First, a caveat: Traditional cable TV is alive and well. Over half of US households have a bundled cable TV subscription in some form; the country's largest cable company, Comcast, is worth just south of $160 billion. Yet, a growing number of customers are ditching traditional cable in favor of on-demand streaming content providers like Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Instant Video, and the battle for those customers is getting intense.

Most recently, a blockbuster alliance added fuel to the argument that the future of TV may not lie with traditional cable. In April, Amazon reached an agreement with HBO making a wide selection of HBO content available to Amazon Prime customers, starting May 21. The multi-year deal, worth an estimated $300 million, marks the first time vaunted HBO shows like "The Wire" and "The Sopranos" will be available to those without a traditional cable subscription. "Amazon has built a wonderful service – we are excited to have our programming made available to their vast customer base and believe the exposure will create new HBO subscribers," said Charles Schreger, president of programming sales for HBO, in a press release.

It's a huge get for Amazon, which recently raised prices for Prime subscriptions and has made huge moves to shore up its streaming video content library over the past year. Netflix, which raised its own prices in mid-April, saw its stock price plunge 5 percent the day of the HBO announcement. Partnering with big names like HBO and Nickelodeon is just one way to lure a cable chord-cutter. A slew of streaming devices have crowded onto the market over the past few years, including set-top boxes like Roku, Apple TV, and Amazon's just-released Fire TV. Hulu recently unveiled a remote control for subscribers using it on video game consoles. "It's all about a land grab right now," says Tom Caporaso, CEO of Clarus Marketing group, a technology company focused on subscription commerce based in Hartford, Conn. With rising cable bills, people are thinking more about services like Netflix and Amazon Prime being their primary viewing engines. As that changes, those companies are out there really tying to grab consumers and earn their loyalty early."

The rise of mobile viewership is another factor. As smart phones and tablets become more pervasive, the amount of video viewed on mobile devices is surging, and

advertisers are investing more and more in digital media. That makes investment in the streaming space all the more crucial. In addition to technology rollouts and content partnerships, Amazon, Netflix, and Hulu have all made big investments into original programming. Netflix struck first, with the comedy “Orange is the New Black,” and the drama “House of Cards,” starring Kevin Spacey. Amazon found success with its first original series, “Alpha House,” a political comedy starring John Goodman. Putting money behind new shows “is why we’re seeing price increases, but it’s also a way to get people sucked into the service and convince them to stay with it,” Mr. Caporaso notes.

All of this is designed to take capitalize on a sea change in the way people consume entertainment. Five million cable TV subscribers with the nation’s major providers have dropped their service over the past five years; Time Warner Cable lost 306,000 TV subscribers in the third quarter of 2013 alone. “A good analogy is the emergence of smart phones,” Mr. Caporaso says. “People would have never thought about not having a phone wire in their house 15 years ago. But as the technology improved and the reliability [of mobile phones] increased, people were more comfortable with it. You probably don’t have a house phone anymore, and I think in two or five or 10 years, more and more people will not have a cable wire in their house.”

So, as the streaming marketplace becomes more and more crowded, which company will come out on top? Netflix was among the earliest to make a dedicated push toward streaming, and its business, once primarily driven by its DVD mail service, has grown to over 40 million digital subscribers globally. It’s also had the most early success with original content: “House of Cards” won three Emmys and a Golden Globe for 2013, and the documentary “The Square” earned the company its first Oscar Nomination. Netflix was also the first to do away with appointment TV altogether, releasing whole seasons of its shows all at once instead of episode by episode. Still, “the two I’d get behind are Apple and Amazon, because they do so many things so well,” Caparuso says, pointing out that both can lure consumers with new technology, as well as programming, and they have a lot of cash to spend. “But they’re all really good companies.” – ***Christian Science Monitor***

Time Warner Cable Inc.'s months-long standoff with other major pay-TV distributors over the Los Angeles Dodgers sports channel is likely to weigh on its financial results for the year, the cable operator said on Thursday.

Time Warner Cable, which in February agreed to be acquired by Comcast Corp., reported slightly higher second-quarter profit and revenue. The company continued to reap gains in Internet subscribers during the quarter, helping offset losses in its core video business. Clouding the results was the company's big bet on the Dodgers sports channel, SportsNet LA. Higher programming costs associated with the network lifted operating costs and damped profits. TWC cut profit and revenue growth guidance for the year, citing revenue shortfalls related to SportsNet LA.

The network has become a focal point of complaints about rising sports programming costs. TWC last year agreed to distribute the network, which is owned by the Dodgers, paying $8.3 billion over 25 years, according to baseball executives. The cable company essentially agreed to take on the risk of launching it, including the burden of persuading other pay-TV distributors to pay for carriage of the channel. TWC is paying a guaranteed fee to American Media Partners LLC, an entity created by the Dodgers owners around the network, regardless of whether other distributors agree to carry it. TWC has said it struck the deal in hopes of keeping down its sports programming costs over the long term.

So far Time Warner Cable is the only major distributor to carry the channel. As it serves about 32% of the greater Los Angeles market, this means most L.A.-area residents can't watch every Dodgers game. Other pay-TV operators, including

satellite-TV companies such as DirecTV, say the channel is too expensive for them to carry. As a result of other distributors not carrying the channel, TWC won't receive affiliate fees that would offset its costs, resulting in the lowered revenue and profit guidance for the year. Earlier this week, under political pressure from lawmakers, TWC said it would be willing to submit to "binding arbitration" with other distributors including DirecTV and Cox Communications Inc. to get the Dodgers games on the air quickly. But Time Warner Cable Chief Executive Rob Marcus noted Thursday that "it takes two parties to actually have an arbitration" and "so far none of the other distributors have expressed a willingness to do what it takes."

Later Thursday, DirecTV Chief Executive Mike White said on an earnings conference call that DirecTV is "willing to consider some kind of mediation" but wasn't sure what Time Warner Cable had in mind. Arbitration, he said, would need the "active and constructive participation of the ownership of the Dodgers." Mr. White said that the Dodgers deal and a similar deal with the Lakers that Time Warner Cable struck in 2011 have created "stratospheric prices in the Los Angeles market" and if "you did it for all the sports teams that L.A. subscribers have to pay for, you would be at $26 per subscriber per month. That's a huge tax, particularly on the many households that don't watch sports." Mr. White said DirecTV actually added customers in the L.A. area in the quarter, a sign that the Dodgers' absence on its satellite TV lineup hasn't materially affected customer results.

On Thursday, TWC Chief Financial Officer Artie Minson recommended investors and analysts "assume we do not sign additional affiliate agreements for the Dodgers network this year." Separately, Mr. Marcus said on the conference call he expects the Comcast transaction to close and win regulatory approval by the end of the year, though he observed that due in part to the media and telecom merger activity since the deal was announced, the Federal Communications Commission has an "awful lot" on its plate and only a "finite amount of resources." – ***Wall Street Journal***; in the ***Los Angeles Times***, **DirecTV's CEO says he's open to mediation**

The Pennsylvania House of Representatives voting session called for next week has been canceled, said House Chief Clerk Anthony Barbush. Barbush said House leadership notified him they were canceling session for Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, all three days it was to be held. He was given no information about possible sessions to be held at a later date, he said. The House is set to reconvene in for the fall session in September, but the session scheduled for Monday was called to address a bill to enable Philadelphia to charge a cigarette tax to fund schools. Speaker of the House Sam Smith issued a statement Thursday shortly after the cancelation was made public. He said the cigarette tax and public pension reform will be voted in September. – ***pennlive.com***