

# Snapshot Report:

## *How Consolidation and Reduced Competition are Raising Your Internet and TV Costs*

December 17, 2025



**U.S. Senate Committee on  
Commerce, Science, and Transportation Minority  
Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), Ranking Member**



## Executive Summary

Americans are facing an affordability crisis. Household connectivity costs – for TV content, cellphone service, and broadband access – continue to rise across the nation.

However, instead of leaning into competition, transparency, and supporting families, today's Federal Communications Commission is allowing a handful of giant companies to accumulate more and more market power that leaves consumers paying more while getting less.

## Key Findings

### TV Content Costs Are Up

- Streaming costs rose 13% year-over-year in 2025 alone.
- Over the last ten years, basic cable rates have more than doubled.
- Retransmission fees have increased approximately 2,000% over the last decade.

### Cellphone Service Costs Are Up

- U.S. consumers pay the second-highest price for wireless service among 26 advanced economies.
- The FCC is reducing competition by forcing Dish to abandon its nationwide network, effectively eliminating a fourth national carrier.
- Verizon is adding over \$1 billion a year in revenue primarily from price hikes, even as subscriber growth is sluggish.

### Broadband Access Costs Are Up

- 23 million low-income households lost \$30–\$75 per month in broadband support, forcing 70% of recipients to downgrade or discontinue their internet access.
- The FCC is making it easier for broadband providers to hide fees from consumers.

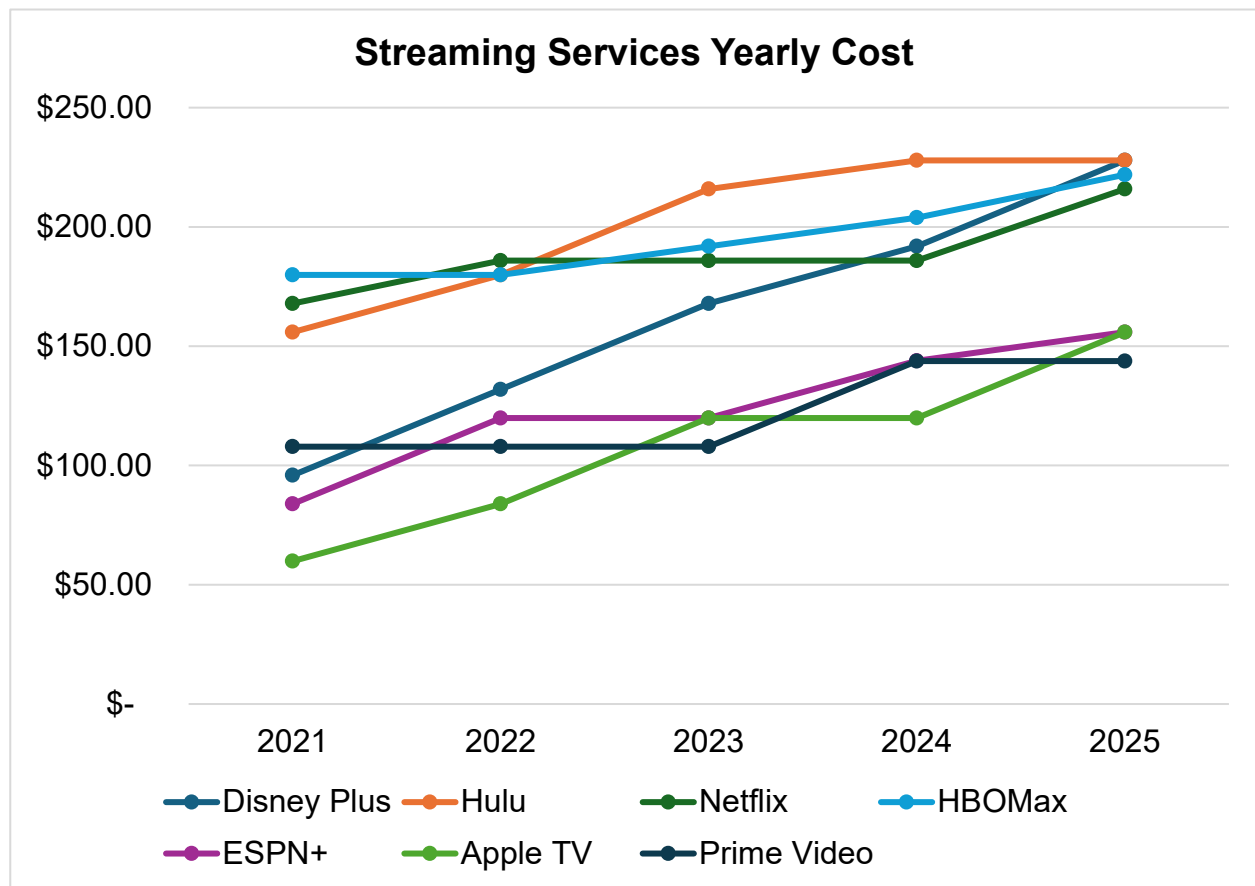
## Rising TV Content Prices

### Streaming and Studio Consolidation Driving Up Household Bills

While streaming was initially marketed as a cheaper alternative to cable, many Americans today have to pay for TV content on top of their monthly internet bills.

