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Wall Street Journal
Big Media Needs to Embrace Digital Shift—Not Fight It

Bloomberg
Comcast's NBC Says U.S. Clears DreamWorks Animation Deal

New York Times
A Conversation With Cablevision's New Owner

Politico
Cable news channels prepare for ad revenue windfall during conventions

Washington Post
This one step by the government may unlock the untapped speed and power of mobile technology

zap2it.com
Cable Top 25 for Week Ending June 19

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
Pa. lawmakers push anti-

With a little more than a week before the commonwealth's budget is due, Gov. Tom Wolf said he thinks the state budget can be balanced without an increase in the sales or personal income tax.

In an interview Tuesday on KDKA-AM, Wolf said negotiations were going "I think, very well" for the proposed budget to be passed by the GOP-controlled General Assembly and signed by the July 1 statutory deadline. The current year's budget stalemate between Wolf and the House and Senate stretched into 2016, eight months after the deadline, **until Wolf decided against vetoing a GOP state budget in late March**.

"We need a balanced budget that is truly balanced," Wolf said on KDKA-AM in a transcript provided by the governor's office. "I want $250 million dollars for basic education, an increase, and I want $34 million dollars for the heroin overdose problem, which is really a big problem in Pennsylvania. And I think all this can be done without a broad-based tax increase. I'm not asking for a sales tax increase or personal income tax increase."

Wolf's proposed $32.7 billion 2016-17 budget proposed in February **called for $2.7 billion in new and expanded taxes**, including a rise in the state's personal income tax from 3.07 percent to 3.4 percent retroactive to Jan. 1, 2016, and sales taxes on a range of items including basic cable TV, digital downloads and movie tickets plus a $1-per-pack rise in cigarette taxes. Wolf appears to be compromising from his previous position on new taxes.

The budget negotiations have been proceeding mostly under the radar for the past several months.

discrimination measures

Pittsburgh Tribune-Review
Pennsylvania video gambling bill could come to vote Wednesday

philly.com
Toomey up, Obama up, Wolf not so much

Philadelphia Inquirer
Fattah convicted of federal corruption charges

What is still unresolved is the fate of another big-ticket tax proposal, the implementation of a severance tax on natural gas and oil drilling. Wolf has proposed it in the past two budgets and his most recent public proposal unveiled in February would have been at 6.5 percent. Wolf spokesman Jeffrey Sheridan told the Pittsburgh Business Times via email Tuesday that the severance tax proposal was still on the table.

"Pennsylvania remains the only gas-producing state in the country without a severance tax and the governor is still seeking one," Sheridan wrote. "He will continue working with the Legislature to reach final agreement on a budget that is balanced, invests more money in education and includes much-needed funding to help combat the heroin crisis. There are no final details at this time." – ***Pittsburgh Business Times***

Worldwide efforts to clamp down on cybercrime, terrorism and free speech itself are on the rise and are putting the economic and societal benefits of the open internet at risk, according to a report released Tuesday at a meeting of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Laws that clamp down on online speech or restrict the flow of data are bringing internet governance to “a critical juncture,” according to the report, released at a meeting of the OECD in Cancun, Mexico. As governments and other stakeholders worldwide exert more internet controls, including state censorship, they risk undermining economic growth, political equality, social justice and other benefits, according to the report.

“Some states have developed and used very sophisticated censorship tools that allow them to censor on the grounds of political dissent or religious beliefs,” the report said. When combined with surveillance technology, it added, “these tools are especially insidious, as they can be used to track down, persecute and imprison activists, educators, artists, journalists or other individuals based on their identity or beliefs, ultimately having chilling effects on freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, privacy and democracy.”

The report, created by the Centre for International Governance Innovation and Chatham House, a London-based think tank, is part of the OECD’s annual three-day gathering of government officials and policymakers to hash out issues concerning the digital economy. The event includes rounds of talks on internet governance as well as on issues such as global connectivity and broadband policies, digital innovation and jobs, and the rise of the Internet of Things.

The report identifies a number of “tensions” within and among states, private corporations, the technical community and civil society that are putting strains on Internet governance. They include efforts to combat cybercrime and terrorism, and to exert state censorship. Tensions also arise over how carriers should be compensated for the exchange of data among online networks, as over the data collection capabilities of big internet platforms. The report also cited the failure of tech vendors to incorporate security as a design feature into products and services related to the Internet of Things, a term for the exchange of data among connected devices and machines.

These strains can result in policies and practices that restrict online activity at a time when “companies increasingly rely on the Internet to interact with their foreign operations, suppliers and customers,” researchers said. Such restrictions threaten global economic growth, they add, citing some $2.8 trillion of global GDP generated in 2014 by cross-border data flows. Yet many countries, notably China and Iran, have taken steps to restrict online speech to varying degrees.

