FCC chairman helps AT&T cement dominance with $23 billion spectrum deal

The FCC's threat drew widespread backlash from across the political spectrum. The conservative Free State Foundation told the FCC that the move would create "regulatory uncertainty" for carriers, while consumer advocacy groups warned it would harm competition and wireless users.

The AT&T/EchoStar deal was "inevitable in light of Chairman Carr's determination that immediate intensity of spectrum use should trump concerns about competition and consumer welfare," Harold Feld, senior VP of consumer advocacy group Public Knowledge, told Ars. "We can only hope that the FCC will take steps to facilitate competition in other ways, such as adopting mandatory roaming requirements and mandatory cell-phone unlocking."

Michael Calabrese of New America's Open Technology Institute told Ars that "the elimination of EchoStar as a facilities-based competitor is a very bad day for consumers." But he said there's a silver lining as EchoStar will avoid bankruptcy and continue to provide service. "Although it will be dependent on wholesale access to AT&T's network, its Boost brand can leverage the company's own 5G core, control customer relationships, and quite possibly offer better and more affordable service to millions," Calabrese said.

The EchoStar spectrum that SpaceX wants is still available, industry analyst Walter Piecyk pointed out today. SpaceX has been seeking access to spectrum in the 2 GHz band.

SpaceX told the FCC in April that “the 2 GHz band remains ripe for sharing among next-generation satellite systems.” EchoStar countered by accusing SpaceX of making “another land grab for even more free spectrum.”

Big 3 oligopoly gets stronger

Today, Ergen said that EchoStar met its FCC obligations—but chose to sell the spectrum anyway. The company “met all of the FCC’s network buildout milestones,” Ergen said. “However, this spectrum sale to AT&T and hybrid MNO [Mobile Network Operator] agreement are critical steps toward resolving the FCC’s spectrum utilization concerns.”

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/08/att-to-buy-echostar-spectrum-for-23b-further-entrenching-big-3-oligopoly/

Senator castigates federal judiciary for ignoring “basic cybersecurity”

US Senator Ron Wyden accused the federal judiciary of “negligence and incompetence” following a recent hack, reportedly by hackers with ties to the Russian government, that exposed confidential court documents.

The breach of the judiciary’s electronic case filing system first came to light in a report by Politico three weeks ago, which went on to say that the vulnerabilities exploited in the

hack were known since 2020. The New York Times, citing people familiar with the intrusion, said that Russia was "at least partly responsible" for the hack.

A "severe threat" to national security

Two overlapping filing platforms—one known as the CM/ECF (Case Management/Electronic Case Files) and the other PACER—were breached in 2020 in an attack that closely resembled the most recently reported one. The second compromise was first detected around July 5, Politico reported, citing two unnamed sources who weren't authorized to speak to reporters. Discovery of the hack came a month after Michael Scudder, a judge chairing the Committee on Information Technology for the federal courts' national policymaking body, told members of the House Judiciary Committee that the federal court system is under constant attack by increasingly sophisticated hackers.

The CM/ECF allows parties in a federal case to file pleadings and other court documents electronically. In many cases, those documents are public. In some circumstances, the documents are filed under seal, usually when they concern ongoing criminal investigations, classified intelligence, or proprietary information at issue in civil cases. Wyden, a US senator from Oregon, said in a letter to Chief Supreme Court Justice John Roberts—who oversees the federal judiciary—that the intrusions are exposing sensitive information that puts national security at risk. He went on to criticize the judiciary for failing to follow security practices that are standard in most federal agencies and private industry.

"The federal judiciary's current approach to information technology is a severe threat to our national security," Wyden wrote. "The courts have been entrusted with some of our nation's most confidential and sensitive information, including national security documents that could reveal

sources and methods to our adversaries, and sealed criminal charging and investigative documents that could enable suspects to flee from justice or target witnesses."

https://arstechnica.com/security/2025/08/senator-to-supreme-court-justice-federal-court-hacks-threaten-us-security/

CBS caved to Trump—now he's seeking punishments for ABC and NBC

Fresh off his thorough victory over CBS News, President Trump is taking aim at ABC and NBC.