Moreover, costs for online TV and movie content continue to rise. Recent consumer reports found that Americans spent an average of \$69 per month on streaming services in 2025, a 13 percent and almost \$100 increase over what they paid in 2024.<sup>i</sup> With costs rising across the board, nearly half of subscribers say they pay too much for the streaming services they use, with 40 percent believing the content isn't worth the price.<sup>ii</sup>

This year, Netflix was the first to increase its prices, raising its ad-free Standard plan to \$17.99 per month and their Premium plan rose to \$24.99.<sup>iii</sup> Disney+ followed in October 2025, raising its Premium tier to \$18.99. HBO Max increased all tiers, with the ad-free Standard plan rising to \$18.49. And Apple TV increased by 30%, from \$9.99 to \$12.99.<sup>iv</sup>



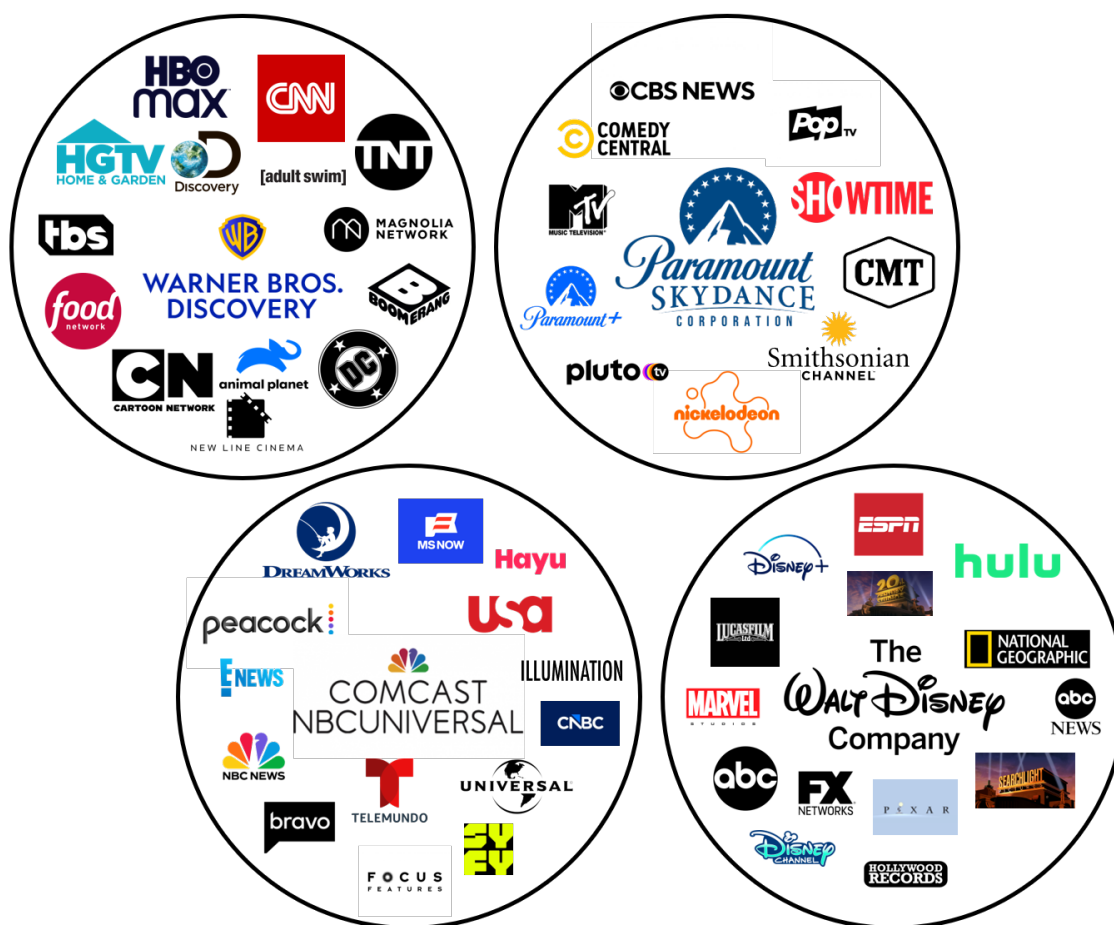
Source: Statista<sup>v</sup>

## Further Market Concentration Threatens More Price Increases

In 2019, Disney bought Hulu,<sup>vi</sup> and earlier this year the Trump Administration approved the Paramount and Skydance Media merger.<sup>vii</sup> Now, further consolidation threatens to increase consumer prices even more.

