

## **“The Role of Grassroots Organizers in Challenging Media Consolidation in the U.S.”**

Funders Briefing hosted at the Ford Foundation, February 25, 2005 – Complete Transcript

**Becky Lentz:** So let’s try and find our way to get started. We have quite a bit of exciting presentations for you today. So I want to welcome everyone to the Ford Foundation this morning. And I’m glad the weather worked for us. This is going to be a lucky day. This is our second in a series of three briefings sponsored by the Grantmakers in Film/ Electronic Media. And all three events focus on a series of issues having to do with key battles and so on and challenges in the media sector today in the United States.

Our first event in January—I hope some of you are revisiting us from that event—showed us how intellectual property rights laws are negatively affecting freedom of expression in this country and around the world. If you were not able to join us for that and would like to make sure that you let us know if you would like proceedings from that, we can send them to you. Today we are going to revisit the topic of threats to freedom of expression, but this time from the perspective of media ownership. We’ll hear from those working closest to the problem in their communities around the country. And we’ll also learn from those on the frontlines in D.C. how the public interest community was able to stop a very major decision at the Federal Communications Commission in 2003 largely because of widespread grassroots activism.

So, we invite you to join us today as fellow learners in a very—hopefully informal—atmosphere of respectful debate and good conversation. Needless to say, we all have our own ideas, experiences, and assumptions about how social change occurs and as funders we invest accordingly. But I would suggest that in the media sector, we’re all still learning what’s most effective in a policy environment that changes daily. Over the past several years, I have heard a lot of skepticism from the nonprofit community about how much can actually be done about the many problems in our media system. And that said, I ask you to hold several questions in mind as you listen to, and interact with, today’s speakers.

First, how CAN anything really be done about the commercial media system when it seems like such a David and Goliath situation? Would it be better to ignore the commercial system altogether and instead invest scarce resources in protecting public, noncommercial, and nonprofit media? Second, what are the media organizers around the country actually doing? What are they for versus what are they against? What’s their vision of a fair, balanced, and just media system? And finally, what kinds of knowledge and expertise are needed in order to change our media for the better? How can funders and grassroots groups contribute even if they’re not experts in technology or regulatory law working inside the beltway?

Today we are privileged to have with us a handful of media activists who have shown enormous courage by speaking out about the media in communities across the country. Before I turn over our podium to our keynote speaker who will be joining us momentarily, I want to introduce two guests in our audience today—FCC Commissioner Michael J. Copps and Paul Margie, who serves as spectrum and international legal advisor for the FCC. Given Commissioner Copps’s

busy schedule, we are very, very lucky to have him here today, and as you know, many of you are tireless advocates of the public interest—he’s criss-crossed the country to participate at public hearings to ensure that OUR voices and dreams for a fair, balanced, and just media are represented and heard at the FCC. Commissioner—(audience clapping)—Commissioner Copps has kindly agreed to share some brief remarks and kick off today’s event. Please join me in welcoming Copps. (audience clapping)

**Michael Copps:** Thank you for the very warm welcome on this cold, frigid morning in New York City. I’m delighted to see you. Thank you for the nice introduction. Thanks for having me over. Thanks most of all to so many of you in this audience for your involvement in issues that are so very critical to the future of our media and to the future of our country. As I look around this room, I see so many people who labored mightily in the battle against more media consolidation, otherwise known as the battle for more media democracy. Many of you have been all over this issue from day one. I know you are still on the case. And I am of the opinion, and I am here to say, that if we do our work right in the months ahead, when the dust settles on all of this, I think we can all be enjoying the sweet smell of success. Your voice is needed again though; it’s needed now and its needed now more than ever before.

The FCC will be taking up media consolidation again this year. Congress will be taking it up at some point in the context of the telecommunications rewrite, but don’t count on a leisurely public process. In fact, you better be prepared for another stealth effort at the Commission by big media because there are big media conglomerates out there who want the merger and acquisition locomotive to start rolling again and to start rolling now. The decision was made not to appeal the Third Circuit Court opinion to the Supreme Court. So, if I was in the world of business, I’d be thinking well this is the time, we’ve got the power, we’ve got the influence, we’ve got a friendly commission, let’s drive this through to completion and let’s drive it through right now. And I’ve been around this country. Everywhere I go I hear, you know the deal’s already written in this town between the newspaper and the broadcast station. The signature blocks are there. It’s ready to go. All we need are those final rules published by the FCC. So don’t be surprised if they push for a piecemeal approach under the radar screen—stealth process—as little public input as possible, give us a newspaper-broadcast, cross-ownership rule in one month. Come one or two months later and give us another one, and just keep it all very quiet and don’t get involved in that public mess that we had back in 2003.

You know, it took a lot of people to bring this issue to the forefront of the nation’s consciousness. It took people raising their voices in books, in articles, in song, in all kinds of forms—pamphlets, whatever kind of media you can think of—to drag this issue front and center, to force the issue of media concentration out of the esoteric pages of the Federal Register and into the mainstream of America’s consciousness. And what an impressive display of public concern and public wrath that was. Imagine 2.3 million Americans contacting the Federal Agency. I didn’t know there was 2.3 million Americans who even knew there was such an entity as the Federal Communications Commission. (audience laughs) But citizens across this land stood up in never-before-seen numbers to express their concern about what was happening to the airwaves and to reclaim their rights to the airwaves that they own.

You know, we're called a 50/50 nation now, or maybe a 51/49 nation, but on this issue we saw groups from the left and the right. We saw Republicans as well as Democrats, North and South, young and old, concerned parents, creative artists, consumer groups, labor organizations, civil rights groups, all fighting together for more diversity in their media. They fought in the red states, they fought in the blue states and it became an all-American grassroots issue thanks largely to the efforts of people in this room this morning.

When I set out to convene some FCC grassroots hearings across the country, because I think the federal regulatory agency has an obligation to level with the people when it has important issues up for debate. I think that's a responsibility, not just to stay in Washington behind their desks and don't talk to the people. We're technical, you know. We don't deal with the issues. But these are huge issues. We have a responsibility to go out and get the people's input. But when I started that, from the FCC's perspective, I didn't know what kind of reaction we were going to get, and I asked for some money to go out and hold some hearings, and Chairman Powell said absolutely not. The chief of the media bureau said he was just foot-stomping. Don't pay any attention to this. But Commissioner Adelstein and I, when he came down, decided we were going to go ahead and hold our hearings on a shoestring based on the premise that a shoestring hearing is better than no hearing at all. So we held some of our own. But more importantly, we latched on to meetings that were convened by many of you in this room which really facilitated our ability to get out. What we found was people cared and people were angry. So all of the grassroots work that was done by you folks paid huge dividends. People came to understand that there was a problem here. People came to understand that letting one company own three television stations, eight radio stations, a monopoly newspaper, the cable channels, and the cable network in a town was not really a good idea for American democracy. They came to understand that having big media control not only the distribution but the content and the production was not good for American democracy. They came to understand that having big media increasingly control the very act of creativity itself was not good for American democracy.

So just the way it's supposed to happen in a democratic society. The people's concern and the people's anger changed public policy. Didn't happen by itself; it happened because of the grassroots involvement of folks like you. But the people's representatives in Congress began to answer the call. Within two weeks of our passing those loosened rules of the FCC, the Senate Commerce Committee voted to overturn the whole thing and the United States Senate went on twice to overturn it. If we could have gotten a vote in the House, and 200 members wanted to vote in the House, we would have overturned them there, too. But the House leadership wouldn't allow that. But I can tell you, if they voted this afternoon on that question, they would vote the same way that the Senate voted. But they've been denied that vote.

