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August 3, 2020

The Verge
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New York Times

Charter Communications shook up the cord-cutting narrative by adding 102,000 net residential video subscribers in the second quarter. The surprise growth comes after Charter had lost video subscribers in each of its previous four quarters, including a net loss of 150,000 residential video subscribers in the same quarter last year. The positive swing for Charter comes as Comcast reported a net loss of 477,000 video subscribers and AT&T reported a net loss of 886,000 premium video subscribers in the same quarter. Charter ended the

Is Telemedicine Here to Stay?

**The Hill
House-passed
funding package
includes \$500M for
election security
upgrades**

**Washington Post
The Internet's threat
is more about
national security
than the economy**

**CBS News
Australia plans to
make Facebook and
Google pay for news**

**New York Times
How the Media
Could Get the
Election Story
Wrong**

**Los Angeles Times
The COVID-19
pandemic is forcing
networks to reinvent
TV election
coverage**

**Pennlive
Census countdown
is on, but a lot of
Pennsylvanians
haven't been
counted**

**Pittsburgh Tribune-
Review
Women with ties to
Pittsburgh hired to
help Joe Biden's
Pennsylvania
campaign**

**USA Today
Op-ed by former PA
Gov. and Homeland
Security Sec. Tom
Ridge (R): Unlike
Trump, Republicans
must strongly, fully
denounce racism**

second quarter with 15.65 million residential video customers, down just 0.9% from where the total stood one year ago.

The cable operator said its total residential and SMB customer relationships increased by 755,000 during the second quarter, thanks largely to 850,000 new residential and SMB high-speed internet customers. That likely helped lead to a 17% year over year increase in double play customers. "Our ability to grow our services this year for new and existing customers, is a testament to our operating strategy, the quality of our products and our significant investment in systems and people over the last several years," said Charter Chairman and CEO Tom Rutledge in a statement. "We continue to perform in a difficult and disruptive environment, and all of us at Charter are proud of our work in serving the communities in which we operate."

While Charter's video subscriber growth surprisingly trended upward, the company's second quarter revenue per residential customer (excluding mobile) totaled \$110.82, down 1.2% year over year. The company said some of that had to do with the waiver of overdue customer balances for customers offered protection following Charter's participation in the FCC's Keep Americans Connected Pledge. However, the company also partly attributed it to a higher percentage of non-video customers and a higher mix of lower priced video packages within Charter's video customer base.

Charter's second-quarter revenue grew 3.1% year over year to \$11.7 billion, driven by residential revenue growth of 4.1%, mobile revenue growth of 96.1% and SMB revenue growth of 2%. Second quarter adjusted EBITDA of \$4.5 billion grew by 7.3% year over year. — **Fierce Video**

Fearful of losing federal pandemic dollars, officials from states across the country are rushing to finish projects by the end of the year aimed at expanding broadband internet into underserved areas. To comply with the current CARES Act rules, states must have the broadband projects, which can typically take months if not years of planning and construction, up and running by Dec. 30. Efforts are underway in Congress to provide greater flexibility in the funding.

In Vermont, the Legislature cut back on what lawmakers would have liked to allocate from \$100 million to less than \$20 million. They didn't believe they could have spent the larger amount on time, despite the need. 'We have to get it out, we have to get people to hook up,' said Vermont State Sen. Ann Cummings, a Democrat who chairs the Senate Finance Committee, which worked on broadband issues during this year's legislative session. Now, the Vermont Department of Public Service is in the process of issuing requests for proposals to spend \$17 million.

Potential contractors that usually plan years in advance are having to rearrange their schedules to do the work, said June Tierney, commissioner of the public service department, which expects to issue the first contracts in the coming days. With broadband, the goal is to expand the service so it would be available to students studying from home during the pandemic, people who need to use broadband for telehealth reasons and people working remotely from home. 'The coronavirus funds that the feds are giving to the states can be used for the short-term in response to COVID, but broadband expansion is a long-term goal,' said Heather Morton, who follows state broadband efforts for the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Among the other states that are dealing with the issue are Alabama, Iowa and New Hampshire. 'Based on guidance we have received, we are looking at short-term, immediate solutions using existing technology to increase internet access,' said Mike Presley of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs. 'That work is still ongoing.' New Hampshire is planning to spend \$50 million to expand broadband into underserved parts of the state. 'We're moving as fast as we can regardless, but hopefully they'll give us

more time,' Republican Gov. Chris Sununu said during a recent news conference.

