

# MADCoNews

a bi-monthly report from the Media and Democracy Coalition

## LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR Fighting Hate Speech

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The media in Philadelphia is salivating over a scandal involving a City Councilman and his aide. Media attention of the accusations, which involve wasting taxpayer dollars and verbal attacks on reporters, are newsworthy. But the hate-filled posts from readers on newspaper web sites about the pair, who are black, has me wondering: shouldn't newspapers respond when racist or hateful speech is posted on their web sites by anonymous users?

For years, the **National Hispanic Media Coalition** has called out broadcasters when pundits like Michael Savage, Lou Dobbs and Bill O'Reilly spout hate speech designed to fuel anti-immigrant sentiment. NHMC and their allies have seen the impact these racist rants have on people's lives. Hate crimes against Latinos are on the rise.

At a roundtable discussion hosted by NHMC last month, the **ACLU**, the **Mexican American Legal Defense Fund**, **Southern Poverty Law Center** and many MDC member groups grappled with ways to stop hate speech without trampling on First Amendment rights. The groups are investigating if boycotts, educational campaigns, advertiser advocacy, and other tactics could lead to responsible broadcasting.

NHMC and its allies have their hands full with that effort, which is primarily focused on television and radio outlets. That's a big job, and they can use your help. Contact Inez Gonzalez at [inez@nhmc.org](mailto:inez@nhmc.org) to get more involved.

Personally, I am going to track more closely how my local paper handles hateful posts on-line. By getting a better sense of how prevalent these posts are, advocates fighting hate speech in the media may be able to formulate a response. For example, this evidence could be used to ask newspaper editors to monitor content more closely, and ensure that civic discourse does not become clouded by hate-filled rants. If you'd like to join me in that effort, contact me at [bmccconnell@media-democracy.net](mailto:bmccconnell@media-democracy.net)

Beth McConnell





## GRASSROOTS CLIPPINGS

Community advocates testified before New York City Council on September 29 on the potential for TV “white spaces” to bring affordable broadband services to low income communities. Josh Breitbart of **People’s Production House**, Tim Karr of **Free Press**, Chris Keeley from **Common Cause New York**, Dharma Dailey of the **Ethos Group**, Dana Spiegel from **NYCwireless**, and Michael Lewis from **Wireless Harlem** used the Council hearing to organize around digital inclusion issues, thanks to support of the **Media Democracy Fund**.



*Josh Breitbart (right) of People’s Production House and Tim Karr of Free Press (left) testifies before New York City Council on white spaces.*

Council is considering a resolution on white spaces at the urging of wireless microphone users in the theater industry, who are concerned about interference. Full audio and video, here: [tinyurl.com/NYC-WhiteSpaces-Hearing](http://tinyurl.com/NYC-WhiteSpaces-Hearing) and learn more about local organizing efforts at [www.speakandlisten.net](http://www.speakandlisten.net)

**Florida Media Coalition** staff met with State Senator Victor Crist (R-Tampa) as well as an aide to State Senator Mike Fasano (R-New Port Richey) about the need for better protections for Public, Educational, and Government (PEG) access cable TV. FMC also issued a news release about the House Appropriations Subcommittee asking the FCC to investigate its concerns about the impact of state cable TV franchise laws on PEGs.

**Colorado Common Cause** is asking state and federal candidates sign-on to the Bill of Media Rights, and is reaching out to churches such as the Jefferson Unitarian Church in Golden, CO, to participate in this campaign. CO CC is also working with **LCCR** to help coordinate a DTV public education event in Denver with FCC Commissioner Copps.

**Media Mobilizing Project (MMP)** produced a video which tells the stories of the Unified Taxi Workers Alliance. The video was made by workers and students from the MMP Our City Our Voices Project. View the video at <http://blip.tv/file/1271621>. Beginning in October, MMP will hold stake-holders meetings to craft a digital inclusion strategy for Philadelphia and beyond.

Jonathan Lawson and Susan Gleason of **Reclaim the Media** traveled to the DTV test market town of Wilmington, NC last week, as part of a MAG-Net project supported by Betty Yu at **Manhattan Neighborhood Network**. They conducted interviews with local activists, journalists, and people on the street. Confusion over the coupon program, lack of consumer choice at retail outlets, and digital broadcast footprints that fail to reach some households indicate that the national transition will be marked by serious challenges for households in rural and low income areas.