So it was grassroots that induced all this. And I can tell you from talking to members of Congress how impressed they were when they went home that spring and summer of 2003 into their town meetings and their district meetings, and all of a sudden people stood up and said I'd like to ask a question on media consolidation, I want to express a concern about media consolidation. And so many of them, particularly in the GOP camp, said I never heard this, never heard this before. I've never heard this concern. And it's important to keep those folks involved

right now. This has to be a bi-partisan issue. This has to be a big-tent issue. We can't afford to lose those people, and they are under a lot of pressure right now. From big business, from some in the administration. Just, you know, let it go, turn away from the issue. You know, you've said your peace. Let's just let this happen now. So let's make sure we keep them pumped up and we keep them interested. And the way you do that is to make sure when they go back home this spring and this summer that that same person standing up and saying, by the way, what happened to that issue and why isn't it resolved right now?

Very important, the courts responded, too. As you know, the Third Circuit ruled last summer that the rules were substantively wrong and procedurally wrong. So we've now heard from the Congress, the courts, and the American people that the FCC got it wrong. So the good news is that those rules are back at the FCC. The bad news is those rules are back at the FCC because they're back to the very same folks who brought them to you in the first place. And as I've said before, I think big media's goal is to accomplish gigantic changes with minimum public scrutiny. And a possible scenario here is rules, new rules, every bit as bad, maybe even worse than the ones that were passed in June of 2003.

So for my part, I'm going to be doing everything I can to make sure that they don't get away with this *sub rosa*, unpublic process. And I'm going to be pushing for a broad (audience claps), thank you, and I'm going to be pushing for a broad and comprehensive rule-making, looking at all of the issues. You know, so many questions that we should have considered when we voted in June of 2003 were never even looked at. What is the impact of these loosened rules on minorities? What's the impact on children? What's the impact on small business? What's the impact on advertisers? There's just so many questions. And the research that we did at the FCC was so paltry. And if it hadn't been for folks like you, who were turning out studies that we could use, and that we could use to respond to and really hit them hard, we might not have been able to stop that train in its process. So we need to have that going forward.

Now part of this, I guess, is long term if you look from the standpoint of maybe Congress getting involved in a telecommunications rewrite. You're looking at something fairly longer term, a year or two years, or maybe even longer than that. So those longer-term research projects are most helpful, and we always have to have those as a democratic society monitors what's going on in its media anyhow. But don't forget that there's a short-term likelihood of action sooner rather than later. So I'm counting on having that kind of information studies and news-making studies that we had last time. Big media doesn't want to cover this issue obviously, but if you come out with studies that are cogent enough and crisp enough and incisive enough, then they can't avoid it. Or if you can get people involved—and I'm working on this right now—who big media can't ignore from the celebrity world or whatever, so much the better. So these are all things that we're going to be working on. So we need that kind of information. Without that kind of information we lose. We lose this battle. And we need a public process. And without a public process we lose this battle. We need a bi-partisan, big-tent approach. Without a bi-partisan, big-tent approach we lose this battle.

We have a lot of work to do. There are powerful economic forces allied on the other side with a willing commission to give them what they want in Washington, D.C. But after traveling the length and breadth of this land I believe that those forces can be countered because Americans want to reclaim their airwaves. I think you ought to look at what you did here. I remember when Franklin Roosevelt declared his intent to run for a second term as President of the United States and he said, I would like to have it said that in the first term of my administration these forces of special interest and economic power met their match. And I would like to have it said, in my second term as President, that they met their master. I think that ought to be your mantra going forward.

I think we did stop the train briefly. We stopped the train briefly. But now our challenge is to realize and to tell the American people, you know, I think there are a lot of Americans out there right now who think, boy didn't we do well. Didn't we do great? We stopped this. The battle is over. The court overturned it. The Congress overturned it. Which is not true. So I think all these people out there in the grassroots are ready to mobilize. They're ready to go again. But big media hasn't told them where the situation is. And we have to make sure that we tell them. So if we roll up our sleeves, all of us, whether we're in foundations, the academic world, creative world, labor unions, consumer groups, regulators, whatever, I believe that we can settle this issue of who is going to control our media and for what purposes. And I believe that we can resolve it in favor of airwaves that are of, by, and for the American people. Thank you very much.

I'd enjoy hearing any comments you all might have. Or suggestions you might have or try to respond to any questions that you might have.

**Comment:** Harold Feld with Media Access Project. Commissioner, last time you and Commissioner Adelstein were instrumental in mobilizing the public with the public hearing. And there's been a lot of talk in Congress how it was a grave mistake for the FCC not to have public hearings. I know at the June 3<sup>rd</sup> hearing they had that was one of the subjects that came up. I know the FCC wants to get this in under the radar, but what do you think is the likelihood of public hearings and what can we do as the process is gearing up to make sure that there are public hearings on this issue?

**Copps:** Well, pressure on all fronts. I would note first of all that the court made very clear in its case, in which you were so closely involved, that this was not a public process and that that was one of its grave shortcomings. So I think we have a judicial mandate. I think we have a Congress that will insist on keeping it a public issue. I don't know who's going to be running our Federal Communications Commission a month from now. But I would probably proceed on the assumption that they would have probably better political judgment rather than to repeat what happened last time and just refuse participation in public hearings. But all that being said, and I hope the majority does participate in hearings, I hope I can get all of my colleagues out on the road. Because I know the message they're going to hear. I know when we have that open-mic session who's going to stand up: the people who've been thrown out of work; the people from newsrooms who are unemployed; the creative artists who can't get air time on local stations. I know who they're going to hear from, citizens concerned about diversity and localism. So we

have to keep the pressure on. We have to start right now, though. And I think you have to present the threat: Hey, something is going to happen here if we're not vigilant and we're not active and it's going to happen. And I think people understand that real quick. I found one thing: The American people have a very proprietary interest in what happens with their airwaves. What happens to them and how it happens to them—the process that's used. And I think they're open to hearing about that right now. And I think if you present the case that, watch out cause something's going to happen, here watch very quietly. I think you'll get a pretty good response to that.

**Comment:** (starts off mic)....And I'm wondering what we're doing on our side of the camp to reach out and continue to make it a bipartisan effort, and whether we really understand what issues we have in common, where we share a vision. And maybe, Gene, you know more about this. But are we doing enough to really make this a big-tent issue and what more can and should we be doing?

**Copps:** We've done a lot. We haven't done nearly enough. When I was first nominated for employment to the FCC, the first thing I did was traipse up to the United States Senate and make some courtesy visits on members of the United States Senate Commerce Committee. One of the first people I went to see was Trent Lott, who was majority leader at that time. And he came in the room and sat down without me saying a thing he said, “When you go down to the Commission I want you to be very vigilant on the issue of media concentration 'cause I don't want to see a situation in this country where there are three, four, five companies that are controlling everything.” So I think that interest is still there. Other Republicans on the Senate Commerce Committee, Senator Snow, several others are interested in it. I think what we have to realize is that people are interested in this issue from a diversity of perspectives. And I think we have to be sensitive to those. Some are interested in it from the standpoint of family values and things like that. And the more you can take their interests in family-values programming, in independently produced programming, and relate it to this issue of media concentration, I think the better off we'll be. I think there is that small independent business, and even small-independent-broadcaster interest against concentration. You know you have many of the broadcasters involved in the 35 percent rule. And I think there are many broadcasters out there in whose breast the flame of the public interest still burns. There are fewer and fewer maybe, and it's harder to keep it burning, but they're out there and they want to do a good job. So we have to use all of these fora. And as I say if we don't keep all these folks together, we don't have a prayer. We've just got to make room and we've got to realize that people join in this great crusade for a diversity of reasons, but there's a central goal, which is to put the breaks on and reverse media concentration because will have happy effects in so many different areas of our society and our culture.