The end-of-the-year rules don't just apply to broadband. Housing, and many business projects, are other sectors that traditionally require long lead times, also must be finished by the end of the year. The Vermont Legislature appropriated \$32 million of CARES Act money to deal with emergency housing issues, including finding permanent homes for the homeless, considered to be among the most vulnerable populations to COVID-19. 'No one has ever had to work this fast before,' said State Rep. Tom Stevens, a Democrat who is the chairman of the House Committee that deals with housing issues.

The goal of the \$2.2 trillion CARES Act, passed by Congress in March was to help states cope with the coronavirus pandemic quickly. Generally, the money is allowed to be used for outbreak-related expenses but cannot go to replace tax revenue that has evaporated because of the economic shutdowns. Many states have shared portions of the money with local governments that didn't qualify on their own. They're also launching loans and grants for businesses and housing and utility assistance for individuals, along with using it to pay unreimbursed costs for testing and contact tracing programs.

Democratic U.S. Sen. Patrick Leahy, whose Vermont home is located on a dirt road just outside Montpelier and has internet service that doesn't meet the working definition of broadband, said he's been working to provide more flexibility in the pandemic relief package being discussed in Congress now. 'Providing states this flexibility would ensure that we can deliver broadband to as many Vermonters as possible, build housing for the homeless, and help businesses navigate the ever-changing marketplace in these challenging times,' Leahy said in a statement. It's unclear what Vermont would do if Congress were to give the state more time to act on CARES Act projects. The Legislature is going to return later this month to make more spending decisions and lawmakers could change the broadband spending plans.

Vermont has mapped parts of the state where especially rural addresses don't have any internet service or those that don't meet the connectivity speed minimum definition of broadband. Officials are going to award contracts based on the best balance of expanding the technology and reaching the greatest number of people. 'This is triage, this is not like what we are looking for, a massive, wide solution,' said Jeremy Hansen, the chair of the governing board for CV Fiber, an organization covering 20 central Vermont towns to help expand broadband, which is considering making a bid for Vermont CARES Act money. 'We may be setting up cases where we are going to serve one house, not ideal, but that may be the case.' — **Associated Press**

The Federal Communications Commission is giving tribes another month to apply for a band of wireless spectrum that would help them establish or expand internet access on their land — far less time than what tribes had sought. Tribes pushed to be first in line to apply for licenses for the mid-band spectrum that is largely unassigned across the western United States and can be used for fixed or mobile internet service. The licenses once were reserved for educational institutions. The tribal priority window opened in February and was set to close Monday. It's now been extended to Sept. 2.

Tribes and tribal organizations had asked the FCC to push the deadline to February, or at least 90 days out as tribes struggle to respond to the coronavirus. Many tribal government offices remain closed with employees working remotely. "I don't believe it's a huge ask," said Loris Taylor, president and chief executive of Native Public Media. "This is something the FCC has done before, they've granted extensions and have provided exceptions in other proceedings due to COVID-19." The FCC said the 30-day extension "strikes an appropriate balance" in giving tribes more time to apply but not delaying licenses to those that already applied. "In light of the simplified application

process as well as the extensive outreach done by commission staff, a lengthy extension of the deadline is unnecessary, as evidenced by the large number of applications we've already received," said FCC Chairman Ajit Pai.

The FCC has estimated that about one-third of people living on tribal lands don't have access to high-speed internet, but others say the figure is twice as high. "This is about Native children and distance learning. This is about Native communities and telemedicine," said Matthew Rantanen, director of technology for the Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association. "This is about the health and safety and life of tribal members."

Nearly 230 tribes or tribal entities have submitted applications for the 2.5 GHz spectrum. Some have been granted temporary authority, including the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe in South Dakota, the Navajo Nation in the Four Corners region and Zuni Pueblo in New Mexico. In its request, the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe said it was preparing for students to do more remote learning in the fall and planned to use the temporary license to connect about 40 homes to the tribe's network.

The National Congress of American Indians was among those asking the FCC to give tribes more time to apply because of the coronavirus pandemic, saying hundreds could miss out on the opportunity. The group urged the FCC on Friday to reconsider its decision. "Significant additional time for tribal nations to file for licenses during this window is necessary and critical," the group said. The spectrum remaining after the tribal window closes will be auctioned off for commercial use. Telecommunications company T-Mobile said it didn't object to an extension of the tribal priority window for up to 90 days but wanted assurance that a public auction would happen next year. — **Associated Press**

Amazon has received authorization from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to proceed with Project Kuiper, its initiative to launch a fleet of low-orbiting satellites that would be used to provide broadband internet access to underserved communities in the U.S. The FCC approved of the tech giant's ambitious project by a vote of 5-0 on Thursday.

