

MEDIA REFORM **n**ews

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Free Press Summit: Changing Media

THE ROOM WAS PACKED at the sold-out *Free Press Summit: Changing Media* at the Newseum in Washington, D.C., on Thursday, May 14. 500 people turned out to discuss our changing media landscape and to help reshape the future of communications policy in the United States. Thousands more watched the event streaming live online.

Breaking the mold for typical D.C. conferences, Free Press balanced speeches and panel discussions featuring leading policymakers and industry leaders with the voices of everyday people and public interest groups. The event was sponsored by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

Kicking off the day was a presentation on *Changing Media: Public Interest Policies for the Digital Age*, a new book by Free Press that provides groundbreaking research on achieving universal, affordable Internet access, finding answers to the crisis in journalism and building a world-class public media system. Speeches from Acting FCC Chairman Michael Copps, NPR President Vivian Schiller, and Susan Crawford of President Obama's



PBS' Ray Suarez moderated a roundtable that included two former FCC chairs.



Small group discussions in the afternoon focused on the future of the Internet, journalism and public media.

National Economic Council followed the presentation.

Just before lunch, the summit featured a roundtable discussion with former FCC Chairs Michael Powell and Reed Hundt, Free Press Policy Director Ben Scott, venture capitalist Ram Shriram, and Jessica Rosenworcel of the Senate Commerce Committee. The roundtable was moderated by Ray Suarez, senior correspondent for *The NewsHour* on PBS.

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"I've already read, underlined and dog-eared [Free Press' new book]. ... *Changing Media* is an important contribution to our national dialogue."

— Acting FCC Chair Michael Copps

continued inside...

Reflections on the Closing of the Rocky

DO YOU KNOW what your paper published about Cesar Chavez's birthday?" a Latino leader asked John Temple, the editor, publisher and president of Denver's *Rocky Mountain News*.

"No," Temple replied.

"That parking was free downtown. That's it."

It was one of many tough questions Temple would field from the Latino community during a 2003 town hall meeting that the paper co-sponsored

with the National Association of Hispanic Journalists.

Under the leadership of its president, Juan Gonzalez, NAHJ had launched the Parity Project, an initiative to increase the presence of Latinos in newsrooms across the country. The project partnered with news organizations that struggled to recruit Latino journalists and to improve coverage of the Latino community. The *Rocky Mountain News* was the first news organization to join the initiative.

For years, Denver's Latino leaders had been angry with the paper for its poor coverage of the community and for its conservative editorial positions. But following that contentious town hall, Temple created an advisory board, doubled the number of Latinos on staff in just two years, met regularly with Latino leaders, and developed a true partnership with the community. As a result, coverage of Latinos improved — quickly.

But on Feb. 27, 2009, the *Rocky* printed its last edition. Despite efforts to save it, the paper's owner, E.W. Scripps, announced it was shutting down the publication that has been printed for nearly 150 years.

The closing of the *Rocky* is a terrible day for the Latino community, but a worse

Free Press and the Crisis in Journalism

The closing of the *Rocky Mountain News* brings us closer to a time when we might see major metropolitan areas without any daily newspapers. For the past several months, Free Press has been convening strategic roundtables to identify viable policy proposals and develop a public campaign to get our communities the news and information they need.

These meetings have included representatives from Congress and the FCC, newspaper editors and reporters, bloggers, academic experts, journalism educators, unions, entrepreneurs, public advocates and others.

day for Colorado and for a newspaper industry spiraling deeper into crisis. Our country and our democracy need journalists and editors like John Temple and the staff of the *Rocky*.

Let's hope we see their bylines again soon.

Joe Torres is government relations manager for Free Press and former deputy director of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists.



The final edition of the *Rocky Mountain News*, shown here, hit newsstands just a few months shy of the paper's 150th anniversary.

Free Press Summit: Changing Media (continued)

The second half of the day featured small group discussions about the future of media.

Representatives from a variety of backgrounds were seated together. Gathered at one table, for example, were two retired journalists, a Native American telecom expert working at the FCC, an advocate for minority advancement in communications, and a teacher.

After debating a broad range of policy ideas, participants used wireless keypads to vote on their priorities. The results will be used to help guide Free Press' future work.

Tracy Van Slyke, project director for the Media Consortium, a network of the nation's leading independent media outlets, attributed the success of the summit to the opportunity to collaborate

For summit transcripts, video coverage, and to download a copy of *Changing Media*, visit www.freepress.net/summit

and interact. "Free Press created the perfect environment where everyone's voice could be heard. This kind of engagement is exactly what we need to change media policy for the better."



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About

Media Reform News is published by Free Press, a national, nonpartisan organization working to reform the media. Contents ©2009 Free Press.