**Comment:** Thanks, Becky. Deborah Rappaport. Becky wanted to know what my title was and the best I could come up with was freelance troublemaker. But I spent several months, starting last July through the election, kind of being the mole in the whack-a-mole game of media consolidation, getting slapped down by Clear Channel, Viacom, and Sinclair. And winning two out of three. My question is, for those of us who are not involved in the day-to-day kind of

policy legislation, but kind of out in the hinterlands working with groups that are trying to find new media, new forms of communication, whether that be low-power radio, the Internet, etc. What sorts of suggestions might you have for us, who are as interested as anybody else is here about the broadcast and newspaper consolidation, but are also looking at new forms of communication.

**Copps:** Well, one of those is to use that tool of the Internet and involve those people who are disciples of it because there are so many of them. And you all have seen on a multitude of issues how efficacious the Internet can be in mobilizing opinion. And again people are worried about the future of it, and I've given some talks just on the subject of what's going to happen to open access and the Internet as we go ahead. Because everybody says, oh, we have this great, wonderful tool of the Internet so we needn't worry. We have a diversity and a multiplicity of sources and voices and all that. There is a very real danger, and we saw it recently in the case of a Vonage observation, which may come to us in the form of a complaint that maybe they don't have that kind of access to the Internet. Maybe those who control the network are going to be in a position to close that access. That fits right in with the themes that we're talking about on media consolidation. And if you look at, people always say, look we have all these news services now. I say, well, look at the top 20 news sites on the Internet. And they go back and look who owns them, and it's the very same people who own the broadcast, and own the cable, and have the increasing stranglehold over America's media. So we need to mobilize them. Low power is good. Use that low power. Get on that low power, talk about it, mobilize, those people turn out at—and you know about it—the grassroots hearings. And they feel very proprietary about that. And they really are a source of localism and diversity and creativity. And you need to be pushing that, the Commission on that. But it's another good issue that can be used to our mutual benefit, mutual advantage. Thank you. I enjoyed being with you.

**Becky Lentz:** Housekeeping....acknowledge other funders...

I'd like to turn it over to the first panel and when Amy arrives we'll do that. So I'd like to introduce Helen Brunner, who's going to coordinate our first panel. And many of you may know Helen from her previous work very recently as consultant for the List Foundation's Freedom of Expression, Arts, and Telecommunications Advocacy programs. Helen's been working tirelessly in the field of media policy since '96, and so she's also one of our mentors in this area. She is now consultant for a new Media and Democracy Fund, a new foundation collaborative supporting media reform. Welcome Helen.

**Helen Brunner:** It's great to see everyone here and thank you for trudging through the slush and the snow and we have several treats in store for us, but the first one is Joan Grossman, who is an extraordinary, award-winning media-maker, who has taken time from her busy schedule at Pinball Films to prepare a clip that's really about this organizing work. And it's really energizing. It's really great. If you guys start dancing, I'll have to call security, but just enjoy.

**Joan Grossman:** First of all, I'd like to thank all the activists who provided the footage that's in this video. And just to let everyone know, the video is short. It's an encapsulation of this

movement. It can only touch the surface, and it was made to be used in settings like this where there’s an opportunity to talk to people who are involved in these issues and have discussion. And so it’s an introduction and hopefully an energizing view of some of the things that are going on.

## VIDEO....

**Becky Lentz:** Thank you, Joan, that was really helpful and kind of gives us a frame for a lot of the stuff that we didn’t get to see the last couple of years. And I want to introduce Amy Goodman, who as you know is a very familiar voice to those of you who listen to Democracy Now! radio and cable television and all sorts of other Internet and other mediums. Probably one of the most innovative distributors of news we have. And I also want to say Amy has aggressively pursued human rights violations in East Timor, Nigeria, and other countries. And she’s co-author with her brother, David, of the acclaimed book, *The Exception to the Rulers: Exposing Oil, Profiteers, and the Media that Love Them*. Please join me in welcoming Amy.

**Amy Goodman:** Thank you, Becky. It is really great to be here and to see that footage. When was the last time you turned on Disney’s ABC and watched something like that. Or General Electric’s NBC, or Viacom’s CBS. What a great job and to all the grassroots activists who are here, it is a real honor to be in your company for all that you have accomplished. And it’s about time that this whole country learns about that, and they will and they are. And it’s because there is an independent media structure that is being built in this country that will give voice to what—I think is represented here—is not a fringe minority, is not a silent majority, but is the silenced majority, silenced by the corporate media. That has got to change. The Pentagon has deployed something more powerful than any missile or any bomb, and that is the U.S. media and we have to un-embed it. And that’s what the independent media movement is all about in this country.

Seeing the last pictures from Free Radio Santa Cruz—I was in Santa Cruz two nights ago and saw folks from Freak Radio, from Free Radio Santa Cruz that was raided. Listening to them describing that day on Democracy Now!, what it was like, when what wasn’t mentioned, I think, or maybe I didn’t hear it, that the FCC and the authorities that moved in had had their guns drawn on people who’s only weapons were a microphone and a mixing board. Guns drawn. I think that’s why the mayor of Santa Cruz came down to speak out in support of these people who had been making media for 10 years. Had the full support of the community. Who was moving in on them? Well, don’t worry, they’re just down the block and they’re continuing to broadcast. The authorities may not know where they are, but that broadcast is up. It’s 101.1 FM if you happen to be in the Santa Cruz area.

But I was in Santa Cruz honoring Ruben Salazar. Some of you may know who he is. Others might not be familiar, but you should be. He was a great Mexican-American reporter, a great American reporter, who died 35 years ago this year, August 29<sup>th</sup>. He was covering, still, the largest Chicano march in the history of this country, August 29<sup>th</sup>, as they marched in East Los Angeles, hundreds of thousands of them against the war in Vietnam at that time, protesting the



huge minority army that was fighting in Vietnam against other people of color. It was a crazy day and Ruben Salazar was there for the *Los Angeles Times*. He was a longtime reporter. He had been the Mexico bureau chief. He had been a Vietnam correspondent. But he had just made a decision. Some thought he was crazy, why would you leave one of the leading papers of this country, where few Mexican-Americans had a voice, and go to KMEX, that's K-M-E-X, a Spanish-language TV station in Los Angeles. He said it was important what he was doing at the *LA Times*. He was giving voice to his people, to the establishment, for the establishment to understand them. And he said that plays a critical role. But he wanted to be able to speak to his own people. He wanted to be able to open the microphones for them to be able to dialogue with each other, to hash out the most important issues of the day. And they weren't getting that from the English-language *Los Angeles Times*. He would do it on Spanish television. That's where, at that time, as he said, as I watched the video of him being interviewed two nights ago, that's where most Mexican-Americans got their news he said, from television.