"Why is it that ABC and NBC FAKE NEWS, two of the absolute worst and most biased networks anywhere in the World, aren't paying Millions of Dollars a year in LICENSE FEES," Trump wrote on Truth Social last night. "They should lose their Licenses for their unfair coverage of Republicans and/or Conservatives, but at a minimum, they should pay up BIG for having the privilege of using the most valuable airwaves anywhere at anytime!!! Crooked 'journalism' should not be rewarded, it should be terminated!!!"

While Trump's many threats to revoke broadcaster licenses have never led to any actual license revocations, the CBS developments show how he can use the government to influence operations at news organizations. CBS owner Paramount recently inked a $16 million settlement with Trump and then agreed to

install a “bias monitor” in order to gain Federal Communications Commission approval of an $8 billion merger with Skydance. Now Trump is turning his attention to ABC and NBC.

“Despite a very high popularity and, according to many, among the greatest 8 months in Presidential History, ABC & NBC FAKE NEWS, two of the worst and most biased networks in history, give me 97% BAD STORIES,” Trump wrote in another post last night. “IF THAT IS THE CASE, THEY ARE SIMPLY AN ARM OF THE DEMOCRAT PARTY AND SHOULD, ACCORDING TO MANY, HAVE THEIR LICENSES REVOKED BY THE FCC. I would be totally in favor of that because they are so biased and untruthful, an actual threat to our Democracy!!! MAGA.”

We contacted ABC and NBC today and will update this article if either company provides any response to Trump’s statements.

License revocations are a lot more complicated than Trump makes them sound. The FCC doesn’t issue licenses directly to networks such as CBS, NBC, or ABC. The FCC’s licensing authority is over broadcast stations, although many of those stations are owned and operated by a big network.

As we’ve written, revoking a license in the middle of a license term is so difficult legally that it has been described as effectively impossible. The FCC can go after a license when it’s up for renewal, but there are no TV station licenses up for renewal until 2028.

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/08/cbs-caved-to-trump-now-hes-seeking-punishments-for-abc-and-nbc/

Is it illegal to not buy ads on X? Experts explain the FTC’s bizarre ad fight.

That may be why the Media Matters fight, which seems like just another front with a tangential player in the FTC’s bigger battle, may end up mattering the most. Whereas others directly involved in the ad industry may be tempted to make a deal like Omnicon’s to settle litigation, MMFA refuses to capitulate to Musk or the FTC, vowing to fight both battles to the bitter end.

“It has been a recurring strategy of the Trump administration to pile up the pressure on targets so that they cannot afford to hold out for vindication at trial, even if their chances there seem good,” Olson told Ars. “So they settle.”

It’s harder than usual in today’s political climate to predict the outcome of the FTC’s appeal, Olson told Ars. Macpherson told Ars she’s holding out hope “that the DC court would take the same position that the current judge did,” which is that “this is likely vindictive behavior on the part of the FTC and that, importantly, advertisers’ First Amendment rights should make the FTC’s sweeping investigation invalid.”

Perhaps the FTC’s biggest hurdle, apart from the First Amendment, may be a savvy judges who see through their seeming pressure campaign. In a notable 1995 case, a US judge, Richard Posner, “took the view that a realistic court should be ready to recognize instances where litigation can be employed to generate intense pressure on targets to settle regardless of the merits,” Olson said.

While that case involved targets of litigation, the appeals court judge—or even the Supreme Court if MMFA's case gets that far—could rule that "targets of investigation could be under similar pressure," Olson suggested.

In a statement to Ars, MMFA President Angelo Carusone confirmed that MMFA's resolve has not faded in the face of the FTC's appeal and was instead only strengthened by the US district judge being "crystal clear" that "FTC's wide-ranging fishing expedition was a 'retaliatory act' that 'should alarm all Americans.'"

"We will continue to fight this blatant attack on our First Amendment rights because if this Administration succeeds, so can any Administration target anyone who disagrees," Carusone said. "The law here is clear, and we are optimistic that the Circuit Court will see through this appeal for what it is: an attempt to do an end run around constitutional law in an effort to silence political critics."

