

# MEDIA REFORM news

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## Media Reform: Big Challenges, Big Wins



Dear Friend,

It's only June, yet 2010 has already proven to be a momentous year for media reform.

In April, a federal appeals court decided that deregulation by the Bush-era Federal Communications Commission left the Obama FCC without authority over broadband providers like Comcast, AT&T and Verizon. It's a testament to the overwhelming influence of fat-cat lobbyists that the federal agency in charge of communications could be stripped of that authority.

It was even more staggering when the *Washington Post* reported that FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski planned to yield to the same lobbyists, and forgo re-establishing the agency's authority.

Free Press mobilized overnight: Nearly 250,000 supporters and allies called or wrote to the FCC — that's on top of the two million people who have called for Net Neutrality to be protected. We gathered hundreds of allied organizations and companies, held press conferences, wrote op-eds, and in just three days' time, the chairman announced plans to restore the agency's authority over broadband.

Needless to say, the telecom industry is not happy.

They're spending \$100 million on Washington lobbyists to oppose proposals that would impose even minimal government oversight. In May, the AT&T-funded front group

Americans for Prosperity announced a \$1.4 million advertising blitz to convince the public that the FCC is plotting to "take over the Internet."

We're fighting back — but it won't be easy.

Meanwhile, we're also fighting to stop the proposed Comcast-NBC mega-merger. Thousands of Free Press activists have signed a letter to Congress and the FCC opposing the merger. And on May 11 at the Free Press Summit, FCC Commissioner Mignon Clyburn called for public hearings on the matter.

We have the opportunity to create a more democratic, diverse and independent media system. We have the opportunity to get fast, affordable, neutral Internet to every home in America. We have the opportunity to break open access and distribution of all media by enabling any website to have the reach of a television or radio station.

But to win, we must fight harder and be smarter than our formidable opposition. Your continued financial support and activism are central to that fight.

Thank you for working tirelessly alongside us.

Onward,

Josh Silver, President & CEO

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JOURNALISM

# Media Fail: Exposing the Worst of American Media

Every day, we read and watch “news” that favors sensation over substance. Meaningless sideshows can dominate the news cycle for days, blocking out real issues of public concern. Worse, what passes for news is often badly sourced, unaccountable and tainted by commercial interests or political bias.

It’s time to FAIL a failing media.

MediaFAIL is a user-powered project of Free Press that lets you expose the worst moments in the media as they happen. Just find a link, post it, fail it, and share it with friends. The top-rated submissions will migrate to the site’s front page for all the world to see.

Here’s a sampling of some posts:

- During a Fox News Sunday segment, former newsman Brit Hume asked, if the BP oil spill was so massive, why couldn’t he see the oil? He then suggests that we need to “get perspective” because the ocean could absorb the problem.
- Rush Limbaugh tried to blame the West Virginia mine disaster on the union. Only problem was, the mine was non-union.
- *Men’s Health* advised that the best colleges for men are those where feminism is weakest.

But we don’t just want to give the media a failing grade. That’s why we’re featuring links to actions on important



Free Press campaigns, to help build a better media system.

Want to add your voice? Go to MediaFAIL.com. Submit your example of terrible reporting. Then post it, fail it, and tell your friends to do the same.

## in brief

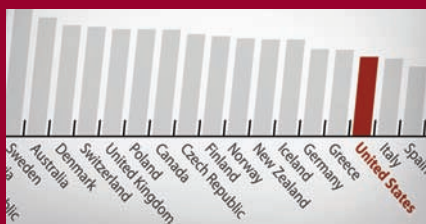
### NATIONAL BROADBAND PLAN: A GREAT START, BUT...

In March, the FCC released its long-awaited National Broadband Plan. The plan takes several critical first steps toward solving the nation's broadband deficiencies. It makes clear that high-speed Internet access has become an essential public service like water, electricity and telephone service and that closing the digital divide is now a national priority.

But in critical areas, the plan does not go far enough fast enough. It's a little like being given a new car with a faulty engine. It has several nice, shiny components and looks great, but lacks sufficient horsepower to get you where you need to go.