But it's not most Mexican-Americans in 1970, it's all of us. It's where we get most of our news. It's on corporate television. And it's not even just the news on corporate television; it's the late-night comics that most people get their news from in this country. And he said he wanted to be in a place where he could provide a true forum. They asked about him being an advocacy journalist. See this goes way, way back. So this is 1970. And he said, “Advocacy journalist? Do you mean by letting Mexican-Americans speak, I am an advocacy journalist?” I suppose you could say that I am advocating for my people, for them to have a voice. Yes, I am guilty of that. On August 29<sup>th</sup> as he covered this massive march, he went to the Silver Dollar cafe with his TV crew afterwards to get a beer after a very raucous day. In walked a sheriff's deputy and shot a ten-inch tear gas projectile that slammed into his head and killed him instantly. One of the leading reporters in Los Angeles. The death was hardly investigated. Still people are calling for it to be reopened today. And 35 years later, there is a movement for a stamp to memorialize Ruben Salazar. I don't know how you fit a giant on a stamp, but hopefully this will happen. A small token, but it is such an important legacy that he leaves us.

And that is what the media should be about because I really do think the media groups we see represented today, they represent the mainstream. I think President Bush has managed to do something very important, and that is to unite people across the political spectrum against him and what he represents. You might say, well he was re-elected, and that isn't the issue of today. That's another discussion. But I really do think people across the political spectrum are uniting. We saw it in the FCC struggle. The fact that Michael Copps and Jonathan Adelstein never gave up, these dissident commissioners, and went around the country. They didn't let those in power determine what the conversation would be. They didn't let the kind of blackout on the media—I should say whitewashing of the information—stand. Working with community groups like those present today, all over the country, and broadcasting on the Internet, broadcasting on Pacifica Radio at all of these informal hearings around the country, they didn't have any of the networks at their disposal. No, they weren't sending cameras to those meetings. They were busy writing briefs behind the scenes, writing briefs that they, by the way, filed after the government said they wouldn't even appeal the Appeals Court decision, as late as just two weeks ago. Wasn't it Fox, Murdoch's Fox News Corporation and Viacom and NBC General Electric—was it NBC? Well,

Fox and Viacom because they have great vested interest in this, as well as the *New York Times* that bought the *Boston Globe* and also bought the free paper in Boston, and wants to make sure that they can continue. But a number of these news organizations that filed a brief so they will replace the government in pursuing this case. But in fact, they really all do work together.

But it didn't deceive the American people. And it shows that people, whether they're Trent Lott or Barbara Boxer in the Senate, they raked Michael Powell over the coals because of the pressure they got from the grassroots. And that came from people learning any which way about what was happening. And it rubbed everyone the wrong way. People know what it means when a media mogul owns a newspaper, a radio, and a television station all in one town. It means the silencing of the majority. And it means pushing through one corporate view that everyone had a visceral response to—that it wasn't democratic; that it actually subverts a democratic society.

We see the power of independent media coming together. It truly is breaking the sound barrier. I want to use the example of one story very relevant today because Monday is the anniversary of the second coup in Haiti, the anniversary of President Aristide once again being ousted from power. It happened February 29<sup>th</sup>, 2004, when Haiti should have been celebrating it's bicentennial. It should have been in its glory year, born in 1804 of a slave uprising, the oldest black republic in the world. The U.S. would never recognize the Republic of Haiti for decades after 1804 because they were afraid it would inspire the slaves of this country to rise up. But finally they did. And then when the democratically elected leader Jean-Bertrand Aristide took office in 1990-1991, he was immediately ousted for three years. Unfortunately, it was with the help of the head of the paramilitary death squad that was on the payroll of the CIA and DIA. But then he eventually was brought back. He was re-elected in the past years, and he was ousted again, once again with that same group of forces backed by the United States.

What was the media saying as President Bush was talking about restoring democracy to Iraq? What were they saying about Haiti at that time? They were saying that President Aristide and the First Lady of Haiti, Mildred Aristide, had simply left the country and taken up residence in the Central African Republic. Well, we knew something otherwise, but not because of the networks who hardly covered this story. And when they did, they simply gave the government line.

That morning when no one could find where the Aristides had gone, we got a call from U.S. Congress member, Maxine Waters—it was March 1<sup>st</sup>, a Monday morning—and the founder of TransAfrica, Randall Robinson. They said they had just gotten word from their friends, the Aristides. They were in the Central African Republic, and President Aristide had said he was the victim of a modern kidnapping in the service of a coup d'état backed by the United States. We put that on the air immediately. We put out the transcripts. We do transcripts every day so that, that come from our closed captioning, so that the deaf and the hard-of-hearing in this country can access independent media. Democracy Now! broadcasting now in over 300 Pacifica Radio stations, NPR stations, public access TV stations, increasingly on PBS stations now, and on both satellite networks, Dish Network, Channel 9415, Free Speech TV, 9410, Link TV, and on Direct TV, Channel 375. And we video and audio stream at DemocracyNow.org, and put up MP3s

everyday, so anyone can access our programming. So that stations across Canada, campus and community radio stations across Australia and through Europe now broadcast our program daily. It is a remarkable public media collaboration—the largest in this country.

So when we did this broadcast, it had a big impact. The corporate network reporters took the transcripts to the White House and the Pentagon. Rumsfeld was there that day answering questions and the network reporter said, is this true what Pacifica is reporting that President Aristide says he is the victim of a modern kidnapping that the U.S. was involved with. And Rumsfeld chuckled. They said, we asked for an answer not a laugh. And he said, that’s ridiculous. Well, I’ve learned as my years as a reporter when a politician tells you that’s ridiculous, you’re probably on the right track.

Two weeks later a small delegation heads to the Central African Republic. They say, if he went freely, if he wants to come back, he should be able to come back freely. And I got on that very, too small plane as the only broadcast reporter with *The Washington Post*—the two of us with this delegation led by Waters and Randall Robinson and a member of the Jamaican Parliament. And we went from Miami, the private airport there, to St. Thomas to Dakar, Senegal, to Bangui, Central African Republic, where they went to negotiate with the dictator who was celebrating the first anniversary of his coup. The U.S. knows how to choose them. And as the evening went on, as the deliberations went on, and the dictator Bozize would go away to say he was thinking about the offer to release the Aristides, President Aristide said to me, he’s going to check with the U.S. in France to get his marching orders. About seven hours later, they were freed because the U.S., France, and the Central African Republic had no choice because the cover was blown if these people were free to go. They were ready to go.

We got back on the plane and went to Dakar, Senegal, to Cape Verde Islands, across the Atlantic, and there President Aristide told his story. How the number two man in the U.S. embassy had come to the compound of the Aristides early in the morning of February 29<sup>th</sup> and said, if you don’t leave you will be killed; thousands of Haitians will die. He said, he wanted to speak to the press. He thought he was being taken to a press conference. Instead he was put onto a U.S. jet with U.S. military and security, and flown off. They did not know where they were going until they ended up in this remote area of Africa. And as we were flying into Barbados and finally Jamaica, where they’d been invited to stay, we heard that Rumsfeld, Rice, and Powell were threatening, saying the Aristides were not to come back to this hemisphere. Whose hemisphere? That the U.S. Ambassador to Haiti, James Foley, said that President Aristide was not to return within 150 miles of his country. Whose country? The U.S. Ambassador’s country of Haiti or the Haitian people’s?