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/08/is-it-illegal-to-not-buy-ads-on-x-experts-explain-the-ftcs-bizarre-ad-fight/

Deeply divided Supreme Court lets NIH grant terminations continue

The dissents

The primary dissent was written by Chief Justice Roberts, and joined in part by the three Democratic appointees, Jackson, Kagan, and Sotomayor. It is a grand total of one paragraph and can be distilled down to a single sentence: “If the District Court had jurisdiction to vacate the directives, it also had jurisdiction to vacate the ‘Resulting Grant Terminations.’”

Jackson, however, chose to write a separate and far more detailed argument against the decision, mostly focusing on the fact that it’s not simply a matter of abstract law; it has real-world consequences.

She notes that existing law prevents plaintiffs from suing in the Court of Federal Claims while the facts are under dispute in other courts (something acknowledged by Barrett). That would mean that, as here, any plaintiffs would have to have the policy declared illegal first in the District Court, and only after that was fully resolved could they turn to the Federal Claims Court to try to restore their grants. That’s a process that could take years. In the meantime, the scientists would be out of funding, with dire consequences.

> *Yearslong studies will lose validity. Animal subjects will be euthanized. Life-saving medication trials will be abandoned. Countless researchers will lose their jobs. And community health clinics will close.*

Jackson also had little interest in hearing that the government would be harmed by paying out the grants in the meantime. “For the Government, the incremental expenditure of money is at stake,” she wrote. “For the plaintiffs and the public, scientific progress itself hangs in the balance along with the lives that progress saves.”

With this decision, of course, it no longer hangs in the

balance. There’s a possibility that the District Court’s ruling that the government’s policy was arbitrary and capricious will ultimately prevail; it’s not clear, because Barrett says she hasn’t even seen the government make arguments there, and Roberts only wrote regarding the venue issues. In the meantime, even with the policy stayed, it’s unlikely that anyone will focus grant proposals on the disfavored subjects, given that the policy might be reinstated at any moment.

And even if that ruling is upheld, it will likely take years to get there, and only then could a separate case be started to restore the funding. Any labs that had been using those grants will have long since moved on, and the people working on those projects scattered.

https://arstechnica.com/science/2025/08/deeply-divided-supreme-court-lets-nih-grant-terminations-continue/

SpaceX says states should dump fiber plans, give all grant money to Starlink

Starlink operator SpaceX is continuing its fight against state plans to expand fiber broadband availability. After saying the Trump administration should deny a Virginia proposal, SpaceX is taking the same approach in a fight against Louisiana.

SpaceX made its view known to the Louisiana Office of

Broadband Development and Connectivity in a filing, which was reported yesterday by PCMag. SpaceX complained that Louisiana proposed awarding 91.5 percent of funds to fiber Internet service providers instead of to the Starlink satellite system. SpaceX alleged that Louisiana was influenced by "a legion of fiber lobbyists and other hangers-on seeking to personally benefit from massive taxpayer spending."

The Trump administration rewrote rules for the $42 billion Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) grant program in a way that benefits Starlink. Instead of prioritizing fiber networks that offer better service and are more future-proof, the Trump administration ordered states to revise their plans with a "tech-neutral approach" and lower the average cost of serving each location.

SpaceX's letters to Virginia and Louisiana claim the states are violating the new rules with their funding proposals.

"The State of Louisiana's Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program Final Proposal proposes to spend nearly $500 million dollars [*sic*] to provide connectivity to its unserved and underserved locations," SpaceX wrote. "SpaceX applied to serve virtually all BEAD households for less than $100 million dollars. As such, Louisiana's proposal includes over $400 million dollars in wasteful and unnecessary taxpayer spending."

SpaceX unhappy with $7.75 million

Instead of selecting Starlink for all locations, Louisiana allocated the company $7.75 million to serve 10,327 locations. The plan would spend $499 million for 127,842 locations overall. The Louisiana Local Fiber Consortium, which includes two Louisiana providers that partnered with T-Mobile, was the biggest winner, with $378 million for 68,535 locations.

"Louisiana's results demonstrate that it did not observe

statutory requirements or program rules and did not conduct a competitive process," SpaceX alleged. "A process in which Louisiana is required to award grants based on the lowest cost to the program, and awards 91.5% of funds to fiber projects at an average per-location cost of $4,449, while rejecting applications at $750 per location because the bid was based on Low-Earth Orbit (LEO) technology could not possibly be considered compliant, technology neutral or a 'competition.'"

