

## Josh Silver

Good morning. [Applause.] I'm Josh Silver. I'm the Executive Director of Free Press. [Applause.] I cannot tell you people how exciting it is to look out at all your faces, know that about twice as many people will be here throughout the day trickling in to over 3,000 people, and know that this conference and this movement for media reform is growing to a level that we never, ever could have imagined five years ago. As we look around, it occurs to me that we really are more than a national conference for media reform; this is truly becoming a national movement for media reform. [Applause.] And it is all about you.

You know, I never thought I would open this conference with a quote from Scott McClellan. [Laughter.] It's a little weird. The man who spoke for the Bush White House during the war in Iraq admits that, quote, "the national press corps was probably too deferential to the White House and to the administration in regard to the most important decision facing our nation: the choice over whether to go to war in Iraq." That's putting it mildly. Later, McClellan said that the news media were, quote, "complicit enablers in the White House's carefully orchestrated campaign to shape and manipulate sources of public approval." [Applause.]

More and more reporters, including major correspondents like Jessica Yellen and Chris Matthews have recently admitted that their bosses were pro-war, and it slanted their coverage. These Johnny-come-lately confessions confirm what's been obvious to almost everyone in this room for years: the corporate media is not a watchdog protecting us from the powerful; it is a lapdog begging for scraps. [Applause.]

But for us here today, being right is no consolation in the face of damage done by the media's love affair with the White House. Government and corporate propaganda have laid waste to journalistic integrity. We know now that the Pentagon poured millions of dollars into a covert campaign to sell the Iraq war to the American people who sacrificed their blood and the good will of other nations. And the media handed over the megaphone, allowing the Pentagon to invade our airwaves – OUR airwaves – and newspaper stands with an army of retired generals. These so-called "message force multipliers" appeared or were cited more than 4,500 times on all the major television networks, and even NPR.

We now know that the media rolled over for the Bush administration not just about the war in Iraq, but about nearly every major decision facing our nation – from message multipliers to prepackaged and undisclosed propaganda on our local nightly news, to pundits for hire like Armstrong Williams. We now know that our leaders preyed on our fears with a cynical PR campaign that raised Homeland Security warnings to Orwellian orange and red to distract from the administration's latest embarrassing or illegal acts. [Applause.]

We now know that the corporate media – the source of news for more than 90% of Americans – acted as their willing mouthpiece. For far too long, the American people

have been made afraid. We have been left in the dark, not just by our government, but by the media that was supposed to keep us informed. Eighty-eight years ago, journalist Walter Lippman said, "All that the sharpest critics of democracy have alleged is true: If there is no steady supply of trustworthy and relevant news, incompetence and aimlessness, corruption, and disloyalty, panic and ultimate disaster must come to any people which is denied and assured access to the facts." [*Applause.*]

Without those facts, we followed the flag into a disastrous war in Iraq. Without those facts, our economy crumbles, and 37 million Americans live in poverty. Without the facts, our nation's infrastructure is in tatters, and victims of Hurricane Katrina are left behind. Without the facts, our climate crisis may have moved beyond repair. Without the facts, without a critical, accountable, fearless media system, we've arrived at one of the darkest moments in our nation's history.

But the media problem isn't really about the journalists. It's not really about the TV show producers, and it's not even about Scott McClellan. Although many of them are complicit, this is about the people at the top. This is about big media owners who decided it's in their best interests to join hands with the Bush administration and global corporations at the expense of all Americans and democracy itself. [*Applause.*]

Our consolidated broken media system gives moguls like Rupert Murdoch the omnipotent power to decide what's news and what isn't; which lives are important and which aren't; which myth the American people will see; and which reality they won't. Friends, we are living in a matrix, and big media is writing the script. For these owners, it's good business to deliver bad media. It's important you understand that. Big media dollars – the advertisers do not want gruesome images from Iraq to follow ads for happy meals and Humvees. Hard-hitting journalism is expensive, and jeopardizes big media's closed-door relationships with politicians.

So we must ask ourselves what kind of country has a media system that helps our leaders trick the American people into an unnecessary war. We have to ask ourselves, what kind of country has a media system more concerned about Paris Hilton than genocide in Africa. [*Applause.*] What kind of country has a media system that covers elections by scandal-mongering, ignoring any pretense of exploring real issues? [*Applause.*]

What has happened to our democracy? I'll tell you exactly what happened. Big media forced it off the road into a ditch, let it burn, and cried alligator tears all the way to the bank. And our corrupt, money-driven political system let it happen. When you have an entire media industrial complex against you, it's easy to feel defeated. Sometimes it takes a transformative moment to realize that you can actually do something about it.

I had that moment thirteen years ago traveling in the Peruvian Rainforest. I was with my friend [Pachen] Miller. At 26 years old, we were longtime travel companions. By the time we decided the headwaters of the Amazon, Pachen had already spent most of his short life doing community service. I had dabbled in public service but had yet to figure out my own path.