Dear Friend,

These are exciting times for media reformers. With our base of 500,000 activists and a new administration in Washington that seems to share our mission, we're witnessing the beginning of true progress on our issues.



For the first time since our founding, we have an extraordinary opportunity to implement a positive vision of media that serve the public interest. Thanks to you, we're seizing it.

As soon as we learned that President Obama would propose a massive stimulus spending package, we submitted a detailed proposal for investing in broadband infrastructure as a strategy for economic recovery and growth. Our advocacy helped shape the congressional allocation of \$7.2 billion for broadband buildout.

Now we're making sure those funds are spent to connect communities without access to high-speed Internet — not just to line the pockets of the telecom companies. This is no small task: The mighty phone and cable lobby gave Obama's presidential campaign eight times what they gave to McCain's, placing the new administration under tremendous pressure to cede important ground in its support for consumer protections and democratic media.

In this issue, you'll read about how our InternetforEveryone.org campaign is putting a human face to the problems we're working to solve. Our "America Offline" series brings home the realities of life on the wrong side of the digital divide: the tremendous obstacles to getting your children an education, launching new businesses, and earning a living.

You'll also learn how we're bringing together the top minds in the nation to find policy fixes to the crisis in the journalism industry. You'll find out how we're pumping new life into community radio and public access television stations — crucial public media that are getting diverse viewpoints and local news and entertainment to communities across the country.

Finally, you'll learn about Alex Dingle, a steadfast media reform activist and one of our most loyal financial supporters. Thank you to Alex and to each and every one of you who contribute to the Free Press Action Fund — especially during these tough financial times. Your generosity keeps us going strong.

Onward,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josh Silver".

Josh Silver
Executive Director

Putting a Face on the Digital Divide

InternetforEveryone.org is using storytelling to shed light on the millions of Americans who live without regular Internet access or lack the training or equipment to get online. A Free Press reporting team traveled to Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and rural communities across North Carolina, interviewing dozens of people about their Internet struggles. Combining short, documentary-style videos and in-depth written reports, these two multimedia series about the digital divide in urban and rural America can be viewed online at InternetforEveryone.org.

FIVE DAYS ON THE DIGITAL DIRT ROAD: Five Communities Across Rural North Carolina



Day 1: Doug and Rhonda Locklear, members of the Lumbee Tribe, say people where they live in Robeson County simply can't afford the high-speed Internet connections that could lead to other opportunities.



Day 2: In rural Person County, farmer Jay Foushee is stuck on dial-up, using a slow connection to check market prices and sell his crops. His teenage daughter Julie has to leave the house each night in search of a broadband connection to do her homework.



Day 3: Living in the Smoky Mountains outside of Asheville, writer Brooks Townes was forced to give up his freelance career because his dial-up service made him uncompetitive. And bed-and-breakfast owner Martha Abraham fears that her slow and unpredictable satellite connection hurts her small business.



Day 4: In remote Spring Creek, residents are trying to revive their town by building a community center that offers a computer lab and space for local businesses. But longtime resident Layten Davis says their attempts are futile without broadband.



Day 5: In Rutherford County, Sam Adams, a senior IBM researcher, spent thousands of dollars to erect his own broadband tower so he could continue working. But he knows that not everyone has that luxury, and that widespread broadband access in the area could jump-start a local economy that has been decimated by the disappearing textile industry.

WIRED LESS: Disconnected in Urban America



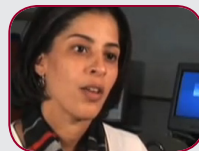
Day 1: The digital divide disproportionately affects people of color. The aspirations of teenagers Lily Huerta and Julian Rosas are stifled by the lack of Internet access, and Azusa Public Library Director Albert Tovar says the library can barely keep up with the demand for Internet service.



Day 2: After struggling for years using a slow dial-up connection, the Quintero family has recently been transformed by finally getting high-speed Internet in their home.



Day 3: 12-year-old El Monte resident Michael Ibarra dreams of a day when he'll actually be able to do his homework from home, with an Internet connection that many in America take for granted.



Day 4: When the bell rings at the end of the school day, students like 11-year-old Alexis Boyce at D.C.'s Arts and Technology Academy return to an offline world, and teacher Ashea Williams worries about their future.



Day 5: D.C. carpenter Ferman Fletcher wants to pursue a new career in music using the Internet, but can't afford a high-speed connection and is thwarted by the limitations of public computers.

Learn more about what it means not to have high speed Internet at www.InternetforEveryone.org/americaooffline.

Internet for All Americans

WHEN THE INTERNETFOREVERYONE.ORG town hall meeting ended on March 7, Brenda Moore and Avie Patrick were ecstatic.