Netflix and Paramount are currently competing to acquire Warner Bros. Discovery's studio and streaming business, including HBO Max. Regardless of who ultimately prevails in the acquisition of Warner Bros. Discovery, either merger would dramatically consolidate the streaming and studio landscape—leaving consumers with fewer standalone options and likely more pressure to accept large, expensive bundles.

As the graphic below demonstrates, decades of mergers and consolidation have already concentrated many popular brands and content producers into few hands.



Source<sup>viii</sup>

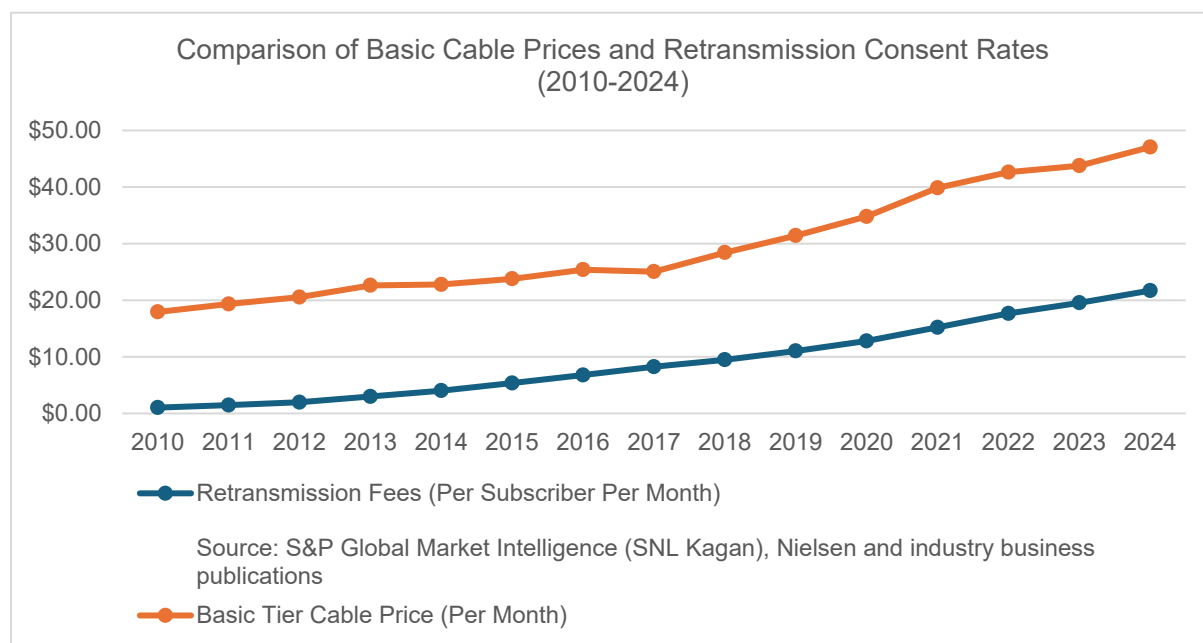
## Cable Bills Keep Going Up

A handful of large companies have acquired most of the content available on cable, particularly local TV offerings, giving them unprecedented market power to drive increased rates. Those costs are being passed on to consumers, as evidenced by basic cable bills more than doubling over the last ten years.<sup>ix</sup>

One of the key drivers of these cost increases is increased consolidation among broadcast ownership groups, which own local TV stations and sell local TV content and national affiliate programming from networks like NBC, CBS, Fox, ABC, and CW to cable companies like Comcast, Charter, and Cox.

In August 2025, Nexstar, the largest broadcast ownership group in the country, announced a \$6.2 billion acquisition of Tegna, the third largest broadcast ownership group in the country, a deal that would expand Nexstar's reach to around 80% of U.S. TV households and significantly increase its leverage over cable TV distributors and advertisers, enabling Nexstar to increase its fees and force consumers to pay even more.<sup>x</sup> Last month, Sinclair, another large broadcast ownership group, launched a hostile takeover bid of E.W. Scripps networks, another top 10 broadcast ownership group.<sup>xi</sup>

Media advocates have called these consolidation deals "wildly dangerous" for local news. They have also warned that large station groups will gain greater leverage to demand higher fees from cable and satellite providers.<sup>xii</sup> Those higher fees are frequently passed through as higher "broadcast TV" or "regional sports" surcharges on cable bills, crowding out smaller independent programmers. These types of fees have increased approximately 2,000% over the last 10 years.<sup>xiii</sup>



These deals rely on the FCC lifting a statutorily set 39% ownership cap and loosening limits like the "Top Four" rule, which currently prohibits a single company from owning two of the four highest-rated broadcast television stations (such as CBS, NBC, Fox, or ABC) in the same local market. FCC Chairman Carr has repeatedly argued that the 39% national audience-reach cap is an "arcane" and "artificial" constraint and has put relaxation or elimination of that cap under active FCC review.

