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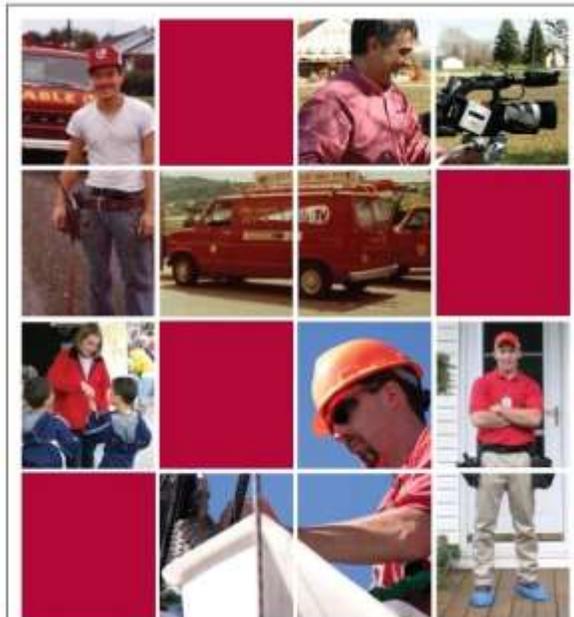
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As a lobbyist for the cable and wireless industries, Tom Wheeler played a role in shaping almost every major telecommunications policy and innovation over the last three decades. Cable and telephone deregulation. Internet service in schools and libraries. C-SPAN. None of them, though, have generated as much public interest as [net neutrality](#), the policy most likely to define his time as chairman of the Federal Communications Commission.

In the last few months, Mr. Wheeler's guidelines for net neutrality, the concept that users should have equal access to any legal online content, have become a lightning rod for criticism. More than 3.7 million comments about the policy have flowed to the commission. Many of them argue that Mr. Wheeler's plan does not go far enough to protect an open Internet. Underlying much of the criticism has been Mr. Wheeler's long history as a lobbyist or investor in companies he now regulates. But almost a year into the job, Mr. Wheeler has established a record as a formidable opponent to the industries he used to represent.



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Six-foot-four and rail thin, Mr. Wheeler still looks like a lobbyist out of central casting. He stands so tall he practically leans backward. His crisp shirts are often monogrammed and have French cuffs. After growing up in Columbus, Ohio, and graduating from Ohio State University, he worked on the 1968 Senate campaign for John J. Gilligan in Ohio. The campaign, though a losing effort, gave him "Potomac fever," Mr. Wheeler said. He moved to Washington and joined the Grocery Manufacturers Association, where he stayed for several years before moving to the upstart cable industry.

While at the leading cable industry group, then known as the National Cable Television

This year, he joined the Justice Department's antitrust division in opposing [the proposed merger of Sprint and T-Mobile](#), the third- and fourth-largest cellphone companies. That opposition led Sprint's parent, SoftBank, to abandon the deal. This month, he strongly hinted that mobile broadband would likely be subject to the same rules as wired broadband, a change from his initial proposal. "Sitting on the other side of the desk in this office is really a fascinating experience," Mr. Wheeler, 68, said in an interview last week. As a lobbyist, he said, "I used to come into this office, and I was cocksure. 'This is the answer; what's important is what's needed for my client.' But as I've said many times, I have an entirely different client now."

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Philadelphia Inquirer
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Association, he helped shepherd the 1984 Cable Act, which largely deregulated the still-fledgling business. While at the top wireless association, he pushed the 1996 Telecommunications Act, a sweeping update of the 1934 Communications Act. He helped get the cable industry behind the creation of C-SPAN, and he championed the E-Rate program, which provided funding for advanced telecommunications connections for schools and libraries.

Reed Hundt, who was F.C.C. chairman in 1994, when an earlier version of the Telecommunications Act died in Congress, said Mr. Wheeler pushed the F.C.C. to continue to fight to get E-Rate approved, even though it would not directly benefit the cellular industry. "He was the only person in the entire business world who came to me and said, 'Don't give up on E-Rate,'" Mr. Hundt said.

