-party sellers to succeed](#) and benefits when consumers have more options. After Rep. Lucy McBath (D., Ga.) played an audio recording of an Amazon seller who said her business nosedived after an action by Amazon, Mr. Bezos said: "I'm surprised by that. It's not the systematic approach that we take, I can assure you."

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler (D., N.Y.) took on Mr. Zuckerberg, quoting documents of him describing Instagram as a threat before Facebook acquired it in 2012. "Instagram can hurt us meaningfully," Mr. Zuckerberg wrote in one of the emails. "This is exactly the type of anticompetitive acquisition that the antitrust laws were designed to prevent," Mr. Nadler said. "I think the FTC had all of these documents" when it reviewed the acquisition for compliance with antitrust laws, Mr. Zuckerberg shot back, referring to the Federal Trade Commission. Some FTC officials in 2012 thought the deal raised antitrust concerns, but they worried they might not win an antitrust case in court if they sued to block the deal, the Journal reported last year.

Mr. Zuckerberg defended Facebook's efforts to regulate false information on its platform, denying that the company has a dominant market position or profits from misleading viral content. He said new competitors are emerging all the time. "History shows that if we don't keep innovating, someone will replace every company here today," he said. Mr. Cicilline accused Google of abusing its position as a web gateway, saying it changed "from a turnstile to the rest of

the web to a walled garden.” He quoted one internal memo that he said showed Google employees discussing how other websites had “too much traffic.”

Mr. Pichai said he wasn’t familiar with the specific document, but he pointed to competition in online search, such as searches for specific items on travel or retail websites, a sector known as “vertical search.” “When we look at vertical search, it validates the competition that we see,” he said. Several Republicans criticized Google for abandoning some work with the Pentagon, and repeated concerns among some in the Trump administration about the company’s work in China. “It seems to really call into question your commitment to our country and our values,” said Rep. Matt Gaetz (R., Fla.). Mr. Pichai said the company doesn’t work with the Chinese military. “Compared to our peers it is very, very limited in nature,” he said of the company’s work in China.

Apple got fewer questions about China, despite its large presence there. Rep. Hank Johnson (D., Ga.) questioned Mr. Cook about whether Apple treats app developers equally, echoing complaints from app developers about Apple’s market power. He cited Apple’s moves to take a lower cut of some App Store sales from Amazon and to allow China’s Baidu Inc. to fast-track app approval. Mr. Cook stood by Apple’s defense that it treats every developer the same and cited the opportunity provided by the App Store’s growth. “If Apple is a gatekeeper, what we have done is open the gate wider,” Mr. Cook said. He acknowledged that he didn’t know about the Baidu situation and said, regarding Amazon, that lower rates are available to “anyone meeting the conditions.”

The hearing was marked by lawmakers interrupting witnesses before they finished their responses. Mr. Bezos’ video feed went out early in the session, causing Mr. Cicilline to call a recess. At the outset, instead of asking the witnesses to stand and swear to tell the truth, Mr. Cicilline had a different request: “Unmute your microphones and raise your right hands.” — **Wall Street Journal**

Congressman Guy Reschenthaler, R-Peters, Washington County, announced Wednesday he’s self-quarantining for 14 days after coming into close contact with a colleague who tested positive for covid-19. The possible exposure occurred Tuesday at a House Judiciary Committee hearing, when Reschenthaler was in close proximity to Texas Rep. Louie Gohmert. Gohmert is a fellow Republican who tested positive on Wednesday for the virus. Reschenthaler said in a statement that he shared a desk with Gohmert during the proceeding and “had extensive conversations with him, including a walk together from the Capitol to the Cannon House Office Building.”

Reschenthaler said he decided to self-quarantine out of an abundance of caution and after consulting with an attending physician. Gohmert, 66, told a Texas news station that he also planned to self-quarantine, after testing positive at the White House. Gohmert has been criticized by colleagues for shunning masks on Capitol Hill. He is at least the 10th member of Congress known to have tested positive for the coronavirus. — **Pittsburgh Tribune-Review**

With three months to go, time to check in on the contest for president in Pennsylvania, even if you’re among those thinking the race already is over. I am not, by the way.