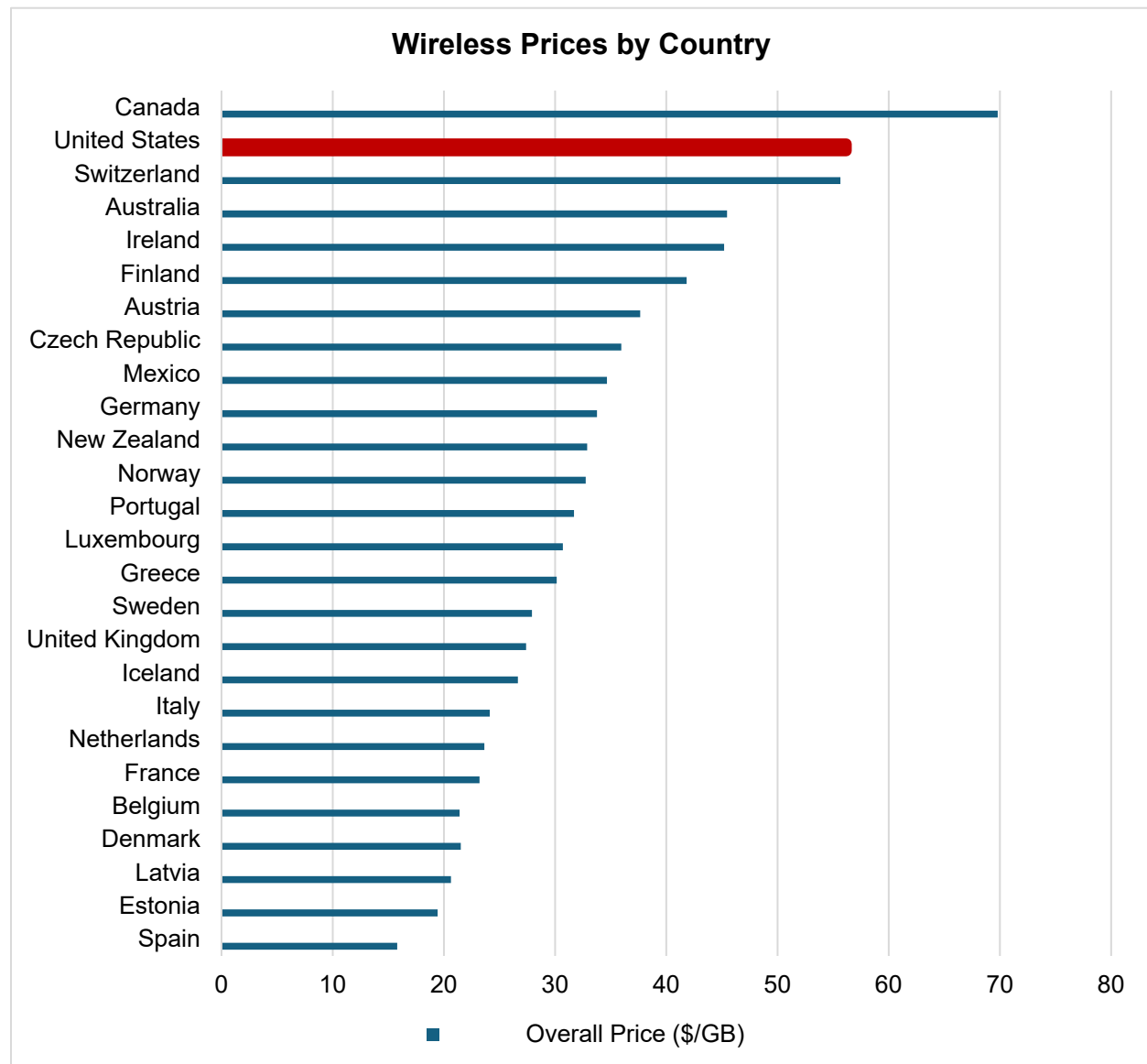
## **Decline in Local Media**

**Beyond the impact on consumer costs, local newsrooms are likely to suffer too.** A survey from Harvard's Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy found that stations owned by large ownership groups produced more news at the regional or national level rather locally. Compared to owned-and-operated and independent stations that produce more news content locally.<sup>xiv</sup> These trends align with a troubling wave of broadcast newsroom layoffs driven by major broadcast conglomerates.<sup>xv</sup>

## Rising Cellphone Service Prices

### Americans Pay Some of the Highest Wireless Costs in the World.

While wireless service has become ubiquitous in every industrialized country, Americans are paying considerably more for essentially the same service if they lived abroad. According to the FCC, Americans pay the second-highest prices for wireless service of a group of 26 industrialized countries. In fact, Americans on average pay about 3.5 times more for wireless service compared to people in Spain.<sup>xvi</sup>