At the same time, large tech firms are struggling with local and global pressures to block content or provide authorities with access to user data, eroding public trust in the internet as a tool for social or commercial interaction, according to the report. “To the extent trust in the Internet erodes, global prospects will be damaged, with significant social and economic consequences,” the report said. – ***Wall Street Journal***

The “Can you hear me now?” guy may be endorsing Sprint instead of Verizon these days. But Verizon is the one that’s getting a much better reception from Wall Street. Can that last if Verizon winds up scooping up troubled Yahoo though?

Verizon stock has surged 17% this year. That makes it the third best performer in the Dow, only slightly behind UnitedHealth and Exxon Mobil. Verizon has done better than wireless rivals Sprint and T-Mobile as well as cable king Comcast. It is slightly lagging that of its former parent AT&T though.

Why are investors so enamored with Verizon? The big reason is that the company pays a juicy dividend — which yields 4.2%. That makes “Big Red” (as well as Ma Bell, which yields 4.7%) attractive to conservative investors worried about a sluggish global economy and a possible Brexit in Europe who crave a higher yield than what you can get from government bonds. The 10-Year U.S. Treasury has a rate of just 1.68%. Yields in Germany recently dipped below zero, joining Japan and Switzerland in the negative rate club.

So it’s understandable why investors desperate for any sort of income would like Verizon. But that’s not the only thing the company has going for it. Verizon recently settled a labor dispute with striking landline workers. That should allay some fears investors had about the possibility that Verizon would fall behind in new customer installations for its FiOS TV and phone service.

But the damage may already be done. Verizon’s CEO and CFO both warned that results for the second quarter could be hurt by the strike. Analysts responded by cutting their earnings forecasts for the quarter and full year in the past month. That’s a bad sign considering that Verizon isn’t the most dynamic of companies to begin with. Earnings are only expected to increase by about 3% a year, on average, for the next few years. Sales are barely budging at all as well. And that’s why the possible Yahoo acquisition could be a problem for Verizon.

Verizon is said to be one of the leading bidders for the core assets of Yahoo, which has been struggling to turn its fortunes around for pretty much the past decade. Would adding Yahoo — a company that is expected to post a sales decline of nearly 10% this year — make sense? Sure, there is an argument to be made that Verizon can strip out some redundant costs by combining Yahoo with AOL — which Verizon bought in 2015 for $4.4 billion.

AOL chief Tim Armstrong would likely run the combined company — leaving his former Google colleague Marissa Mayer presumably getting a golden (purple?) parachute for her troubles. But investors would have valid reasons to be worried that trying to fix Yahoo — a reclamation project that has led to the ouster of numerous Yahoo CEOs since 2001 — could turn out to be too much of a distraction for the company.

Verizon has to deal with more challenges on the video front from AT&T following Ma Bell’s acquisition of DirecTV. And on the wireless side of the business, T-Mobile has proven to be a pesky pink pest that has helped push monthly prices down across the industry. Adding Yahoo to AOL could turn out to be a brilliant move for Verizon — especially if it doesn’t have to pay much. According to several reports, bids are coming in around $3 billion. So Verizon wouldn’t exactly be betting the mortgage on Yahoo. Still, investors seem to like the way things are going with Verizon right now — without Yahoo. What’s that saying, about not fixing what isn’t broken? Verizon might need to keep that in mind. – ***GantDaily***

Comcast has made a TV comedy about watching TV -- which is in fact one big promo for its cable TV service. The cable operator has launched "Glued," a six-episode short-form series about a married couple whose relationship evolves as they get hooked on a hit TV show. The point of the show is to highlight the benefits of Comcast's Xfinity On Demand, which offers some 85,000 selections including current-season TV shows and movies.

"Glued" is executive produced by Sharon Horgan ("Catastrophe," HBO's upcoming "Divorce") and directed by John Riggi ("30 Rock"). It stars John Ross Bowie ("Big Bang Theory") and Jamie Denbo ("Orange Is the New Black," "Childrens Hospital") -- who are married in real life -- as the TV-addicted couple. "Glued" guest stars Ian Lithgow ("3rd Rock from the Sun") and Deborah Craig ("The Blacklist").

The show was created with advertising agency Droga5 in partnership with Merman X Pulse, a branded-content production joint venture between Pulse Films and Merman. "There are so many stories around the way we watch television, and we had so much fun telling them," Horgan said in a statement. "We didn't have to stretch very far beyond our own real lives. It all felt so fresh, and clever, and real, which is what I really responded to."

The first four episodes of "Glued" are now available on the Xfinity YouTube channel, Comcast's Watchable.com and Xfinity On Demand, with the final two scheduled for release June 30. Each ranges from three to five minutes in length and each focuses on a different TV-watching behavior, such as setting viewing rules with your spouse and developing new parenting techniques to facilitate binge-watching.

Comcast is promoting the series with digital and social media campaigns, including 15-second cut-downs, a show trailer and customized GIFs across brand-owned and paid channels. For now, "Glued" is a one-off, with no additional Xfinity-themed original series in the works. – ***Variety***