And then we landed in Jamaica. Now all along this way, every report that we did, every report that we put on satellite broadcast to DemocracyNow.org, AP would hook into. And they would put out the print report of every broadcast that I did. When we got to Jamaica, CNN had the satellite phone and they said, go on the air, describe what had happened. I said, let me bring over U.S. Congress member, Maxine Waters. They said, well actually the host won’t really understand what is going on, it’s sort of a lifestyle show, it’s afternoon. Just explain when you

get on. So I said, hello, and he said something like, he thought I was on holiday in Jamaica, How is it down there?

I said, interesting you should ask, we're on the tarmac. This historic trip has just taken place. A small delegation went to retrieve the Aristides, who were ousted in what they say was a modern kidnapping in the service of a coup d'etat, backed by the United States. You could hear he was getting more words in his ear now. And he said, What about the violence? What about the violence? Not sure what he was referring to. He wasn't. I knew, the U.S. government saying he would inspire violence. And I said, I'm glad you raised that issue of violence. Now this is going out on CNN, it's live. Because we have to look at the people who fomented this coup, like Jodel Chamblin, number 2 man in FRAP, the paramilitary death squad that had fomented it 10 years before with the support of the U.S. Jodel Chamblin found guilty of the murder of the Justice Minister 10 years ago. Guy Malary—front page of him sprawled in his own blood in the *New York Times* in '93. Found guilty of the killing of Antoine Izmerly, the Haitian businessman, who on another September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1993, was walking to remember the dead in Haiti during the coup and was forced behind a church on his knees in broad daylight in cold blood, executed. Jodel Chamblin found guilty of his murder. He's involved with this coup, so it's important we talk about the record of violence and who the U.S. government is working with. And the anchor said, you're kidding.

And I take that example. And all through this 40-hour period of this delegation, CBS radio was taking our reports and broadcasting them around the country. From CBS to CNN to AP to the network reporters, taking these transcripts and telling a very different story, letting people speak for themselves. I call that trickle-up journalism. We can break the sound barrier if we work together. And I think that is what is absolutely critical right now is providing that infrastructure for groups to be able to communicate with each other. The right wing knows exactly how to do it. They have done it for decades. They have built up the echo chamber that they need from their pseudo-think tanks to, their most importantly, their conveyor belts putting out these pseudo-studies. And it's not just Fox that's putting them out. It is all of the corporate networks. Just look at the lead-up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq. It is so important to understand how the system works. FAIR did a study of the two weeks around Powell making that push for war at the United Nations, then Secretary of State Colin Powell. In that two-week period before February 5<sup>th</sup> and after, of the four major nightly newscasts—this doesn't include Fox, ABC, CBS, NBC, and *The MacNeil News Hour*—of the four major nightly newscasts in that critical two-week period, where the media manufactures consent, there were 393 interviews done around war. Only three were with anti-war representatives, three of almost 400. That is not a democratic media expressing the views of the people in this country, when more than half the people in this country were opposed to the invasion. That is a media beating the drums for war. And that is what has to be challenged. Because when the media does that, we're not talking about minor issues here, we're talking about issues of life and death. Ask the families of the close to 1,500 U.S. servicemen and women who have died in Iraq. Ask the families of what is believed to be more than 100,000 Iraqi civilians who have died, according to a recent study by Johns Hopkins, Columbia University, and a Baghdad university. A hundred thousand. When was the last time you heard that mentioned in the corporate media? And you might say I saw it once, or I heard it

once, or I watched it once. The issue isn't the exceptional report and every network, every newspaper has it. What matters is the drumbeat coverage and who they are beating those drums for, and who is being beaten down.

It is so important also to understand that the anti-war movement in this country was not just the conventional view of who was anti-war. Most interesting and one of the most under-reported stories is the level of resistance in this country in the military, in the intelligence agencies. And these people at the highest levels were also risking their professions and speaking out. And yet they weren't being included in the national discourse. But because of Democracy Now, because of pirate and low-power FM radio, because of the Internet, because of public access TV, these conversations were taking place. And it really does make a difference on every issue. The other day we had a debate between high-level UN spokesperson on a report that came out from the UN that said what was happening in the Sudan wasn't genocide, though it was very important to deal with, and Sally Booker, who was attacking the report. It was a fierce discussion, but because these discussions—we don't even hear one of these sides, rarely do we get the debate. We get a call right afterwards on Democracy Now! It's from a *MacNeil News Hour* reporter, who was saying, where are the transcripts? And we said, of what? Of your debate today. And we said, well, they get up soon because you know how it works? We have the MP3s, we have the closed captioning that's done for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, and after the show—they're never perfect because they're live and they're going as fast as they can—we put up the MP3s and used an army of volunteer transcribers around the world. We divide up the show and each one gets a segment, and they match the closed captioning to the actual recording and they put out a perfect transcript, or close to one. And then we put those transcripts on the Web site. And there was *The News Hour with Jim Lehrer* saying, where are your transcripts? We felt like we were their employees and we had been late. And we said, we're getting them up as soon as we get—I don't know where that person was sending them from. And they said because we're having the two of them on—they had heard them on the show that morning—and we need to brief our anchor.

It really can make a difference. We really can together transform the media. We're not talking about top down national broadcasting all over the country. We're talking about grassroots media outlets all over the country being organized and coordinated, and hearing the voices of the real experts, people in their communities, who are the experts in policy and how it affects them. And the target end of policy, whether it's abroad or right here at home, when we come to issues like Social Security and issues of the prison-industrial complex and surveillance. This unites people across the political spectrum. Conservative Republicans, like progressives, deeply care about issues of privacy, deeply care about corporate control, care about a war budget out of control, care about servicemen and women who are dead, care about corporate executives getting away with so much when so many thousands have lost their pensions. Yes, people are uniting in all kinds of ways now. Those traditional labels of conservative and liberal are breaking down. And that's I think what grassroots media is expressing. It is about time we break down those walls of the corporate network studios who bring us everyday on every channel that same small circle of pundits, who know so little about so much, who are explaining the world to us everyday, and let the real experts talk. Which is why we have to shore up all the independent media outlets.

Democracy Now! on Pacifica, founded 56 years ago by a conscientious objector of World War II, who came out of the detention camps and said, there’s got to be a media outlet that’s brought to us by journalists and artists, not by corporations that profit from war—as George Gerbner, founder of the Cultural Environment movement, professor at the University of Pennsylvania, says, not brought to us by corporations that have nothing to tell and everything to sell that are raising our children today. That’s how Pacifica was born—first station KPFA in Berkeley; then KPFA in Los Angeles; BAI here in New York, 1960; WPFW, 1967; KPFT in Houston went on the air in 1970. It is the only radio station to this day whose transmitter was blown up, actually twice in its first year of operation, blown up by the Ku Klux Klan. And I don’t know if it was the Exalted Cyclops or the Grand Dragon, ’cause I often confuse their titles, but when they claimed responsibility, they said it was their proudest act because they understand, they understood how dangerous Pacifica is, how dangerous all independent media is, simply because it allows people to speak for themselves. And when you hear someone speaking from their own experience, that breaks down bigotry and racism. It breaks down caricatures and stereotypes that fuel the hate. And if we heard that on a regular basis in this country, I really do believe it would have made it a lot harder for those low-level soldiers at Abu Ghraib to lay a finger on those Iraqi prisoners. Because that started here at home in a country that does not allow for populations, especially the most targeted—now Muslims, Arab-Americans, people of South Asian descent—people to speak for themselves. And it’s easier when you have an administration that demonizes whole populations for people to come to believe that these groups are sub-human. And that’s why independent media is a matter of life and death, Pacifica Radio, Indy Media, Indymedia.org, low-power FM stations growing now all over this country, like we saw Radio Consencia for the Imakolee workers, that they have a voice, that they can speak together. They can frame their own reality. Public Access TV—it is such an underutilized resource. We’re broadcasting on more than 150 of these public access TV stations and the response has been amazing.