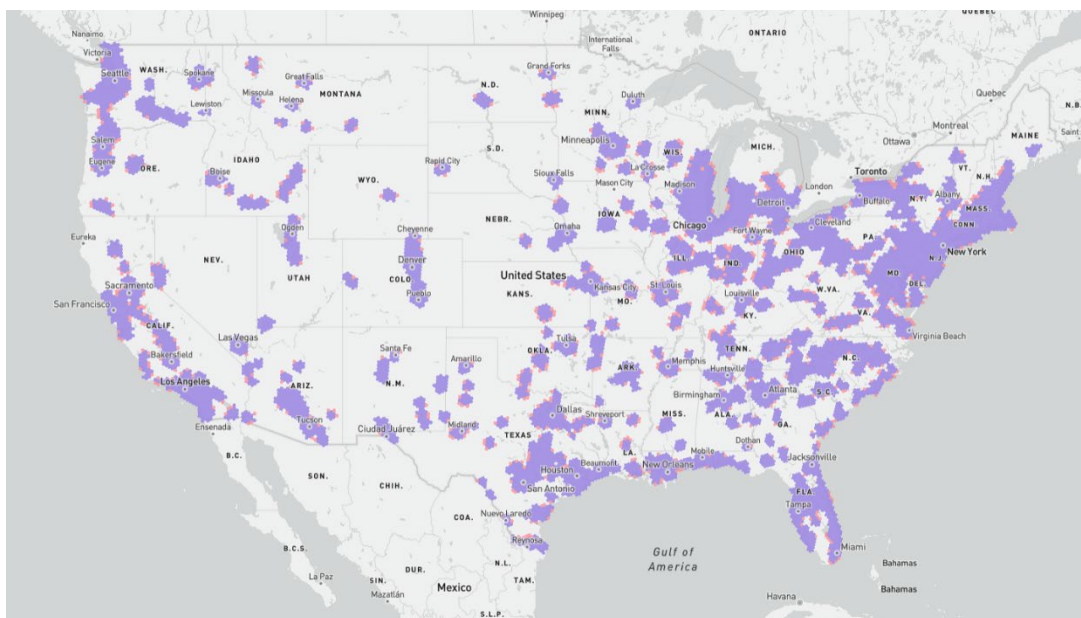
Source: FCC<sup>xvii</sup>

## FCC is Reducing Competition

The FCC has not done enough to support market competition to try and make American wireless service more affordable. One stark example is the broken promise to help Dish become a fourth national competitor, which was an integral component of the first Trump Administration's approval of the T-Mobile and Sprint merger.

In an unprecedented move by the Commission, Chairman Carr launched an investigation into Dish/EchoStar's spectrum utilization, to essentially force Dish/EchoStar to sell its spectrum, ending any chance the company to remain a viable wireless competitor.<sup>xviii</sup> The result: Dish/EchoStar sold most of its spectrum to AT&T<sup>xix</sup> and SpaceX,<sup>xx</sup> effectively ending the fourth carrier experiment.

With over 7 million subscribers in mid-2025,<sup>xxi</sup> Boost Mobile, Dish/EchoStar's mobile wireless brand, was once positioned to compete head-to-head with AT&T, Verizon, and T-Mobile. Now it will lease access on other providers' networks, a model that severely limits its ability to compete and innovate. The infrastructure Dish/EchoStar spent years and billions of dollars building is being decommissioned (a coverage map is pictured below).<sup>xxii</sup>



Source: FCC National Broadband Map<sup>xxiii</sup>

And the fifth largest carrier, regional carrier USCellular, sold off its assets in a series of transactions waved through by the FCC earlier this year, despite warnings from the Department of Justice about the level of concentration in the marketplace and the dangers of the "Big 3's oligopoly."<sup>xxiv</sup> Experts agree that more concentrated wireless markets lead to higher prices, yet the FCC has not only failed to act but took actions that solidified this oligopoly.<sup>xxv</sup>



## Wireless Carriers Are Raising Prices to Boost Profits, Not Service.

The major wireless carriers are increasingly relying on price increases and add-on fees rather than subscriber growth. Verizon has implemented monthly plan price hikes, increased fees like "administrative" charges, and pushed customers into higher-priced plans. Analysis shows that price increases alone are adding more than \$1 billion annually in service revenue in 2025, at a time when Verizon's subscriber base is essentially flat.<sup>xxvi</sup>