The FCC is offering funding for DTV grassroots education and support services in 81 cities. Groups are encouraged to submit proposals to the FCC to support the acquisition of converter boxes through the coupon program, training support to insure proper installation of boxes, running informational help centers, post-transition assistance to negatively affected households, or public relations. The deadline for proposals is October 21, 12pm EST. For more information, go to <http://tinyurl.com/FCC-DTV-Funds>. Erica Swanson of **LCCR** is available to support your application process and help you identify partners – her email address is [Swanson@civilrights.org](mailto:Swanson@civilrights.org).

## MEET THE COALITION

### Joe Torres

Free Press Government Relations Manager Joe Torres is a huge boxing fan. "My boys come to my house to watch all the big fights. I love to go to boxing matches... Ironically, I find it very relaxing... It is a mental game, a chess match—you know, a violent chess match—but there is preparation, will, study... There is an art to it."



He continues, "I think the... fight for media justice is a lot like boxing... If you can take someone out and end the fight early, you have to strike... because you may not get that chance again, but you train the twelve rounds. You're in it for the long haul. There are some days it seems like we're not making much progress, but folks who came before us faced bigger challenges. [so] you don't get frustrated and... go home."

Joe is a prize fighter for diverse media ownership. After working as a journalist for seven years, Joe joined the staff of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists in 1998. "We got into policy when Juan Ganzalez became president... [We saw] a direct link between the lack of diversity... and [media] consolidation... For the most part, people of color do not control the mass dissemination of their own story... The imprint of Latinos is very much part of the United States, yet people know very little about it. This extends to all different ethnic and racial minorities... We should all care about this, because the majority of the US population is going to be made up of people of color... There's your future workforce, people paying into Social Security. The prosperity of these communities matters... [M]edia has tremendous impact on public policy. Any attempt in trying to pass immigration reform is totally shut down with the help of right wing talk radio."

After fighting media consolidation on Capitol Hill during one of the most intensive years of the struggle, Joe is optimistic, but cautious. "I think we can make progress on minority ownership, strengthen localism rules," but "regardless of who gets elected... we're up against well financed media and telecom companies that have a lot of sway on both sides of the aisle.... There is a lot of work to be done... We need to redouble our efforts."

## NATHAN'S NOTES

### Big Days for Broadband

While the banking crisis has absorbed the most media attention in the last weeks, a number of events offered encouragement to digital inclusion advocates. From a conference in Washington, DC to a hearing in New York City, a newly passed bill in Congress and a presidential debate, these have been big days for broadband.

On September 25<sup>th</sup>, I attended the Broadband Census for America Conference in DC along with dozens of researchers, policy makers, advocates, and journalists. Hosted by **BroadbandCensus.com**, the conference featured a morning of in-depth broadband policy discussions. University of Texas researcher Kenneth Flamm opened by colorfully stating the basic premise of the meeting: "If we can have good data on cheese prices, we should be able to do the same for broadband prices." Rachele Chong, California State Public Utilities Commissioner and former FCC Commissioner called for, "more assertive national leadership," and continued, "If you don't do broadband, you're just not going to have state of the art economic development."

That evening, as I watched the first 2008 presidential debates, Barack Obama said, "I... think that we're going to have to rebuild our infrastructure, which is falling behind, our roads, our bridges, but also broadband lines that reach into rural communities." This is a promising development. Not only did he make clear that the Internet is basic infrastructure rather than a luxury, but it was amazing to see a policy priority important to so many Coalition members break through the sound barrier during one of the peak moments of the general election.

On Monday, September 29<sup>th</sup>, **Free Press** hailed the passage of the “the Senate passed the ‘Broadband Data Improvement Act’ (S. 1492), legislation that would improve the information gathered at the federal and state level on the availability, speed and value of high-speed Internet service.” Within hours, the House followed suit. At the same time, Coalition allies were in New York City, calling for the expansion of broadband services through opening TV “white spaces” to unlicensed devices (see Grassroots Clippings).