You may even say, I don’t even know the channel of my public access TV station. Is it the one I always go past because there’s something weird on it? These are invaluable. And just like people at Pacifica fought back a corporate coup, a takeover, media activists have fought for that precious national treasure—the airwaves. When the monopolies come in like Cox or Time Warner or whatever the cable company is, Comcast, in your area, the city or the town only allows one media company to come in and rip up the roads to put in the cable. And then because of media activism, people fought for, if they have a monopoly they should set aside some public interest channels for the community. In some cases the community doesn’t even know that there’s this channel available, and the city council approves it, but then doesn’t even realize what they have there. And then when the company comes back to renegotiate a few years later they say, okay we’re just going to drop the three channels you have in the city and we’ll make it one. You don’t need the others. Unless there’s a constituency that fights back.

It makes me think of a great giant of a man who died in the last few weeks, Dirk Konig, who is the founder of Grand Rapids Community Television, a quarter of a century ago. Dirk is a remarkable man who left us too early at the age of 48. Dirk built Grand Rapids Community Television. We went out as we were shoring up community media around the country to Grand

Rapids, and I spent the weekend with Dirk. He talked about how when he first started this community center, which brings an incredible example of radio, public access TV, Internet. It's based in the public library—broadcasting the city council hearings, the grassroots activists programs, young people making their own media, older people documenting their own communities on TV, on radio, on Internet—a remarkable treasure that everyone in Grand Rapids now celebrates. Not always, by the way—he had to fight for this a quarter century ago. “City council, you've got to be kidding, you're not broadcasting our city council hearings.” And he had to make his way, step by step. And finally, they established the channels. And now, Dirk said—it's hard to say “said” instead of says—he walks down the street and the city councilman says, hey, why wasn't I on TV this week? And what it means is first they're afraid, but the transparency has transformed this community. And people who walk down the street, the city council members, are suddenly getting noticed. And people are saying, wait, on that bill I'd like to tell you about what I think about that. And they're becoming local heroes and they're not used to it, and they see the upside of transparency, of people getting involved. And now everyone fights for those channels. And they won't lose them because there is a constituency across the political spectrum. And it is happening all over this country, but we have to make sure that the programs are there, and the people in the communities know what it means to make their own media, that they have the tools, the facilities. And once you start doing your own programs, it makes you immediately a media analyst. You understand how the images are constructed and you can deconstruct what you see on television, and you can challenge them. An educated population is what shores up a democracy.

It is so important that media be a component of everything we do. And we can't talk about media policy without having the shining examples on the grounds of community media that works. Because then people have something to fight for. Years ago, I was on a corporate network show, *The Sally Jesse Raphael Show*. I'm not using this as the model for community media, but you all know what it was, right? It's not on the air anymore. But remarkably enough I was on WBAI at the height of the bombing in the first Gulf War. And I was railing against the bombing of the cradle of civilization back to the cradle, and we got a call from a producer from *The Sally Jesse Raphael Show*. And she called up to say they were doing a show in two days on the war and they'd like me to come on. They were going to have three women for and against the war. I was a little bit shocked that they had called. She said that she was listening in her limousine—I think the chauffeur had turned on the program. And I said I would come on. I thought about what to wear. This was a big moment. It's television and it's reaching millions of people—mainly women, and I thought about dressing as a man disguised as a woman, masquerading as a man pretending to be a woman, because I wanted to fit in.

But anyway, I figured out what to do, and I went down to the show two days later, and they had this program—six women for and against the war. The other five for and against, by the way, were all military. And we went on the stage. They had divided us up before, so we wouldn't meet, so they said we'd duke it out on the stage. And Sally came, and the show went on. It was being recorded. It would be aired two days later. And she handed the microphone to a woman in the audience who said, I'm concerned about Saddam Hussein's biological and chemical weapons. To which the woman next to me, Dr. Yolanda Hewitt-Vaughn, who was an army

captain trained as a doctor, said, she was refusing to go to the Gulf, said she was trained to save lives not take them, said I share your concern, but I'm also concerned about biological and chemical weapons right here at home in the United States. And before she could get out the word States, Sally whirled around, she came barreling down the aisle, and she started to shout, “You be quiet! This is my show. You shut up or get out.” And she was coming down at such a velocity. And there is Dr. Yolanda Hewitt-Vaughn sitting next to me, wearing this long black dress, hands clasped, very soft-spoken. She looked almost Amish. And I thought about this producer saying, we want you to duke it out on stage. This whole Jerry Springer thing. I thought Sally was going to strike Dr. Yolanda Hewitt-Vaughn. She is coming up on the stage. I said, whoa, Sally, back off. And they told us to invite friends. I brought people from WBAI. They were in the audience and they started chanting, “Free speech, free speech, free speech!” You can dress them up, but you can't take them anywhere. Anyway, Sally stopped the broadcast of the program. And her producers came out and they rocked her backed and forth, and they encouraged her to continue. And somehow she did.

She started the re-taping, but she said we would have to raise our hands if we had anything to say. I hadn't seen that before, but on *Sesame Street*, but we agreed. And we continued. And it was a very important show. We were really battling out the important issues of the day, people who disagreed having a true debate. And she showed videotape from the protesters in Washington, who you hardly ever see in the media. And if you see it, as I said, I congratulated her, you don't see these people brought into the network studios to discuss why they feel the way they do in a civilized one-on-one discussion like you see and hear on public radio, community television, to have these discussions. And I congratulated her for having the debate and going beyond the protests. And she said, who are these people? I didn't know everyone's name, but I said they're people who take to the streets because they believe that peace is patriotic. And they can only hope that on a global warming day a CBS executive might open his window and their chant of “no war” will waft in and hit an open microphone. But anyway, we had a really good discussion. I said that as the granddaughter of an Orthodox rabbi I was horrified to see little Israeli children wearing gas masks. But I was more horrified to see little Palestinian children not wearing gas masks. And that's the kind of conversation we had in the hour.

At the end the cameraman gave the thumbs up and we were headed out. I went to BAI. The show was going to air in two days. Two days came and went and the show didn't air. I called up, what happened. They said there was a problem, a technical problem, that some of the stations had called, said the videotape was unusable. I called those stations. They said no, it was pulled from New York. So I called back. I said the jig is up, when is that show going to air? And they said it wouldn't, but they would invite us back some day. I said you know that can't happen because Dr. Yolanda Hewitt-Vaughn is going to jail. She was court marshaled for her refusal to serve. She served under the death row in the brig, sentenced to three years. Actually got out after 8 months because of Amnesty International's clearing her as a prisoner of conscience. I recently met her son at a book signing in St. Louis as we celebrated community radio and television there, KDHX and DHTV. And I was signing and this young man came up and I said who do I write it to? And he said Emilano Hewitt-Vaughn. This was Yolanda's oldest son. He was eight when she was arrested. He was starting an Amnesty chapter in his high



school. He thought maybe he could free someone else’s mother like his mother had been freed. As Margaret Mead once said, never doubt for a moment that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed it’s the only thing that ever has.