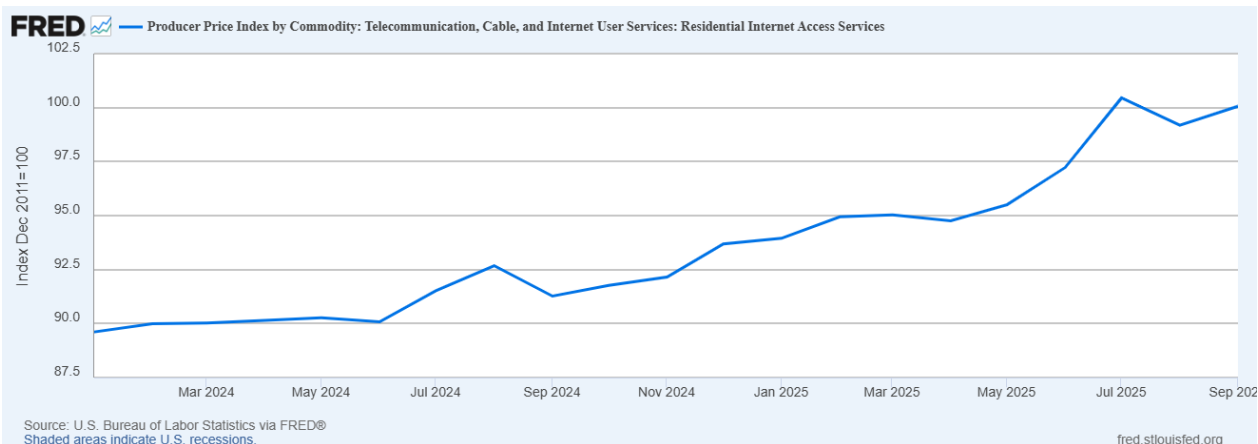
## Rising Broadband Access Prices

### Ending Support for Low-Income Households' Access to Broadband

The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) provided up to \$30 per month for low-income households and \$75 per month for those on Tribal lands, supporting roughly **23 million households** at its peak before funding was exhausted in 2024. After ACP's expiration, bills for those households jumped by exactly the size of the voucher, often forcing families to downgrade service, cut other necessities, or disconnect altogether.

ACP successfully brought home internet to new households. A survey of ACP recipients found nearly 50 percent of respondents reported that they had no home internet or relied solely on mobile internet service before receiving the ACP discount.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Since no replacement program has been proposed, **over 70 percent of respondents formerly receiving the ACP discount have either had to downgrade or drop service entirely.** Despite bipartisan support in Congress for reauthorization, neither the Administration nor the FCC has taken meaningful action to restart ACP. Without a broadband affordability program to offset costs for low-income households, cost pressure on providers has risen sharply since the last ACP benefit was distributed in May 2024.<sup>xxviii</sup>



## Forcing Higher-Cost, Less Reliable Broadband Service for Rural Americans

Under the Trump Administration, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) has restructured the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program in ways that have hurt rural households. Passed as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, BEAD is a federal grant program designed to expand affordable, high-speed internet access to unserved and underserved communities across the United States.

The restructured program now explicitly de-emphasizes ongoing affordability support in favor of one-time capital builds, and this has only added to the affordability crisis when it comes to access to broadband.

NTIA's June 2025 restructuring of the \$42.45 billion BEAD program did two critical things. First, it **gutted "low-cost" programs**. Earlier BEAD guidance offered model "low-cost" plans (e.g., \$30–\$40 per month) as examples for states. The revised guidance drops those benchmarks and gives providers wide latitude to define "low-cost" so long as they meet broad criteria, opening the door to \$60+ "low-cost" offerings in high-cost or low-competition areas.<sup>xxix</sup>

Second, the restructuring forced states to include substantially more satellite and other non-fiber alternatives as part of their plans. New NTIA guidance encourages states to treat satellite providers as "qualified" BEAD subgrantees and to rely more heavily on fixed wireless and satellite in high-cost areas. Independent analysts have found that low-Earth-orbit (LEO) satellite offers higher prices, reduced reliability, and stricter data caps than many terrestrial options, and that treating satellite as equivalent to fiber may lock rural households into permanently higher effective costs per gigabyte. LEO satellite providers like SpaceX's Starlink may offer "low-cost" options, but service is often capped and "deprioritized" while still being more expensive than traditional broadband providers.<sup>xxx</sup>

For rural communities, this risks a future where the only "affordable" option is a high-priced satellite plan with expensive equipment, that may cost hundreds of dollars, that must be replaced every several years—the opposite of BEAD's promise to bring reliable, affordable broadband to all Americans.