On the third night, we were ambushed. Pachen was shot and killed at close range. I was shot in the leg and I narrowly escaped. It took a week to make it back to Lima, where they removed seven pieces of lead from my leg. At the hospital, the surgeon kept shaking his head, looking at how close the lead had come to the artery. He said, "*Tiene mucho suerte, hombre. Mucho, suerte.*" "You're very lucky, young man. Very, very lucky."

I came back from that trip a changed person. At the age of 26, I was suddenly aware of my own mortality. It was several years before most people realized that their life on this earth is short. And I knew in my bones that this short life that luck or fate had granted me would be committed to making the world a better place. [Applause.] And from that day forward, I also felt that I was living my life both for Pachen and for me; that my experiences and my successes were both of ours.

Now, I'm not suggesting that you have to go off to the Peruvian Rainforest, to get shot, to do good social change. But I AM suggesting that every one of us has the potential to be a powerful agent for change: you, me, the person sitting next to you. There are extraordinary people in this room and coming later in the day and tomorrow. Look around. There are people who have fought this fight for years. There are people who are new to these issues of media reform and ready to get to work. There are people with talent and passion and the will to win a better life for this country – people who have brought the media reform movement to a level previously unimagined.

Who could imagine the victories we've had since our last conference in Memphis? Just last month, together, we got the United States Senate to overwhelmingly reject the FCC's latest outrageous attempt to let big media to get even bigger. [Applause.] Together, we stopped the White House and Congress from abolishing net neutrality and turning the Internet into a private fiefdom for the cable and phone companies. [Applause.]

Together, we're pushing Congress to award thousands of new low-power FM radio licenses to cities and towns that desperately need independent voices. [Applause.] Together, we're challenging unfair postal rate hikes that threaten to shut down independent publications that are the lifeblood of our democracy. [Applause.] And together, we have created a movement made of thousands of people who are committed to creating a media system we need, and, for the first time ever, we have presidential candidates who are discussing and debating open Internet and media consolidation. [Applause.]

But right now, we ARE at a crossroads. Right now, we stand on the brink of the greatest opportunity in generations to break the corporate media stranglehold on democracy. In a few years, nearly all of our media – television, radio, newspapers, phone services, movies – will all be delivered through a high-speed Internet connection. At this critical junction, we cannot ignore history; we must learn from it.

In the past, every time a new technology emerged with the power to give a voice to the voiceless, there was a great moment of hope. We saw it when radio was invented in the 1920s, television in the 1950s, cable television in the 1980s. Each time, medias moguls send their hired guns to Washington to co-opt and monetize these technologies before they even get off the ground.

Each time the best and greatest chance for everyday people to reclaim the media was sacrifice to corporate power. Each time, the public had no idea laws were being passed in the THEIR name that were killing the dream. The ruinous state of the media we see today, as Robert Chesney always says, is the result of those disastrous policies. But this time is different. This time we stand at a moment of opportunity with the Internet. This time, we have a tool that not only speaks truth to power; it can organize truth against power. [*Applause.*]

This time, we can use the Internet to save the Internet. And we know that the future will go down one of two paths. The first is the righteous path. It's of openness: a new media world that treats all content equally. No slow lanes for us and fast lanes for them – [*applause*]; an Internet where anyone with a good idea can make it big and make a difference; an Internet that is fast, affordable, and accessible to everyone, rich and poor, urban and rural. [*Applause.*]

The second path is a closed Internet: an Internet that looks radio, TV or cable; an Internet where giant phone and cable companies decide what's on, how much it costs, and how fast it downloads; Internet that is no longer a vibrant own square for us but a cash cow for a few; where free speech is censored and status quo is king.

In this high-stakes debate over the future of the Internet, the future of virtually of all media, it's either open or closed; it's all or nothing. It is a clash between democracy and plutocracy that will be fought on every street corner from here to Pennsylvania Avenue to Main Street. It's going to be fought everywhere, and it's one of the most profound fights of our lives. [*Applause.*]

As Van Jones said at the last conference, he said, "You don't believe me, but it's true." On the eve of his 1936 reelection, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the architect of the New Deal, spoke words as true today as they were 72 years ago. He said, quote, "We had to struggle with the old enemies of peace: business and financial monopoly; speculation; reckless banking; class antagonism; sectionalism; war profiteering." They had begun to consider the government of the United States as a mere appendage to their own affairs.

We know now that government by organized money is just as dangerous as government by organized mob. [*Applause.*] FDR passed the New Deal because he took the fight to his opposition and he never backed down, and neither will we. Because we dedicate ourselves here today to the proposition that our fight for a democratic, open Internet and independent media will end the historic pattern of monopoly that suffocates freedom, dissent, and creativity [*Applause.*]

Because the future of the media DOES NOT BELONG TO RUPERT MURDOCH.  
[*Applause.*] The future of the media does not belong to Comcast and AT&T. The future of our media does not belong to Clear Channel, Verizon, and Tribune Company. The future of the media belongs to us. [*Applause.*] All of us. And everyone watching across this country.

We are here in Minneapolis today and this weekend to fight for all the media that we want. And mark my words: We will not stop this fight until we win. Thank you, and welcome to Minneapolis. [*Applause.*]