So I said, you know it’s never going to happen. I said I want to speak to the executive producer now. And they said he’s a very busy man. And so as people kept calling in, where’s the show, I said, don’t call us, call *The Sally Jesse Raphael Show*. I, and understand they got hundreds, I believe thousands, of calls, thanks to community media all over the country. And then I got a very frantic call from a high level producer two days later, who said, the executive producer would like to speak to you now. And I said I’m a very busy woman. And they asked if I would cry censorship if they edited the program. And I said, of course not, you have every right, it’s your show. I assume you’ll edit out Sally’s fit. And they did. But the show ran the next day. And it ran with headlines around the country because they’d held onto it, that said, “Things Get Messy with Sally Jesse.” And the most interesting response that I got was from women on southern military bases, who called up to say we have never heard this view on television before, and we agree with you. Here were women who were being sent to war, or whose loved ones were, to kill or be killed. I don’t know which is worse. And they were saying they can’t have these debates on military bases. They rely on us in civilian society to have the most important discussions, these discussions about life and death, and war and peace.

I see the media as a huge kitchen table that stretches across this country that we all sit around and debate and discuss these issues. And anything less than that is a disservice to the servicemen and women of this country, is a disservice to a democratic society. Democracy now!

**(Applause)**

**Helen Brunner:** Thank you, Amy. And thank you for your work. We all depend on it. I really want to thank all of you for being here, for your interest, the Ford Foundation for convening this, the Grantmakers for Film and Electronic Media for helping support this effort, and all of the affinity groups that brought their members here and are beginning to see how critically important it is to all the interests that we care about in our communities.

This panel is really about stories. And through the stories about their work, these panelists will begin to give substance to a few key themes, which you’re going to hear throughout the day. One is that grassroots organizing for media justice and media reform does exist in many communities. It’s a growing and multifaceted movement that is diverse, widespread, and has an effect on local and national policy decisions, and as you’ve heard to eloquently from our two speakers this morning, policy decisions that have far-reaching and long-term consequences for the health of our society and democracy. Even if they’re extraordinarily under-resourced—plug—the grassroots groups are successfully building the base of the movement and the capacity of their organizations and the national policy organizations through relationships with each other—grassroots group to grassroots group—and through deepening relationships with the national policy organizations. And finally grassroots organizing is critical to changing the media landscape as we know it today and to protecting space and access for a

diversity of voices and public discourse in the future. This plethora of independent voices has to have space that’s protected. We have to preserve that so that the voices of Amy Goodman and others in her coordinated network and other voices all throughout the land can be heard.

The stories that you’re about to hear are about on the ground organizing. What does organizing look like in a field that’s ripe with arcane technical language, legislative legalese, and regulatory language that’s obtuse and hard to understand? How do people become engaged and empowered when faced with an omnipresent consolidated media, where they do not see themselves and they do not see their values reflected? How do you speak truth to power when power controls the microphone? Where are the points of entry to the alphabet soup agencies, congressional committees, and courts that may offer some remedy to this dire situation? How do these doors open? Who gets let in? Who gets to speak and who gets heard? How are differences negotiated and barriers based on race, economic status, gender, age, sexuality swept away? How do we get to our vision of a society where a diversity of voices and opinions are embraced and celebrated rather than resisted and hated?

The creation of a media environment that serves the public begins with that public, with people in communities, with faces and opinions that are often invisible. It is their vision, their voices that inform advocates at the national level who are also fighting for a just media environment. The speakers on this panel work day to day to build relationships in their communities, and to amplify those voices in the confusing and complex and noisy arenas, in which policy is made. It’s the vision and the voices of people, these people, as we heard from Commissioner Copps this morning, and from many others that work at this level, that give the standing and the power to actually create change.

You’re about to be rewarded for having trudged through the slushy snow by these inspiring stories. And we’ll begin with Inja. Inja Coates is the co-founder and executive director of Media Tank, which is located in Philadelphia. She was also co-founder of the Independent Media Center of Philadelphia, which was set up in response to provide independent coverage of the 2000 Republican convention. She helped establish the Philadelphia Community Access Coalition, which is a coalition of more than 80 groups working to get public access TV in Philadelphia. In her past lives before becoming a media activist, she was video producer, video artist, urban gardener, and community activist. And her current work is really an outgrowth of her abiding passion and interest in the intersection between art and social change. So Inja.

**Inja Coates:** Thank you, Helen. Thank you all for coming, and thank you Becky and GFEM for having us. I have a lot of stuff to say and not a lot of time to say it, so I’m going to lay it out in fairly abbreviated bullet-point fashion, and if—I’m going to try not to—and if I slip into any jargon or anything, feel free to flag me and ask for clarification of what I’m talking about.

So I just want to—this is a funders’ event—and just point out that fact—newness of this work. I know there has been advocacy work going on in the D.C. area around media policy issues for decades. But as far as like a popular movement, this is just a few years old in a lot of ways, at least in the most recent configuration. And it hasn’t been recognized as a field or a movement

until fairly recently, I should say. And certainly as a nonprofit organization that is looking for grant funding, we don't fit into the traditional categories: children and families; arts and culture; environment; healthcare. There hasn't been this recognition around media policy, so it's very exciting. That's why today is so great. And there have been moves to address that, and especially given the media's central role in all of those other issue areas. Public debate and our ability to really have social change on those issues are affected by the media system that we have today.

A couple other points just about this moment that we're in, and the underlying premises that we bring to this work: the need to build the base of this movement and really popularize it, and that involves building awareness at the most basic level that we're surrounded by media constantly, but there isn't an analysis of it as a system around us. It's sort of getting the fish to recognize the water that it swims in, and then a need for mechanisms to channel the engagement and awareness into real action and real change.

So I'm going to talk about a couple of different projects. I want to go back and give a little background to a lot of the stuff we saw around the FCC ownership, because there was quite a bit of grassroots mobilizing that was going on before that, and particularly in the wake of 9/11, when FCC Commissioner Powell first started making noises that he was going to open up the media ownership review, and then really in the beginning of 2002 where there were just pretty significant rollbacks of public interest provisions happening. And activists had been coming together and talking and there was a real recognition that something had to be done. The public hadn't been engaged too much. I mean we're talking about stuff like Fox going to court over cross-ownership stuff, cable-modem stuff, really arcane things. But the people that were following this knew that this was a really important time to have to engage the public.

And I guess fortunately or not, Powell has this foot-in-mouth problem, and so he was saying things like, the angel of the public interest hasn't enlightened me to what the public interest is. And that really set us up really perfectly for this press conference and rally that we had in front of the FCC in March of 2002—the Angels of the Public Interest—which you saw in the video and actually a lot of folks who you see in this room were involved in organizing and being there to help remind Michael Powell what the public interest was about. And that action was really great because it generated a lot of media attention. It even made the cover of *The Wall Street Journal*. It captured people's imagination around this idea of public interest and sparked a lot of new organizing and relationships that led up to some of this other stuff.

Because of that work, later that same year when they announced the media ownership review in September, we were really in a good position to mobilize our grassroots networks. And the timing worked out really great because we had the opportunity to come together and plan strategically really early in the process. In fact, it was just two days after the official proceeding was announced in Seattle at the “Reclaim the Media” conference, where activists from all over the country were able to come together and really talk about this opportunity. And at that point we thought it was a real long shot that we were going to win on a policy level, but we saw it as a real movement-building opportunity to really engage the public and educate people like mad.