With the commission's green light, Amazon will now be able to begin the deployment of its 3,236 satellites. In total, Amazon is spending \$10 billion on the project based in a new Amazon development facility in Redmond, Wash. "We have heard so many stories lately about people who are unable to do their job or complete schoolwork because they don't have reliable internet at home," Dave Limp, Amazon's senior vice president, [said in a statement](#). "There are still too many places where broadband access is unreliable or where it doesn't exist at all. Kuiper will change that."

Many school districts in the country that are located in areas without widespread internet access have struggled to reach their students during the coronavirus pandemic. Forced online, many states and cities have created mobile hotspots where children can turn in and download their assignments. — **The Hill**

Pennsylvania will foot the cost of postage for voters to mail in ballots in November's general election, officials said Friday, a move that Gov. Tom Wolf has made a priority as the coronavirus pandemic unexpectedly fueled high interest in voting by mail under a new state law. The administration plans to use money from federal emergency coronavirus aid to foot the bill, which could run to several million dollars to cover 55 cents for millions of ballots.

Wolf's top elections official, Secretary of State Kathy Boockvar, said paying for the postage is a way to make voting more accessible, safer and easier during the pandemic. Advocates also said it should help people get their ballots in faster and on time. Under the plan, voters who apply for and receive a mail-in or absentee ballot in the mail will also get a postage-paid ballot-return

envelope. Each county will have options on how to carry that out, whether using stamps, a metered machine or a business-reply mail account linked to the state's, Boockvar said.

The step by Wolf, a Democrat, comes as his administration and lawmakers discuss legislation to help counties deal with the expected avalanche of mailed-in ballots in a premier presidential battleground state. It also comes as the push to expand voting by mail ahead of the November presidential election has become increasingly partisan.

President Donald Trump has made clear he believes widespread mail-in voting would benefit Democrats. He has alleged — without citing evidence — that it will lead to massive fraud, and the Republican National Committee has budgeted \$20 million to fight Democratic lawsuits in at least 18 states aimed at expanding voting by mail. Seventeen states cover postage for mail-in ballots, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures, including in states under Republican governors such as Arizona, Maryland and Missouri, and under Democratic governors, including California, Minnesota and Virginia.

Covering ballot postage is also the subject of a push in statehouses and courts in several other states with Republican governors, including Ohio, Florida and Georgia. While the U.S. Postal Service has said the post office delivers every piece of election mail to its destination — with or without adequate postage — advocates for postage-paid ballot envelopes argue that most voters are unlikely to trust that a ballot without postage will get delivered. Advocates also compare the cost of a stamp to a poll tax. However, a federal judge in Florida rejected the idea in a court case there in June, comparing stamps to the costs of a voter driving or riding the bus to the polls.

In Pennsylvania, both the Republican and Democratic parties urged voters to cast ballots by mail in the June 2 primary election. More than 1.4 million Pennsylvanians voted by mail in the primary, or about half, smashing a state record made possible by a sweeping new election law Wolf signed last fall. In the 2016 presidential election, 6.1 million voters cast ballots, as Trump's narrow victory in Pennsylvania helped pave his path to the White House.

But while Democrats have tried to expand access to voting by mail, Republicans have struggled with what to tell their voters. Some have pushed for it, including the Trump campaign, while Trump and his allies at the Republican National Committee have tried to limit the expansion of remote voting, including in Pennsylvania. Rep. Kevin Boyle, D-Philadelphia, who chairs the state House committee that handles election issues, said pre-paid ballot envelopes will help voters get their ballots in more quickly and help avoid problems like in the primary when thousands of mailed-in ballots arrived after polls closed. "It will quicken the turnaround time and make it easier for voters to participate in this election in November," Boyle said.

House Republicans, meanwhile, questioned need to pre-pay for all ballot envelopes, and said the state could instead cover the cost when the U.S. Postal Service bills counties to deliver ballot envelopes without a stamp. "Instead of a narrowly tailored approach that considers the true costs of ensuring voting remains free to the voter, the Wolf administration has once again taken the overbroad approach of carelessly doling out taxpayer dollars under the false pretense of solving a phantom problem," House Republicans said in a statement. — **Associated Press**



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