They had driven nearly three hours to attend the meeting in Durham, N.C., seeking an answer to how to bring affordable, high-speed Internet to their community in Buckhead. Both Brenda and Avie are members of the Waccamaw Siouan Tribe. What they found at the meeting was a growing community of people from across the state sharing experiences, strategies and solutions to bridging the digital divide.

"The one thing that we realized today is that we're not the only ones in rural areas living in the sticks and all we can get is dial-up," Brenda said. "We felt that way, we felt that we were left behind, but we realize now that we're not the only ones."

Brenda and Avie joined nearly 150 town hall participants to discuss the future of the Internet as the federal government begins to craft a national broadband plan. Seated at small tables with people who went from strangers to allies as the day progressed, Brenda and Avie talked about their own struggles and how the government could best tackle the growing divide between Internet haves and have-nots.

"I consider myself a computer expert in our community, but a lot of things I heard here today I had never even touched on that could benefit us," Avie said.

To help facilitate the discussions and catalog the different suggestions for how the government could get Internet to all Americans, participants used individual keypads to provide feedback and vote on proposed solutions.

Brooks Townes, who lives without high-speed Internet in Weaverville, N.C., trekked four hours to make the

InternetforEveryone.org: Bringing Broadband to the People

InternetforEveryone.org, a coalition of more than 160 public interest, civic and industry groups organized by Free Press, is working to bridge the digital divide for the nearly 40 percent of the population that still doesn't have high-speed Internet.

Washington is taking its first steps toward getting broadband to all Americans — setting aside \$7.2 billion in economic stimulus funding for high-speed Internet expansion. InternetforEveryone.org is giving the public a seat at the table in creating a national broadband plan.

The coalition conducted a national survey; launched a video reporting project; created a digital town hall forum; and held a series of town hall meetings to provide people from across the country the opportunity to help craft a national broadband plan. The coalition met on May 13 in Washington to evaluate the public's recommendations and plan its next steps in getting fast, affordable, open Internet to all Americans.

meeting. A video about Brooks' struggle to conduct a freelance writing career on dial-up was among those showcased during the town hall meeting.

Brooks says he hopes the government continues to step in to tackle the Internet crisis and prioritizes broadband expansion. "I don't know how many people would be employed setting up the infrastructure, but a heck of a lot of people would be employed on their computers who otherwise could not compete," he says.

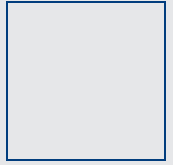


InternetforEveryone.org traveled to Durham, N.C., to talk with local residents about bridging the digital divide.



The future of our media is being debated and decided right now. Your gift will help us put the public interest at center stage, where it belongs.

Visit www.freepress.net/ donate or call toll-free 1.888.877.1533 ext. 504 to make a gift today.



donor profile

An Interview with Alex Dingle

Alex Dingle is a Free Press Action Fund monthly sustainer who lives in Mountain View, Calif.

FP: What media issues do you care about the most?

AD: Consolidation of ownership, which I think is dangerous for a couple of reasons.

First, reducing the number of independent views in the public media space is worrisome because I think that we as a democracy need what Al Gore refers to as the “marketplace of ideas.” Often it’s how we collectively think about a problem that directly shapes our national action, like the coining of the phrase “war on terrorism,” which was followed by military action in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Second, where there’s greater consolidation of the media, there’s a greater potential for censorship. After the 9/11 attacks, Clear Channel “recommended”

to its subsidiaries that they ban John Lennon’s “Imagine” from the airwaves, along with 149 other songs. Should one company have so much power over our national dialogue?

Finally, there may always be conflicts of interest between companies and the news organizations that are supposed to blow the whistle on them. Is NBC likely to publish a hard-hitting story on GE [which owns the network]?

FP: How are you or people that you know affected by media policy issues?

AD: I was completely shocked by the abysmal media coverage in the run-up to the Iraq war. I don’t think it reflected much skepticism about what the Bush administration was telling Americans, or how much anti-war sentiment our country was really feeling. How many

Americans know that on Feb. 15, 2003, more than 500,000 Americans participated in a coordinated anti-war protest, with over 300,000 in New York City alone? Because the American media largely ignored [the protest], it had virtually no impact on our policymakers in Washington. With a wider spectrum of media outlets, perhaps there would have been less groupthink on the part of the media outlets and more coverage on this critical issue.

FP: We’re grateful for your monthly support. Why do you contribute monthly?

Because I want a healthy democracy, and I see a healthy media system as a very important part of this.

To donate to the Free Press Action Fund, visit www.freepress.net/donate.