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NewsClips

September 27, 2019

Bloomberg
Phone Firms Are
Losing Their Grip on
an Industry They
Pioneered

Bringing broadband to all of Pennsylvania will require money and a better mapping system, a group of panelists told the Senate Communications and Technology Committee. About 11 million people do not have access to high-speed broadband, according to a report by Penn State and legislation filed by Committee Chairman Kristin Phillips-Hill, R-York.

New York Times

Why Californians Have Better Privacy Protections

National Journal

The Fight to Keep Congress from Embarrassing Itself on Tech

The Wrap

Fox TV Stations, Cable Networks Go Dark on Dish in Carriage Dispute

New York Times

Locast, a Free Streaming Service, Sues ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox

The Hill

Hacker conference report details persistent vulnerabilities to US voting systems

TVNewsCheck

FCC Proposes Online Public Notice Requirements

Reuters

Russia's Yandex launches video service aimed at rivaling YouTube

Phillips-Hill reintroduced a package of legislation, including Senate Bill 470, addressing what she said was the inadequate connectivity. If the bill passes, the Department of General Services will “conduct an inventory of all state department, agency, commission or institution owned communication towers, poles, buildings, and facilities to leverage existing state-owned assets for the provisioning of high-speed broadband internet to unserved and underserved areas.”

But the issue is not about access to poles, it’s about the market, testified Curt Topper, secretary of the Department of General Services. “The private sector has failed to provide broadband everywhere because the market opportunity hasn’t been sufficient everywhere to warrant the necessary private capital investment everywhere,” Topper said. “Even if we offered the commonwealth’s real estate assets and space on our existing towers to wireless providers at no cost, it wouldn’t fundamentally change the economics. Additional capital investment is necessary to solve the rural broadband challenge.”

James M. D’Innocenzo, Comcast vice president for government, legislative and regulatory affairs for the Pennsylvania and Ohio area (and BCAP Board of Directors member), cautioned lawmakers about confusing adoption with available speed. He told the panel that 96 percent of homes in Pennsylvania have access to internet that is equal to or greater than the 25/3 threshold recommended by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

“However, many customers choose to purchase service tiers that are slower than the fastest service available in their area,” D’Innocenzo said in verbal and written testimony. “For example, a person could choose to buy a 10 mbps service because it is sufficient enough to meet their needs, even if a 25 mbps service is available. To be clear, broadband is available to these people and they have not adopted the service, but they purchase service at less than the fastest speeds available to them.”

Creating a mapping system that identifies areas that lack broadband access is another problem, panelists testified. The FCC approved a plan Aug. 1 that would improve mapping nationwide and better identify where broadband is not available. Before, the FCC relied on internet service providers but did not verify the information, Sascha D. Meinrath of Penn State University testified. Cost will remain a barrier, with all of the panelists telling Phillips-Hill that broadband expansion would cost millions. – *northcentralpa.com*

Apple Inc. is looking to make a splash in Hollywood by bringing feature-length films to theaters before releasing them on its streaming TV service, according to people familiar with the plans. The company has made overtures to cinema chains and consulted with an entertainment executive as it pursues a traditional theatrical-release plan that would keep its movies in theaters for weeks before becoming available on Apple TV+, these people said.

By reaching out to theater-industry representatives now and releasing films early, Apple is hoping to attract big-name directors and producers and avoid some of the tension created by another Hollywood

newcomer, Netflix Inc., people familiar with Apple's strategy said. Netflix typically asks theater owners to release movies it owns or produces at the same time they are available on the streaming service. That approach limits the company's ability to play its movies in major cinemas, which generally insist that films don't appear online for about three months after their theatrical debuts. In recent months, talks between theater companies and Netflix about showing awards contenders such as the coming Martin Scorsese drama "The Irishman" in their cinemas have fallen apart after the two sides failed to reach a consensus on the exclusivity.

Apple's strategy is more akin to that of Amazon.com Inc. , which started releasing films in 2015. Amazon has given movies such as "Manchester by the Sea" a three-month theatrical window while others get a two-week run. Apple's effort is being led by its co-heads of video programming, Zack Van Amburg and Jamie Erlicht, who report to the iPhone maker's services chief Eddy Cue. They have tapped Greg Foster, the former head of entertainment at IMAX Corp. , as a consultant to help with the plan.

Among Apple's first major theatrical releases is Sofia Coppola's "On the Rocks," which stars Rashida Jones as a young woman reconnecting with her eccentric father, to be played by Bill Murray. Apple is eyeing a mid-2020 release, perhaps following a premiere at a high-profile event such as the Cannes Film Festival, people familiar with the situation said. "On the Rocks" is being produced through Apple's partnership with A24, an independent film production company known for such art-house releases as the best-picture winner "Moonlight" and "Hereditary." Apple and A24 signed a multiyear partnership last year. A24, while well-regarded in Hollywood and among critics, isn't known for setting box-office records: Its top-grossing release, "Lady Bird," made \$49 million in the U.S. and Canada.

