

## Robert W. McChesney

Wow, that was fantastic. I'm Bob McChesney, and... [*Applause.*] I have the privilege of cofounding Free Press, as Josh Silver and John Nichols. And many of you, I know, probably remember those days. Now they seem like ancient history to talk about those dark years before 2003 when media moguls and phone companies and cable companies had their way with our politicians. There was no coverage, no recognition.

They had their plans to carve up our communities to have no more nonprofit, non-commercial media; to have one company own all the media in a community, so one newsroom would fit all company town media; to have an Internet privatized to the phone and cable companies; would be able to select which Web sites you could see and which you couldn't, which speeds they wanted. That was all on the agenda in the early part of this decade. Those were there plans. They owned the politicians, they owned the White House. They thought everything was going to be clear sailing.

And then they learned something: they learned that the American people weren't going to put up with that; that once we learned – once we learned that his media system was not handed down to us from the founding fathers, was not a free market system, profit-driven but not free market, but instead was the result of policies and subsidies made in our name but without our informed consent.

And once we saw the disastrous consequences for this system for issues of war and peace, of social justice, of economic development, across the board, the American people no longer put up with this system. And we stand here understanding that we have won numerous victories slowing down the efforts of our adversaries to take over and further their control over our media system.

And what's exciting about this conference – for the first time, in the themes that I think you've already seen talked about this morning, is we're now poised to turn away from fighting to protect the past, to look to the future, to take control of where this media system actually is going to go. [*Applause.*]

Our great challenge is to take the energy in this room, to take the extraordinary support we're beginning to develop in Congress and convert it into a program and agenda that will advance a truly democratic media system. Now, when I said that at the Madison conference that began this whole process roughly four years ago – four and a half, almost five years ago – it seems like I was talking about science fiction. It seemed like, who is this guy kidding that we could possibly have legislation passed to spawn local media – nonprofit, non-commercial and commercial media; competitive newsrooms; news rooms that served communities, diverse communities; have ownership not just by rich, white guys and a handful of corporations, but by people across the spectrum of our society.

It seemed impossible. Who would have thought that we could stop the Internet from being taken over by the same lobbies that own our politicians; that Larry Lessig now,

fortunately, has dedicated himself to tackling. And today in this conference, we're going to start the process of winning these victories. And why we're going to win these victories is very clear: Members of Congress have learned the message. Members of Congress are increasingly hearing from you.

And we're very privileged now in the United States Congress to have a lot of members who are fighting in our behalf, who aren't representing AT&T and the cable companies. And our next speaker is someone who's definitely one of our champions now in Congress, and one of the leaders for the coming generation. Congressman Keith Ellison was elected to Minnesota's 5th Congressional District. [*Applause.*] Here in Minneapolis, in 2006, he's the first Muslim elected to the U.S. Congress, and the first African American elected to the House from Minnesota. [*Applause.*]

Congressman Keith Ellison is a fierce advocate for social justice. He's beloved here in Minnesota. And I think his treatment by the media is quite telling. He has a recent direct experience with corporate media, and as I say, a picture or a video tells a thousand words.