For example, the plan doesn't do enough to promote competition in the broadband market; it fails to provide details on the changes needed to reform the Universal Service Fund to support broadband infrastructure; and it fails to allocate both underused and unlicensed spectrum for broadband access. Making matters worse, a federal court's recent ruling that the FCC lacks authority to regulate broadband threatens the agency's ability to improve the plan or carry out its ambitious goals.

It's clear that it will take a huge amount of work to bridge the digital divide and make universal, affordable Internet access a reality. Free Press, along with our supporters and allies, is already applying pressure to the FCC to ensure that it meets America's broadband needs.



The United States places a dismal 22nd in the world in broadband adoption (down from 4th place a decade ago). To learn more, visit [freepress.net/international-broadband](http://freepress.net/international-broadband)

[www.freepress.net](http://www.freepress.net)

## MEDIA OWNERSHIP

# Lawmakers to Comcast: We Can't Trust You

**D**ebate over Comcast's proposed takeover of NBC Universal has been raging for almost six months now, and Free Press has been the leading voice against the deal.

Even before news of the merger became official, we were developing a national campaign to highlight the dangers it poses to our media and democracy. Since then, we have released two major reports on the proposed merger and produced and disseminated a range of popular educational materials including videos, fliers and a new website: [www.freepress.net/comcast](http://www.freepress.net/comcast).

Free Press has also been working on Capitol Hill and mobilizing in communities across the country to ensure that this merger is not rubber-stamped. And we're starting to see some encouraging results: Members of the public have already sent nearly 40,000 letters to Congress expressing opposition to the takeover. In response, Congress has held four hearings and posed tough questions to the CEOs of Comcast and NBC about the merger's impact on consumer prices, competition and local media.

At one of the first hearings, Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.) — a former writer and performer on NBC's *Saturday Night Live* — held NBC President Jeff Zucker's

feet to the fire. Franken unleashed a scathing critique of both Comcast and NBC, cataloging

their long history as corporate bad actors with a string of broken promises and providing compelling reasons "to be very concerned about this potential merger."

At another hearing, Comcast CEO Brian Roberts fielded a lengthy series of questions, after which Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.) cut to the chase, saying: "You've got a diversity problem; you've got a labor problem; and you've got an ownership problem. ... So I don't know why I should be supportive of your merger."

If the deal goes through, Comcast would own broadcast stations and be the dominant broadband provider in 11 markets, giving it control in those markets over content online, on cable, and over the airwaves. Free Press is currently working with local organizations and residents in these communities to put the brakes on this massive, anti-consumer merger.

To learn more and take action, visit [www.freepress.net/comcast](http://www.freepress.net/comcast).



The National Conference for Media Reform

SAVE THE DATE  
April 8-10, 2011  
Boston

Thousands of activists, media makers, educators, journalists, policymakers and people who want better media will gather in Boston to call for real and lasting changes to our nation's media system.

Don't miss this one-of-a-kind event!

Visit [www.freepress.net/conference](http://www.freepress.net/conference) for more information.

## INTERNET

# Get Your Hands Off Our Internet: Free Press Activists Speak Out

In October 2009, after years of concerted advocacy by Free Press and our allies, the FCC announced plans to write new rules to secure Net Neutrality, the principle that protects consumer choice and the free flow of communications online.

The cable and phone companies responded by hiring political mercenaries, co-operated think tanks and “astroturf” (or fake grassroots) groups to disrupt the agency’s rulemaking proceeding with false claims that the proposed regulations are anti-business and will result in service downgrades and job losses. Fox News’ Glenn Beck even called Free Press “the most dangerous group in the United States, if not the world.”

Before the new rules are finalized this summer, Free Press will undoubtedly have fought one of the most definitive battles since our founding.