## Opening the Door to Hidden Fees

<b>Broadband Facts</b>	
Provider Name	
Service Plan Name and/or Speed Tier	
[Fixed or Mobile] Broadband Consumer Disclosure	
Monthly Price	\$00.00
This monthly price is an introductory rate	Yes / No
Time the introductory rate applies	YY months
Monthly price after the introductory rate	\$00.00
Length of contract	YY months
Link to Terms of Contract <a href="https://www.example.com/terms-of-contract">https://www.example.com/terms-of-contract</a>	
<b>Additional Charges &amp; Terms</b>	
Provider Monthly Fees	
Fee description	\$00.00
Fee description	\$00.00
Fee description	\$00.00
Fee description	\$00.00
One-Time Purchase Fees	
Fee description	\$00.00
Fee description	\$00.00
Early Termination Fee	\$00.00
Government Taxes	Included/Varies by Location/\$00.00
<b>Discounts &amp; Bundles</b>	
Visit the link below for available billing discounts and pricing options for broadband service bundled with other services like video, phone, and wireless service, and use of your own equipment.	
<a href="https://www.example.com/discounts">https://www.example.com/discounts</a>	
<b>Speeds Provided with Plan</b>	
Typical Download Speed	000 Mbps
Typical Upload Speed	000 Mbps
Typical Latency	00 ms
<b>Data Included with Monthly Price</b>	000 GB
Charges for Additional Data Usage	\$/GB
<a href="https://www.example.com/data-usage">https://www.example.com/data-usage</a>	
<b>Network Management Policy</b>	
<a href="https://www.example.com/network-management">https://www.example.com/network-management</a>	
<b>Privacy Policy</b>	
<a href="https://www.example.com/privacy">https://www.example.com/privacy</a>	
<b>Customer Support</b>	
Phone:	(555) 555-5555
Website:	<a href="https://www.example.com">https://www.example.com</a>
Learn about the terms used on this label. Visit the Federal Communications Commission's Consumer Resource Center.	
<a href="https://fcc.gov/consumer">fcc.gov/consumer</a>	
Unique Plan Identifier: F0005937974123ABC456EMC789	

The FCC's broadband label rules—a bipartisan concept mandated by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act—were **designed to give consumers simple, standardized labels disclosing monthly price, all mandatory fees, typical speeds and latency, and other key service terms**. These labels began appearing in 2024 to help consumers comparison-shop and see the true cost of internet service.<sup>xxxi</sup>

On October 28, 2025, Chairman Carr's FCC voted 2-1 to propose eliminating six key consumer disclosure requirements in the broadband labels. The targeted requirements include: itemizing state and local pass-through fees, reading labels to consumers over the phone, displaying labels in customer account portals, making labels available in machine-readable format for comparison shopping, and archiving labels for at least two years.<sup>xxxii</sup> These rollbacks could make it easier for internet companies to stick consumers with hidden costs and fees.

As FCC Commissioner Anna Gomez stated, *"This is one of the most anti-consumer proposals I have yet to see. The broadband label is about empowering consumers. This proposal says you don't need that clarity."*<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Without clear labels, consumers are less able to comparison shop, a recipe for paying more than they should.



## Conclusion

As markets consolidate across wireless, streaming, and local media, providers gain greater leverage to bundle services, add fees, and raise rates with fewer alternatives for consumers to turn to. What may begin as a modest increase in one bill can quickly cascade across a household's entire digital budget.

If this trajectory continues, Americans will face a future with fewer choices, higher monthly costs, and reduced access to the essential connectivity required for work, education, and health care. Digital access is no longer a luxury; it is a basic utility of modern life.

Congress directed the FCC to protect consumers and promote competition. Instead, today's FCC has chosen to side with corporations at every turn. Current policies are steering the communications marketplace toward concentration and opacity rather than competition and affordability. Without a course correction, these warning signs can harden into a permanent reality where essential digital connectivity becomes more expensive, less reliable, and increasingly out of reach for millions of families.