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/08/starlink-keeps-trying-to-block-fiber-deployment-says-us-must-nix-louisiana-plan/

Trump admin ranks companies on loyalty while handing out favors to Big Tech

We contacted the White House today and will update the story if it provides any comment.

Ending "weaponization"

Public Citizen wrote that "President Donald Trump spent much of his 2024 presidential campaign claiming his prosecution by multiple authorities and subsequent conviction for his crimes are unfair 'weaponization' of law enforcement. Corporate executives in the technology sector, eager to curry favor, seized on the talking point. They similarly cast powerful corporations accused of violating laws that protect consumers, workers, investors, and the public as victims of 'weaponized'

enforcement."

The Trump administration acted quickly to end this alleged weaponization, Public Citizen wrote:

> *When Trump took office, the corporate campaign to discredit law enforcement that protects the public and holds the powerful accountable culminated in the day one executive order "Ending Weaponization of the Federal Government," which explicitly ties enforcement against Trump and January 6 rioters to enforcement against corporate lawbreaking…*
>
> *Since then, the Trump White House has exerted unprecedented authority over statutorily independent enforcement agencies such as the Consumer Product Safety Commission, Federal Trade Commission, and the Securities and Exchange Commission, and has essentially eliminated the half-century policy of the Justice Department's independence from the White House.*
>
> *The elimination of agency independence means enforcement investigations and lawsuits will not proceed if President Trump wants to kill them, and that agency officials who resist White House orders will be removed.*

Twenty-three enforcement actions against cryptocurrency corporations and 11 against financial technology firms have been dropped or halted under Trump, the report said. Tech companies that have had investigations stopped include Activision, Binance, Coinbase, eBay, HP, Juniper, Meta, Microsoft, PayPal, SpaceX, and Tesla, the report said.

There are still numerous pending investigations and lawsuits against tech companies that the Trump administration hasn't ended, at least not yet. Companies investigated by the Biden administration and which are now "poised to exploit their ties with the Trump administration include Amazon, Google, Meta, OpenAI, and corporations headed by Elon Musk (Tesla, SpaceX, xAI, The Boring Company, and Neuralink)," the report said.

Public Citizen also published a spreadsheet containing information on active cases and those that have been ended.

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/08/trump-admin-ranks-companies-on-loyalty-while-handing-out-favors-to-big-tech/

US may purchase stake in Intel after Trump attacked CEO

Why Intel may be into Trump's deal

At one point, Intel was the undisputed leader in chip manufacturing, Bloomberg noted, but its value plummeted from $288 billion in 2020 to $104 billion today. The chipmaker has been struggling for a while—falling behind as Nvidia grew to dominate the AI chip industry—and 2024 was its "first unprofitable year since 1986," Reuters reported. As the dismal year wound down, Intel's longtime CEO Pat Gelsinger retired.

Helming Intel for four years, Gelsinger acknowledged the "challenging year." Now Tan is expected to turn it around. To do that, he may need to deprioritize the manufacturing process that Gelsinger pushed, which Tan suspects may have caused Intel being viewed as an outdated firm, anonymous insiders told Reuters. Sources suggest he's planning to pivot Intel to focus more on "a next-generation chipmaking process where Intel expects to have advantages over Taiwan's TSMC," which

currently dominates chip manufacturing and even counts Intel as a customer, Reuters reported. As it stands now, TSMC "produces about a third of Intel's supply," SCMP reported.

This pivot is supposedly how Tan expects Intel can eventually poach TSMC's biggest customers like Apple and Nvidia, Reuters noted.

Intel has so far claimed that any discussions of Tan's supposed plans amount to nothing but speculation. But if Tan did go that route, one source told Reuters that Intel would likely have to take a write-off that industry analysts estimate could trigger losses "of hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars."

Perhaps facing that hurdle, Tan might be open to agreeing to the US purchasing a financial stake in the company while he rights the ship.

Trump/Intel deal reminiscent of TikTok deal

Any deal would certainly deepen the government's involvement in the US chip industry, which is widely viewed as critical to US national security.