We are now working to ensure that the public’s support for strong Net Neutrality rules is part of the official record. So far, more than two million of you have spoken out to Congress and the FCC. Here are just a few of your comments:

*“I am 62, disabled and housebound. I depend on Internet access for issues critical to my existence and survival. Without open and full Internet access, my quality of life would deteriorate considerably.”*

*“The Internet ... allowed me to pull myself out of poverty and join the ranks of the innovators and entrepreneurs that keep our economy running. Please don’t allow the narrow interests of two companies to destroy the ability of others to do the same.”*

*“As a musician, much of my livelihood relies upon the Internet. I promote my shows on sites like Facebook; I network with other players and find gigs; and I can sell my music to a worldwide audience. All of this depends on free and easy access to the Internet for everyone.”*

*“I am a small-business owner, and much of my business is driven through my websites. My websites need to be available to ALL potential customers, not just the few who can afford the highest tier of service. Please do not allow Internet providers to restrict the World Wide Web; this would put me out of business!”*

## Debra Brown: The Making of a Free Press Activist



*“Free Press gave me opportunities to get increasingly involved with the campaigns that are important to me, and I went for it!”*

It all began when Debra Brown signed a Free Press petition to support Net Neutrality. As a small-business owner, Debra knew that an open Internet was essential to the success of her company, the text messaging service MobilizeUs. But Debra was so passionate about the issue that adding her name to a letter wasn’t enough. Soon, she was working with Free Press to do more: She wrote her own letter to the FCC, published a blog post on SavetheInternet.com, and posed a question that FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski answered during a YouTube interview.

Speaking about her newfound activism, Debra said:

*“What I find truly remarkable is how Free Press has reached out to me and helped me take my activism to the next level. If you had asked me two weeks ago if I ever thought I would be making a YouTube video, let alone using it as a vehicle to ask a very pointed question to the FCC, I would have said ‘no way.’ But sure enough, after Free Press provided me with help every step of the way, I was able to successfully get an important question to be acknowledged by the chairman.”*

Inspired by Debra’s example? To learn more about the fight for Net Neutrality, visit [SavetheInternet.com](http://SavetheInternet.com)

[www.freepress.net](http://www.freepress.net)

## PUSH BACK AGAINST INDUSTRY LIES

SAVE THE  
INTERNET  
.COM

The AT&T-funded group Americans for Prosperity has announced a \$1.4-million advertising blitz to spread the lie that the FCC is plotting to “take over the Internet.”

Take action today. Visit [SavetheInternet.com](http://SavetheInternet.com)





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**About**

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**FREE PRESS SUMMIT: IDEAS TO ACTION**

# Free Press Summit Sparks Lively Conversations About Future of Media



Scenes from the 2010 Free Press Summit

The May 11 Free Press Summit: Ideas to Action, supported by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, was a resounding success both off- and online.

Held at the Newseum in Washington, the event was packed to capacity with 300 people listening as Federal Communications Commissioner Mignon Clyburn told the audience that the Internet should be protected for the people, not for corporations. She stressed that the FCC must change the way broadband is classified under the law to avoid “landmines” that would hinder the agency in its efforts to protect Net Neutrality and promote universal broadband access.

Sen. Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) voiced his strong support for Net Neutrality, saying that it was simply good governance. *Huffington Post* technology editor Jose Antonio Vargas, author Deanna Zandt, James Rucker of ColorofChange.org and Facebook’s Andrew Noyes spoke about the power and pitfalls of social media.

In the afternoon, journalist Farai Chideya moderated a panel about the future of public media with the BBC’s John Tate and PBS’s David Fanning. Free Press also released a new policy

paper called *New Public Media: A Plan for Action*. The paper presents a series of innovative policies to support quality news reporting in local communities and to build a world-class noncommercial media system in America.

Thousands of people who couldn’t make it to D.C. watched a live stream of the speeches and panels and chatted online about the event. Prominent media activists and journalists stopped by the chat room to share their insights and comment on what the speakers had to say.

Back in D.C., participants packed afternoon breakout sessions to discuss the morning’s speeches and figure out how to put the best ideas into action.

Jehmu Greene, president of the Women’s Media Center, capped things off with a final keynote address encouraging more women to get involved in the media — and calling on media outlets to do better at publishing journalism by women.

For more information on the summit, including access to transcripts, videos and a copy of *New Public Media: A Plan for Action*, please visit [www.freepress.net/summit](http://www.freepress.net/summit).