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RCN, one of the Lehigh Valley's primary cable TV and internet providers, could be on the market — again. According to a [report by Reuters on Monday](#), RCN's owner, TPG Capital, is exploring a sale of Astound, a network of regional cable and internet providers that includes RCN, Grande Communications and Wave Broadband. Reuters, citing people familiar with the matter, reported a sale could fetch more than \$8 billion, including debt. That would represent a big return for TPG, which paid about \$4.6 billion in 2017 and 2018 to acquire RCN, Grande and Wave. TPG then combined the firms to create a Top 10 U.S. cable company.

RCN, which has bounced around between private-equity owners over the last decade, declined to comment. In addition to the Lehigh Valley, RCN's markets include Philadelphia, New York City, Chicago, Boston and Washington, D.C. Wave serves customers in Washington, Oregon and California, while Grande covers Texas.

The report comes as cable providers across the country see a surge in internet service amid the coronavirus pandemic, which has forced many people to work from home and become increasingly reliant on streaming for their entertainment needs. In the second quarter, the country's largest cable and telephone providers added more than 1.2 million broadband internet subscribers, the highest quarterly gain in eight years, according to Leichtman Research Group Inc., which specializes in research and analysis of the broadband, media and entertainment industries.

emergency powers fails

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Harrisburg Patriot-News
Op-ed by Lisa Schaefer, Executive Director of the County Commissioners Association of PA: We need changes in state law to ensure accurate, timely reporting of mail-in voting

On Wednesday, cable and internet provider Altice USA announced a \$7.8 billion bid to buy Canadian telecommunications firmCogeco, though Cogeco's majority shareholder reportedly indicated it wouldn't support the proposal. In the case of selling RCN, Grande and Wave, the challenge could be finding a buyer, said Bruce Leichtman, president and principal analyst for Leichtman Research Group. That's because those companies are considered overbuilders, the name given to firms that built on an existing telecommunications operator's network, putting it in competition with an area's incumbent provider. An overbuilder is a less attractive purchase to firms that want to dominate each market. "That essentially rules out major companies like Comcast and Charter from buying," Leichtman said. "They would have far less interest in buying an overbuilder than franchised properties."

One public company considered an overbuilder is WideOpenWest Inc., though Leichtman said he's unsure if that firm, which goes by WOW!, is interested or is in a position to make a play. If a deal happens, that would be the third ownership change for RCN in the last decade. RCN, a dot-com-age darling that emerged from bankruptcy in 2004, in 2010 announced a deal to sell itself to Abry Partners for about \$1.2 billion in cash and assumed debt. Then, in August 2016, TPG announced an agreement to buy RCN from Abry for \$1.6 billion. RCN's main competition in the Lehigh Valley, Service Electric Cable TV & Communications, has remained private and locally run, with its headquarters in Bethlehem. – **Allentown Morning Call**

Cable-TV newcomers joined Verizon Communications Inc. and Dish Network Corp. among the top bidders in the Federal Communications Commission's latest auction of cellular spectrum licenses, according to data released Wednesday.

Verizon, the country's largest cellphone carrier, topped the list with \$1.89 billion in winning bids for licenses in the 3.55 gigahertz band, according to the commission. Dish unit Wetterhorn Wireless LLC bid about \$913 million. Units of Charter Communications Inc., Comcast Corp. and Cox Communications Inc. followed with winning bids of \$464 million, \$459 million and \$213 million, respectively. Cellphone carrier T-Mobile US Inc. bid less than \$6 million in the auction, while AT&T Inc. spent nothing.

Wireless-industry analysts expected Verizon and Dish to be active participants in the most recent auction, which offered 70 megahertz of "priority access" licenses in a band considered useful for ultrafast fifth-generation, or 5G, transmissions. Rival T-Mobile's purchase of Sprint Corp. this year gave it a treasure trove of wireless licenses that led Verizon to play catch-up in the race to supply customers with more mobile internet data. Satellite-TV operator Dish has spent the past decade amassing its own spectrum licenses for a brand-new wireless network, though the system hasn't been built.

The entry of regional cable operators suggests that home broadband providers are eager to offer more service over the air. Charter and Comcast have added hundreds of thousands of smartphone customers over the past year, but their mobile service runs on Verizon's network outside the home, limiting the cable companies' profitability. Charter also has tested fixed home broadband service over 3.5 GHz frequencies to lower the cost of stringing wires to far-flung households.

The cable companies' wireless bets pale next to their regular investments in landline infrastructure, and the latest bids are no guarantee their strategies will shift. Cable companies have made similar wagers on wireless service before withdrawing and selling their holdings back to established cellphone carriers. The latest auction fetched nearly \$4.6 billion in winning bids overall. The licenses were considered highly valuable but complicated by a sharing arrangement that allowed some companies to use nearby frequencies without an exclusive license. The military also uses the spectrum band, though

engineers consider the likelihood of interference from naval radar low in most of the country.