Working for universal access in the next several months and years won't be easy, but it's clear that, due in no small part to the work of Coalition members and our allies, there is broad interest in closing the digital divide, a new level of political energy and will, and a growing network of people and resources that can make it happen.

-- Nathan James, [njames@media-democracy.net](mailto:njames@media-democracy.net)



**Congratulations to the Prometheus Radio Project for receiving the Everett C. Parker Award, which was given to the radio activists at the Parker Lecture held by the United Church of Christ Office of Communication, Inc. in September.**

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Oct 5-8:** Rural Telecommunications Congress, Smuggler's Notch, VT

**Oct 6:** Future of Music Coalition: What's the Future for Musicians? New York, NY

**Oct 23:** FCC DTV Public Education Tour Stop, Seattle, WA

**Oct 23-25:** Re-Bootting the News: Reconsidering an Agenda for American Civic Education, Philadelphia, PA

**Oct 24-25:** Alliance for Community Media - West (ACM West)

**Nov 20:** Rural Broadband Workshop, Phoenix, AZ

**Nov 21-24:** National Communication Association 94th Annual Convention, San Diego, CA

**Feb 24-26, 2009:** We Media, Miami, FL

**June 26-29, 2009:** Media Giraffe Conference

**August 13-16, 2009:** Netroots Nation, Pittsburgh, PA

## CAPITOL ROUND-UP

Members of the House Appropriations Financial Services and General Government Subcommittee sent a letter to the FCC on September 30th asking that it investigate the treatment of public access channels. The letter was in response to testimony heard during a September 17<sup>th</sup> hearing on the subject. It states, "We... believe that PEG television is essential to our communities as an outlet for free speech, local information and opinions, and emergency communications. Changes in the cable environment should not lead to a diminishment of the accessibility of PEG channels to these same viewers." The **Alliance for Community Media** has long been calling for such action.



Low Power FM advocates at **Prometheus Radio Project** persuaded the FCC to delay a vote that would have allowed AM radio station owners to use FM frequencies to repeat their signals beyond their main transmitters' footprints. If the FCC allows this usage of FM bandwidth, they could adversely affect the availability of channels for new LPFM stations.

The **Institute for Public Representation (IPR)** is representing the **Children's Media Policy Coalition** (which includes **United Church of Christ Office of Communications, Inc.** and the **Benton Foundation**) and the **Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood** in deliberations at the FCC over the future of "embedded advertising" in television programming. Embedded ads include product placement and the inclusion of corporate brands in story plot lines in exchange for payment. IPR's clients are concerned that children are not equipped to distinguish ads from other messages, so children's programming needs special protections beyond disclosure. The FCC recently received comments on this question. To view comments go to <http://tinyurl.com/FCC-Comments> and search for docket number 08-90. Reply comments are due October 22<sup>nd</sup>. Anyone can file comments by going to <http://tinyurl.com/File-FCC-Comments>. **Commercial Alert** has launched a letter that individuals and groups can sign: [tinyurl.com/Embedded-Ads-Letter](http://tinyurl.com/Embedded-Ads-Letter).

The **National Hispanic Media Coalition (NHMC)** applauded FCC Chairman Martin for a proposal that would allow a path for low powered television stations, which have a significant minority ownership, to become full powered stations. Chairman Martin has added this item to the agenda for the October 15, 2008 monthly Commission meeting. "Chairman Martin's proposal is important to the U.S. media landscape because it creates a much needed opportunity for new and diverse media voices to be heard in local communities," said NHMC President Alex Nogales in an Oct 1 press release.

Last week, it became clear the *Resolution of Disapproval* to overturn the FCC's relaxed newspaper-television cross-ownership rules would not get a floor vote in the House. Advocates at **Free Press** believe the political and public education against media consolidation will make it easier to halt proposed mergers at the FCC.

The *Local Community Radio Act* is awaiting a Senate floor vote, and a House Committee vote. Strong bi-partisan support exists, as does a large, diverse coalition of groups pushing for its passage. Advocates in DC are working to break the log-jam to move the bills before Congress adjourns for the year.