Apple has also talked with movie theater representatives about a documentary called "The Elephant Queen," which it plans to release this year. The documentary—about an elephant leading her herd across Africa—is slated to debut Nov. 1 on TV+ and also air in theaters so that it is eligible for awards consideration, according to people familiar with the plans. Rather than see the theatrical strategy as a moneymaker, Apple is more interested in the prestige and brand-building that can come with a glitzy theatrical release, according to people briefed on its plans, a strategy similar to that of Amazon Studios. Like Apple, Amazon has focused on character-driven movies largely abandoned by major studios, producing big-budget features in the vein of "The Avengers" or "The Fast and the Furious."

Apple has pitched itself as a place where artists can share their stories with the world, putting pressure on it to define a theatrical-release plan for producers and directors, said agents and Hollywood advisers. They said a strategy would help the company woo content creators who still want to see their work on the big screen and be taken more seriously as a player in film.

J.J. Abrams, the director of "Star Wars: The Force Awakens," recently spurned Apple's overtures to bring his film, television and digital projects to the company. Instead, Mr. Abrams signed with WarnerMedia in a deal worth less than Apple proposed, partly because

Apple didn't have a movie distribution model, according to people familiar with the negotiations.

Movies could deepen the appeal of Apple TV+. Apple's subscription-streaming service, which makes its debut Nov. 1, will initially offer just a handful of original shows, making it a tough sell against the deeper programming libraries of such streaming rivals as Netflix, Amazon and Walt Disney Co. Apple has tried to counter its shallower offering by undercutting rivals on price. TV+ will cost \$4.99 a month, less than the \$6.99 that Disney plans to charge for Disney+ and a fraction of the price of Netflix's fee of \$12.99. The iPhone maker can afford to **discount the service** because of the profits it earns on hardware and its ability to distribute across the more than 1.4 billion active devices it has world-wide.

Apple's push into Hollywood has created challenges for established players. On the day it announced its TV+ pricing, Disney Chief Executive Robert Iger **resigned as a director** on Apple's board to avoid any potential conflicts as the companies increasingly compete. Mr. Foster brings to Apple nearly two decades of experience with some of Hollywood's most popular filmmakers, such as James Cameron and Mr. Abrams, who have shot their movies with IMAX technology, as well as major exhibitors such as AMC Entertainment Holdings Inc.

Mr. Foster's tenure at IMAX coincided with the company's expansion beyond science-museum documentaries to include auditoriums in every major theater chain, dedicated to showing Hollywood's biggest releases for a premium price on large-format screens. Since IMAX only shows one movie at a time, studios now schedule their releases at times they know they can secure IMAX auditoriums. — ***Wall Street Journal***

Special elections come and go. But the mess in West Philly's 190th State House District endures. Clout hears agents from the state Attorney General's Office are visiting Democratic ward leaders **in the district**, asking about the **March 12 special election** won by State Rep. Movita Johnson-Harrell.

Clout readers probably recall that the previous occupant of that seat, Vanessa Lowery Brown, **resigned in December** after being **convicted on bribery charges**. The Democratic City Committee then ran into a series of problems in January, prompted by this column's reporting, while seeking a replacement candidate. Now we hear investigators are showing checks from Johnson-Harrell's campaign, written to ward leaders for election day get-out-the-vote efforts, and asking how they were cashed. They're also asking about one of her campaign consultants, Tracy Hardy.

Johnson-Harrell, who worked for District Attorney Larry Krasner before the election, declined to comment and referred questions to her attorney, who also declined. Hardy was once an aide to former Mayor John Street and until last year was chief of staff to Street's son, State Sen. Sharif Street, who is vice chairman of the state Democratic Party and **helped Johnson-Harrell secure** the party's nod in January. He has done consulting work this year for Mayor Jim Kenney's campaign, along with candidates for City Council, City Commissioner, and Court of Common Pleas. Hardy referred us to his attorney, Michael Schwartz, who said he had spoken with the AG's Office. "I have been

assured that Tracy Hardy is not a subject or target of any investigation,” Schwartz said.

Pete Wilson, who leads the 6th Ward, said the agents last week showed him a campaign check made out to his ward and asked if the signature used to cash it was his. It wasn’t. “Somebody signed my signature,” Wilson said. “I know it wasn’t my signature.” Bernadette Wyche, leader of the 24th Ward, said she didn’t have much information. “They’re not giving us any details at this time,” she said. “I can’t say anything.”

Other ward leaders in the district did not respond to requests for comment. A spokesperson for the Attorney General’s Office declined to comment. More than **\$85,000 was dumped** into Johnson-Harrell’s six-week campaign, in a district where 87% of registered voters are Democrats. Her victory — with 66.5% of the vote — was assured as soon as the city committee nominated her. Still, Johnson-Harrell lent her campaign \$15,000. Building trades unions gave her thousands more, the largest chunk — \$10,000 — from Local 98 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

Johnson-Harrell was the party’s third choice, and her bid was tinged with controversy due to a history of **financial troubles**, including **a shuttered business** and a personal bankruptcy filing. An early front-runner, Sonte Reavis, bowed out after **Clout raised questions** about whether he lived in the district. Then, nominee Darryl Thomas **quickly dropped out** of the race after **another Clout column** posed similar questions. – Chris Brennan’s “Clout” column in *Philadelphia Daily News*