The most recent auction was still considered a bellwether for new participants' interest in building their own wireless services. Oil giant Chevron Corp., equipment maker Deere & Co. and several electric utilities made smaller bids for licenses in certain areas. The auction results also set the stage for a more expensive auction of C-Band spectrum, another swath of frequencies useful for 5G service. The commission is expected to kick off an auction for those spectrum bands in December. – **Wall Street Journal**

It's a race to watch. Even as down-ballot contests aren't getting attention. Even amid COVID-19, when campaigns can't press the flesh, and going door-to-door seems unwise.

It's happening as Pennsylvanians no longer can vote a straight-ticket -- something insiders in both parties are jittery about. And as worry persists over mail-in voting. Yet the race in the 15th state Senate District, covering Perry County and most of Dauphin County, including Harrisburg, is maybe the best undercard contest in the state; a rare bit of politics filled with the promise of high-end performance. And since it's key to Democratic hopes (I'd say optimistic hopes) of flipping four Senate seats to grab control of the chamber, it's certain to be spirited.

It features first-term incumbent Republican Sen. John DiSanto and Democratic challenger George Scott. Two strong candidates familiar with tight, tough races. Scott, you'll recall, is the soldier/minister/intellectual, with a resume worthy of applause, who got lots of attention in 2018 [by nearly upsetting GOP Congressman Scott Perry](#). Scott lost by just 2.6 percentage points.

DiSanto, a successful, wealthy developer active in the community, [won his seat in 2016 by upsetting incumbent Democrat Rob Tepoltz](#). DiSanto won by just 2.8 percentage points. DiSanto has robust Republican cred and a notable populist streak. He lauds President Trump's economic policies as "good for the 15th District." Says blaming Trump for COVID-19 is "politics." And tags Gov. Tom Wolf for not working with lawmakers, biz leaders and others in handling the pandemic.

He's pro-jobs, pro-gun, pro-school choice, anti-abortion and all about less government. He's not taking a state pension. He doesn't take expenses or mileage. He donates his annual cost-of-living salary bump to charity (they all should). And he sponsored popular legislation that became law last year [prohibiting public employees convicted of a felony from collecting public pensions](#). (That effort gained steam after [former Democratic Senate Leader Bob Mellow](#), of Lackawanna County, who went to prison on federal corruption charges, was allowed to keep his public pension of, believe it or not, \$245,000 a-year.) So, a case can be made that DiSanto's positioned to win a second term – which would be his last since he's self-term-limiting. "I've done what I said I'd do. I've been accessible. I've been transparent," he says. "I'm sure I'm going to win."

Ah, but then there's Scott. Raised on a farm, magna cum laude from Georgetown University, Army intelligence officer, served around the world, battalion commander in Iraq, retired after 20 years with rank of lieutenant colonel. Then served in the CIA. *Then* became a Lutheran minister. In 2018, as a political newcomer, he was an impressive and effective campaigner.

Which, come on, raises questions: why not run for Congress again; why a state Senate seat? Opportunism maybe? Find a first-terminer. Move into the district. And away we go? Scott moved from Dillsburg in York County to Harrisburg's riverfront Shipoke neighborhood last September. (The state Constitution requires Senate candidates live at least a year in the district they seek to represent, and be a state resident for four years.)

Scott says he and his wife just wanted to downsize, adding, "I'm not some outsider...I've lived in Southcentral Pennsylvania since I was four-years old...it's not like I moved from Philadelphia or Pittsburgh...I moved a whopping 15 miles." And, he says, he's running for Senate because he came to see "the issues that most directly effect peoples' day-to-day lives are primarily at the state level." He stresses sensible priorities such as health care, paid family and medical leave, equitable school funding, campaign finance reform, term limits, integrity and accountability in government.

He supports the Second Amendment but wants a "dialogue on reducing gun violence." He thinks abortion should be safe, legal and rare. Believes in raising the \$7.25 per hour minimum wage to \$15 over time. Is no fan of school vouchers. "As with (late Georgia congressman) John Lewis, my politics is an extension of my faith," says Scott. "It's about loving and caring for our neighbors." Who wins? As always, it depends on who votes. And this year, on the impact of the presidential race, success or failure of mail-in voting, and COVID-19.

The 15th District has nearly an equal divide of R and D voters. And lots of independents. Current state data shows 76,482 registered Republicans, 75,581 Democrats and 25,833 "other" voters. They have a real choice for state senator. That's a rarity around here. And, historically, across Pennsylvania.

– John Baer's column in *Harrisburg Patriot-News*