Still, assuming no big bombshells (a risky assumption these days), here’s my current theory: Biden wins the state because he’s the kind of candidate the state historically likes. And I don’t mean a candidate from here. Hillary Clinton was sorta from here. Didn’t help her, did it? No, I’m talking about a different kind of candidate.

A guy hard to get riled up about, no real drama, sort of middling, not giving anybody reason to hate him. State voters are drawn to such men, let's call them Type B candidates, especially for high office such as governor and senator. I say "men" because this is Pennsylvania, where a woman is never elected governor or senator. Hence, Govs. Dick Thornburgh, Bob Casey, Tom Ridge, Tom Corbett, Tom Wolf; Sens. Bob Casey and Pat Toomey. Not a lightning rod among them. Gov. Ed Rendell, a Type A liberal from Philly, and Sen. Rick Santorum, a firebrand conservative from Pittsburgh, were exceptions proving the rule. And Arlen Specter was in a class all his own.

So, now we have candidate Biden fitting an established, successful pattern, a Pennsylvania thing. "That's interesting," says J.J. Balaban, long-time Philly-based Democratic ad-maker who's worked campaigns in Pennsylvania and many other states, "I hadn't considered that, but it's a fair point that Biden does follow in those footsteps." He adds, of course, Biden is helped by the pandemic, the economy and Trump's dropping job-approval. But he notes while Trump won Pennsylvania in 2016, he now faces a candidate who "fits the Pa. way," as opposed to polarizing Hillary Clinton, who did not. And that "way" or pattern is especially important against Trump.

Why? Because it does not present the sort of candidate (or person) Trump is best at hammering. And hammering is what Trump does to win. That Biden's a tough target for Trump was noted by Dick Polman, former national political writer for the Philadelphia Inquirer and writer in residence at the University of Pennsylvania, in a piece for the Pennsylvania Capital-Star. Polman wrote when Trump baits Biden with claims that Biden's a socialist who wants to defund police, abolish the suburbs and end religion, Biden doesn't take the bait. He stays in the basement, metaphorically and actually, not responding.

As a result, Biden is, "The last person Trump would ever want as a foil," Polman wrote. Washington Post columnist Max Boot (a byline I've always thought perfect for a columnist) expounded on that. Boot, a conservative who opposed Trump in 2016, recently wrote that Biden, "Isn't an African American like Barack Obama, a woman like Hillary Clinton, or a socialist like Bernie Sanders. He's a boring, moderate white guy who has been around forever without being demonized the way that Clinton was for decades."

Veteran Harrisburg-based GOP consultant Christopher Nicholas sees it, too: "In 2016, it was all 'lock her up.' And that worked. But now Trump hasn't been able to target-lock on Biden. And Biden's hard to demonize, largely because of his personal losses (Biden's first wife and young daughter died in a 1972 traffic accident; his son, Beau, died of brain cancer in 2015)." Plus, says Nicholas, Trump "hasn't even gotten to go after Biden yet, because right now the race is Trump v. COVID-19." And right now, the race looks daunting for Trump.

Throughout July, poll after poll – Fox News, Morning Consult, Rasmussen, CNBC, Monmouth – shows Biden leading Trump in the state by 2 to 11 points. The news site RealClearPolitics, which averages polls, has Biden up here by 6.2 points. Of course, things can change. Things can happen in debates. Trump voters, in my view, are more reliable than Biden voters. Biden's clearly capable of blunders to reshape the contest. And we don't even know yet if he can remember, "Person. Woman. Man. Camera. TV." We know Trump can. But Biden has that Pennsylvania thing. And that could be enough. – **John Baer's column in Harrisburg Patriot-News**