While unusual, the deal does seem somewhat reminiscent to the TikTok buyout that the Trump administration has been trying to iron out since he took office. Through that deal, the US would acquire enough ownership divested from China-linked entities to supposedly appease national security concerns, but China has been hesitant to sign off on any of Trump's proposals so far.

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/08/us-may-purchase-stake-in-intel-after-trump-attacked-ceo/

US government agency drops Grok after MechaHitler backlash, report says

xAI apparently lost a government contract after a tweak to Grok's prompting triggered an antisemitic meltdown where the chatbot praised Hitler and declared itself MechaHitler last month.

Despite the scandal, xAI announced that its products would soon be available for federal workers to purchase through the General Services Administration. At the time, xAI claimed this was an "important milestone" for its government business.

But Wired reviewed emails and spoke to government insiders, which revealed that GSA leaders abruptly decided to drop xAI's Grok from their contract offering. That decision to pull the plug came after leadership allegedly rushed staff to make Grok available as soon as possible following a persuasive sales meeting with xAI in June.

It's unclear what exactly caused the GSA to reverse course, but two sources told Wired that they "believe xAI was pulled because of Grok's antisemitic tirade."

As of this writing, xAI's "Grok for Government" website has not been updated to reflect GSA's supposed removal of Grok from an offering that xAI noted would have allowed "every federal government department, agency, or office, to access xAI's frontier AI products."

xAI did not respond to Ars’ request to comment and so far has not confirmed that the GSA offering is off the table. If Wired’s report is accurate, GSA’s decision also seemingly did not influence the military’s decision to move forward with a $200 million xAI contract the US Department of Defense granted last month.

Government’s go-to tools will come from xAI’s rivals

If Grok is cut from the contract, that would suggest that Grok’s meltdown came at perhaps the worst possible moment for xAI, which is building the “world’s biggest supercomputer” as fast as it can to try to get ahead of its biggest AI rivals.

Grok seemingly had the potential to become a more widely used tool if federal workers opted for xAI’s models. Through Donald Trump’s AI Action Plan, the president has similarly emphasized speed, pushing for federal workers to adopt AI as quickly as possible. Although xAI may no longer be involved in that broad push, other AI companies like OpenAI, Anthropic, and Google have partnered with the government to help Trump pull that off and stand to benefit long-term if their tools become entrenched in certain agencies.

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/08/us-government-agency-drops-grok-after-mechahitler-backlash-report-says/

Starlink tries to block

Virginia’s plan to bring fiber Internet to residents

Noting that its “project areas span from mountains and hills to farmland and coastal plains,” the DHCD said its previous experience with grant-funded deployments “revealed that tree canopy, rugged terrain, and slope can complicate installation and/or obstruct line-of-sight.” State officials said that wireless and low-Earth orbit satellite technology “can have signal degradation, increased latency, and reduced reliability” when there isn’t a clear line of sight.

The DHCD said it included these factors in its evaluation of priority broadband projects. State officials were also apparently concerned about the network capacity of satellite services and the possibility that using state funding to guarantee satellite service in one location could reduce availability of that same service in other locations.

“To review a technology’s ability to scale, the Office considered the currently served speeds of 100/20 Mbps, an application’s stated network capacity, the project area’s number of [locations], the project area’s geographic area, current customer base (if applicable), and future demand,” the department said. “For example, the existing customer base should not be negatively impacted by the award of BEAD locations for a given technology to be considered scalable.”

SpaceX: “Playing field was anything but level”

SpaceX said Virginia is wrong to determine that Starlink “did not qualify as ‘Priority Broadband,'” since the company

“provided information demonstrating these capabilities in its application, and it appears that Virginia used this definition only as a pretext to reach a pre-ordained outcome.” SpaceX said that 95 percent of funded “locations in Virginia have an active Starlink subscriber within 1 mile, showing that Starlink already serves every type of environment in Virginia’s BEAD program today” and that 15 percent of funded locations have an active Starlink subscriber within 100 meters.

“The playing field was anything but level and technology neutral, as required by the [updated program rules], and was instead insurmountably stacked against low-Earth orbit satellite operators like SpaceX,” the company said.

We contacted the Virginia DHCD about SpaceX’s comments today and will update this article if the department provides a response.

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/08/starlink-tries-to-block-virginias-plan-to-bring-fiber-internet-to-residents/