Over the years Mr. Wheeler regularly supported Democratic candidates, and as he increased his wealth as a venture capitalist, his fund-raising efforts expanded as well. In the fall of 2007, he and his wife, Carol, moved to Ames, Iowa, her hometown, to campaign for President Obama before the Iowa caucuses. For six weeks, the Wheelers rubbed shoulders with campaign workers in their 20s, answering phones each weeknight and knocking on doors all weekend. Later, he became a top fund-raiser for Mr. Obama's campaign, raising more than \$700,000.

His work as an investor in communications start-ups helped make him personally wealthy, too. On financial disclosure forms he lists at least \$10 million in financial assets, much of them investments in media companies. After his nomination last year, he divested himself of investments in 78 media companies, including Verizon, AT&T, Comcast and Google. Some of Mr. Wheeler's supporters say his wealth has freed him as chairman because he does not need a job when he is done. Many past commissioners have turned to lobbying after their tenure — including the current leaders of the cable and wireless associations: Michael K. Powell, chief of the National Cable & Telecommunications Association and former F.C.C. chairman; and Meredith Attwell Baker, the chief of CTIA-The Wireless Association and a former F.C.C. commissioner. Mr. Wheeler has said he wanted to return to writing books. But many consumer organizations say Mr. Wheeler could have taken a stronger stand against cable groups. "So far, the discussion has not been as productive as we would have liked," said Matt Wood, policy director at Free Press, a consumer interest group. "The rhetoric has been good, but the reality of the proposal hasn't matched that."

One thing has remained constant throughout the years, according to people who have known Mr. Wheeler for a long time — his belief that for every issue, there is a right and a wrong answer. Mr. Wheeler says he relishes debate, up to a point. "I love the intellectual stimulation of conflicting ideas," he said. "A lot of people tend to say, 'He didn't do it my way, therefore he doesn't have an open mind, and therefore he's not willing to compromise.' I think there is a difference between compromise and capitulation."

Mr. Wheeler sometimes references his past when explaining his policy decisions. After leaving the cable association in 1984, he helped start a company that delivered high-speed data to home computers over cable television lines. It ran up against a cable industry that wanted the company, Nabu, to pay for the right to access the cable lines, money that the start-up did not have. "I had companies fail because they did not have access to networks," he said at a town-hall meeting in Albuquerque in June, during a discussion about whether his net neutrality plan was strong enough. "Cable companies would tell us to go away. I know what it's like to not have access."

Arthur Esch, who started Nabu with Mr. Wheeler when relatively few people had heard the word "online," said Mr. Wheeler was always open to hearing people's ideas and their thought process. But listening is often as far as it goes. "He's not a democracy guy," Mr. Esch said. "You do not have a vote. He's a decision maker."

Mr. Wheeler's style has led to some grumbling among the commissioners at F.C.C.

headquarters. Aides say the other commissioners often are excluded from the drafting of new proposals. Sometimes, that has meant making enemies with groups that once were friends — especially when it comes to net neutrality. Mr. Wheeler was handed the issue of net neutrality two months into his tenure, when a [federal appeals court threw out F.C.C. rules](#) enacted in 2010 that forbade broadband providers from blocking or discriminating against any legal content. The court said the F.C.C. was treating broadband companies too much like regulated utilities.

Those invalidated rules also discouraged content providers from paying for priority access through a broadband company's pipes. But when Mr. Wheeler released a new set of rules, that provision was missing, leading many critics to say that the new regime violated net neutrality by allowing for paid prioritization — so-called fast lanes through a broadband company's systems. New rules are expected to be adopted by the end of the year. Mr. Wheeler has said several times that he does not believe fast lanes are consistent with an open Internet. "How we deal with open Internet is going to have to be an amalgam of multiple approaches," he said. "These are new times. These are new technologies," he continued. "There is a new future and we want to be able to structure something that will last into that new future." — *New York Times*

For a glimpse of challenges facing stand-alone media companies, investors should gaze at the Starz. News that the premium cable network is seeking a buyer should come as no surprise. From the beginning, many investors saw Liberty Media's August 2012 announcement that it would spin off Starz as a way to spur an acquisition by another player. The rationale behind a sale has only gotten stronger since then. Starz and other stand-alone networks such as AMC Networks and Scripps Networks Interactive lack the heft of their larger peers when it comes to negotiating affiliate deals with pay-TV providers. And they look increasingly vulnerable now that distributors like Comcast, Time Warner Cable, AT&T and DirecTV are combining forces.