## Sources

- <sup>i</sup> <https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/about/press-room/digital-media-trends-consumption-habits-survey.html>
- <sup>ii</sup> <https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/about/press-room/digital-media-trends-consumption-habits-survey.html>
- <sup>iii</sup> [https://www.statista.com/chart/27983/prices-of-video-streaming-subscriptions-in-the-us/?srsltid=AfmBOooVdix803OqwAV\\_I9D52xn8e\\_VpRK0kc3ypbUGah84dovmrmoIK](https://www.statista.com/chart/27983/prices-of-video-streaming-subscriptions-in-the-us/?srsltid=AfmBOooVdix803OqwAV_I9D52xn8e_VpRK0kc3ypbUGah84dovmrmoIK)
- <sup>iv</sup> [https://www.statista.com/chart/27983/prices-of-video-streaming-subscriptions-in-the-us/?srsltid=AfmBOooVdix803OqwAV\\_I9D52xn8e\\_VpRK0kc3ypbUGah84dovmrmoIK](https://www.statista.com/chart/27983/prices-of-video-streaming-subscriptions-in-the-us/?srsltid=AfmBOooVdix803OqwAV_I9D52xn8e_VpRK0kc3ypbUGah84dovmrmoIK)
- <sup>v</sup> [https://www.statista.com/chart/27983/prices-of-video-streaming-subscriptions-in-the-us/?srsltid=AfmBOooVdix803OqwAV\\_I9D52xn8e\\_VpRK0kc3ypbUGah84dovmrmoIK](https://www.statista.com/chart/27983/prices-of-video-streaming-subscriptions-in-the-us/?srsltid=AfmBOooVdix803OqwAV_I9D52xn8e_VpRK0kc3ypbUGah84dovmrmoIK)
- <sup>vi</sup> <https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/news/2019/05/14/disney-bought-hulu-whats-mean-cord-cutters-binge-watchers/3665629002/>
- <sup>vii</sup> <https://www.paramount.com/press/skydance-media-and-paramount-global-complete-merger-creating-next-generation-media-company>
- <sup>viii</sup> <https://www.wbd.com/our-brands>; <https://www.paramount.com/about/brands>;
- <sup>ix</sup> <https://www.nbcuniversal.com/brands>; <https://privacy.thewaltdisneycompany.com/en/company-overview/>
- <sup>x</sup> <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-24-136A8.pdf>
- <sup>xi</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/en/nexstar-buy-smaller-rival-tegna-354-billion-big-local-tv-deal-2025-08-19/>; <https://www.nexstar.tv/nexstar-media-group-inc-enters-into-definitive-agreement-to-acquire-tegna-inc-for-6-2-billion-in-accretive-transaction/>
- <sup>xii</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2025/12/02/broadcast-station-owners-consolidation-regulation-deal-structure.html>
- <sup>xiii</sup> <https://www.freepress.net/news/free-press-slams-trump-fccs-broadcast-ownership-proceeding-wildly-dangerous-democracy>
- <sup>xiv</sup> <https://americantelevisionalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/ATVA-Price-Hikes-on-Consumers-6.25.pdf>
- <sup>xv</sup> [https://shorensteincenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/TV-News-Study\\_Patterson\\_June-Final.pdf](https://shorensteincenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/TV-News-Study_Patterson_June-Final.pdf)
- <sup>xvi</sup> See, e.g., <https://talkingbiznews.com/media-moves/sinclair-to-replace-local-newscast-with-national-desk/>;
- <sup>xvii</sup> <https://cordcuttersnews.com/to-cut-costs-sinclair-is-now-producing-local-news-remotely-in-some-smaller-markets/>;
- <sup>xviii</sup> <https://cordcuttersnews.com/sinclair-continues-to-make-cuts-to-local-news-as-it-stops-offering-local-news-on-some-stations/>;
- <sup>xix</sup> <https://thedesk.net/2024/11/gray-media-layoffs-q3-earnings-report/>
- <sup>xx</sup> <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-24-136A10.pdf>
- <sup>xxi</sup> <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-24-136A10.pdf>. "Dish with the assets and transitional services required to become a facilities-based mobile network operator that can provide a full range of mobile wireless services nationwide."
- <sup>xxii</sup> <https://prod-i.a.dj.com/public/resources/documents/Carr-Ergen-letter.pdf>
- <sup>xxiii</sup> <https://about.att.com/story/2025/echostar.html>
- <sup>xxiv</sup> <https://ir.echostar.com/news-releases/news-release-details/echostar-agrees-sell-full-unpaired-aws-3-spectrum-license>; <https://ir.echostar.com/news-releases/news-release-details/echostar-announces-spectrum-sale-and-commercial-agreement-spacex>
- <sup>xxv</sup> <https://www.ookla.com/articles/boost-mobile-what-the-u-s-is-losing>
- <sup>xxvi</sup> <https://ir.echostar.com/news-releases/news-release-details/echostar-announces-spectrum-sale-and-hybrid-mobile-network>
- <sup>xxvii</sup> [https://broadbandmap.fcc.gov/provider-detail/mobile?version=jun2025&zoom=4.00&vlon=-96.912157&vlat=38.689313&providers=460677\\_500-1\\_on%2C460677\\_500-2\\_on&env=0&pct\\_cvg=0](https://broadbandmap.fcc.gov/provider-detail/mobile?version=jun2025&zoom=4.00&vlon=-96.912157&vlat=38.689313&providers=460677_500-1_on%2C460677_500-2_on&env=0&pct_cvg=0)
- <sup>xxviii</sup> <https://www.fcc.gov/document/order-granting-att-usc cellular-applications>; <https://www.fcc.gov/document/order-granting-t-mobile-usc cellular-applications>; <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/statement-department-justice-antitrust-division-closing-its-investigation-merger-t-mobile>
- <sup>xxix</sup> <https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/83623/1/dp1486.pdf>
- <sup>xxx</sup> <https://www.investopedia.com/verizon-stock-slumps-after-warning-of-soft-subscriber-growth-11694672>
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Federal Communications Commission
- <sup>xxxii</sup> <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/WPS372#>
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> <https://www.ntia.gov/other-publication/2025/bead-restructuring-policy-notice>
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> <https://www.fierce-network.com/broadband/starlinks-new-affordable-broadband-plan-gamechanger>
- <sup>xxxv</sup> <https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-requires-broadband-providers-display-labels-help-consumers>
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-25-74A1.pdf>
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-25-74A3.pdf>