As those deals work their way through the government-approval process, Starz has more incentive than ever to sell itself. But when it comes to bulking up, big media companies have more incentive to combine with even bigger media companies than they do to pick up stragglers. Having a full array of assets, including valuable sports rights, a broadcast network and cable channels makes a media firm harder to ignore when it sits down across the negotiating table from a pay-TV provider. That principle was on display in 21st Century Fox's \$80 billion bid for Time Warner in June. Fox later abandoned this after being rebuffed. But the idea behind that deal was to create a mega company with the full arsenal of assets at its disposal.

A premium channel might also be considered a must-have asset; HBO undoubtedly made Time Warner a more attractive target. But HBO's deep library of original content makes it a more powerful negotiating tool than Starz, which is still in the relatively early stages of its original-programming strategy. In a recent survey of 18-to-24-year-olds conducted by Janney Capital Markets, HBO was by far the most popular among premium networks and streaming services. The firm, which surveyed a thousand people in that demographic, found HBO was the fifth most popular source of content, putting it above broadcast networks like Fox and CBS.

That suggests HBO is well positioned for the possibility of new distribution models as more people watch video online, Janney says. That could mean offering its HBO Go service directly to consumers or becoming part of a smaller cable bundle. And being inside a larger company undoubtedly helps. The advantage is reflected in the multiples of stand-alone companies versus those of their larger peers. Starz trades at nine times 2015 earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization, compared with 11 times for Time Warner and 13 times for Fox. As media companies look to get bigger, stand-alone networks may not be their first port of call. — *Wall Street Journal*

Dodgers minority owner Magic Johnson said he is confident a majority of local households will be able to watch his team's games on television next season. "I think we're going to be on TV next season," Johnson said Sunday. "I really do." The Dodgers' network, SportsNet LA, was unavailable in 70% of local households as Time Warner Cable was unable to reach a distribution agreement with DirecTV and other providers. Comcast is in the process of taking over Time Warner; AT&T is doing the same with DirecTV. Johnson thinks a deal can be struck once the mergers have been completed. Johnson pointed to how fans responded when the Dodgers' final six games were aired on KDOC. "They saw the response of the fans when they were on TV and how everybody tuned in to see the Dodgers," Johnson said.

Johnson said that at one point, he reached out to DirecTV. "I asked them, 'Can we do anything to make this deal happen because our fans are suffering?'" Johnson said. "They felt they had a good proposal on the table. They did respond, so I give DirecTV credit." The Dodgers' games in the National League division series will be televised by FS1 or MLB Network. "They don't have to worry about that starting on Friday," Johnson said. "They'll be on all the cable stations." – **Los Angeles Times**

Former Pennsylvania senator Rick Santorum was among the potential 2016 presidential contenders wooing conservative activists this weekend at the annual Values Voter Summit in Washington, D.C.

Greeted with a standing ovation from the ballroom crowd Friday afternoon, the previous – and perhaps future - presidential candidate talked about the latest Middle East clashes and critiqued the Republican Party for what he described as "playing defense" on too many important issues. "We're not even willing to fight the fight to stand for what we say we believe in, because we think, well, history is moving in a different way," Santorum said. "History? We are the determiners of history."

Santorum defied political odds in 2012, winning 11 states and forcing Mitt Romney, the GOP's eventual nominee, to spend enormous amounts in tight races. But Santorum ended his run before Pennsylvania's primary, as his daughter was hospitalized and he risked an embarrassing loss in his home state. The social conservative icon has remained coy about whether he'll give a presidential campaign another go, saying he won't announce a decision until next year.

Despite his unexpected surge last time, he's remained outside of the 2016 spotlight that has focused on other headliners from the weekend conference, like Texas Sen. Ted Cruz and Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul.

Attendees at the conference, organized by the Family Research Council, tend to be conservative Christian voters. The nine-year-old event is a popular stop for social conservative candidates, and Santorum has been a speaker every year. Santorum didn't address 2016 specifically in his remarks Friday. He did use his time slot to tout a book he and his wife, Karen, will be releasing in February about raising Bella, their youngest daughter, who has a rare genetic condition. – **Allentown Morning Call**; more on Santorum in **Politico**



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