And originally it was a 60-day window. Allies in D.C. worked to get that expanded to 90 days, which wasn't a lot. So we're talking about September through the holidays essentially. And I really want to emphasize that at the grassroots, we were working frantically through October, November, and December of 2002. People often refer to this as the media-ownership fight of 2003, but lots was going on in 2002. We were going out and doing community workshops. We were talking on community radio shows. Doing everything we could to get the word out. Right before Thanksgiving, I sent a note to Commissioner Copps's office asking him to come and be part of our regular speaker series that we have. And then I guess a few weeks later I got a call back from his office, and then we had a conversation about what was needed, that there was a real interest in going out and talking in communities. And we were able to get that information out to all the other grassroots groups that ended up then hosting forums in their towns. We also came together and developed an online comment filing system that was a one-stop shop and a very greatly simplified from the FCC system at that time. And that was really instrumental in helping force open the process and extending it to the June 3<sup>rd</sup> vote because they had an unprecedented response from the public even by the first filing window deadline, which was actually January 2<sup>nd</sup>. And the vote didn't happen until June.

Another thing that happened in that time was that we worked within our own networks to make connections with anti-war and social justice activists. And I know for me, I felt it was turning point when they were coming to and saying we want you to help us protest the media and not the other way around. You know they were really getting the connection between the movements and the media system and the threat of more consolidation was terrifying to them.

So I also want to say that a tremendous amount of this work happened really on little to no money. We developed this software that was up on half a dozen Web sites for free. Media Tank's annual budget the first year when we did the angels thing was \$18,000; the second year was like \$24,000. And we're just now at the point where we have paid staff, which is great.

All of this work has been—there've been various conferences and opportunities like this where we've come together and it has forged these relationships that have led to more ongoing organizing. Another project I just want to mention briefly is this Grassroots Cable campaign that Media Tank's involved with along with folks in San Francisco, Seattle, and Chicago. It's been really built out of the efforts that have come before and the different convenings. And I feel really excited about this campaign because to me it represents a new organizing model, where networked local efforts have the potential of having national impact, and it's really driven from grassroots local organizing. And you saw very briefly a clip from a press conference that we had with the local coalition we're working with in Philadelphia. It really is groups that embrace consumer issues, labor issues, access issues, and civic responsibility. We came together to develop a code of conduct that we issued to Comcast, which is right in our hometown. And I think the groups are really galvanized around this idea of holding corporate power accountable because we've seen what the fact of that monopoly concentration is there. And it's an opportunity that we've had to develop new organizing tools, both high tech and low tech. One of the most popular things that we have is little Monopoly money that we hand out at different things that give little facts about Comcast and stuff. And one last thing about it is that it also

represents a real reframing of the issues. Because cable especially is—it’s a pay-TV service essentially and now broadband—and as that technology evolves, it’s shifting and playing a different role in our lives. And it’s not really—I think it’s really important not to see it as a luxury entertainment item. That it is really becoming a core communications tool. And for us this campaign also evolved out of the World Summit on Information Society and these global conversations around communication rights. And so, as you saw with Joy Butts from KWRU, that’s what we’re ultimately talking about is the right to access to tools of communication, and framing this campaign as that and winning rights

Through these efforts we’re evolving new organizing strategies and forging new alliances. And just closing these efforts, the things I talked about are really emphasizing grassroots organizing, which is why we’re here, but also we’re working and there’s a big need for innovative popular education work. And that’s it for me.

**Helen Brunner:** (announcement about saving time for questions...) Our next speaker will be Jonathan Lawson. Jonathan is co-founder and director of Reclaim the Media, a Seattle-based organization that we’ve seen and heard about already this morning. It’s an organization committed to promoting community media, media literacy, and media policy reform. During the last two years, Reclaim the Media has played a catalytic role in the growth of the national movement focused on democratizing media policy. Jonathan also directs organizing communications for the Washington Federation of State Employees/AFSCME. He’s a four-year veteran of the independent media center movement and co-hosts the weekly creative music program, “Floation Device,” at KBCS. Jonathan.

**Jonathan Lawson:** Thank you, Helen. And thanks also to Becky Lentz, David Haas, Lynn Stern, and the other funders and advocates who have made it possible to be with you here today and to hear from such a wonderful range of voices of allies and activists who are working together.

I want to introduce my comments by saying just a couple of words about Reclaim the Media and talk about a few case studies that represent our work in coalition building and our work on the issues of ownership, cable franchise reform, and radio—three of the numerous areas that we’ve linked together through our work, both individually as an organization and in coalition with like-minded groups like Media Tank and some others you will hear from today.

We started work on media policy issues, media literacy education, and supporting independent community media resources in 2002, coming from a place of envisioning an authentic, just democracy, characterized by media systems that inform and empower citizens, reflect our diverse cultures, and secure communications rights for all, to quote our vision statement. Our first event was the Reclaim the Media founding conference, which we saw some street protest shots in Joan’s excellent video. That happened in September 2002 in what turned out to be an important pivotal moment for the development of a national network of like-minded groups approaching these issues together. The occasion was the National Association of Broadcasters biennial radio convention, which was happening in Seattle, taking inspiration from the previous

such conference that took place in San Francisco and was the occasion for a kind of a shadow conference that was organized by a group of folks in San Francisco on the subject of low-power FM and advocacy around that issue. We thought this is an opportunity to talk about a greater range of issues, particularly the threat which was becoming apparent that there was going to be a major attempt coming from the leadership of the Federal Communications Commission to remove the limits on ownership in mainstream media, or in all media. And we wanted not only to figure out a way to galvanize opposition to that move, but also to use the huge brain trust of grassroots and local activists working on these issues to see if we could develop positive responses. We didn't know how to do that, but we thought that if we brought a lot of the folks together from around the country working on these issues that that would be an appropriate way to proceed.

So we sort of beat the pavement and looked around to ask the question: Who are the people working on these issues? Little bits of funding from the Ford Foundation and the [inaudible] Foundation enabled us, as we were organizing what became a mammoth five-day conference, it enabled us to bring people like Inja and many of the other creative activists around the country to Seattle. And what turned out to be, as Inja kind of alluded to, a very significant moment in the conference was a strategy session where we were all were able to get together, put our heads together around the fact that just two days earlier the FCC had announced the actual proceeding to review the ownership rules, which we understood to possibly remove the ownership rules. And just by being together in the same place and finding our strength in collective organizing we were able to begin to sketch out the contours of what became a campaign that extended through the fall around community education on the issue of media-ownership consolidation, building collective strategies through networking remotely, and finally, sending comments and getting people to send comments to the FCC. We also networked with our national allies in D.C. who were working on extending the time limit in which these kinds of things could happen. And also national level organizations began to take note of this local organizing that was happening around the country. The success of that was that organizing effort emerged out of getting folks together and that was a powerful lesson for us.

I'm going to fast forward now to spring of 2003 when Seattle became the venue for one of the unofficial FCC field hearings on ownership reform, which Commissioners Copps and Adelstein planned. We found out about the hearing several weeks before it was going to happen and had a few weeks to try to organize around it. It was hosted by Sharon Nelson, who is the National Board Chair of the Consumers Union, but was also at the time, was employed at the University of Washington. And it was universities sort of hosting a lot of these hearings. The plan of her office was to have a hearing in a large classroom—you know, a few people would come and listen, and maybe provide some comments. A lot of the hearings were envisioned as that, as sort of small appeal things where people who were interested in policy issues would come together and talk about them. But based on our experience of designing this campaign with other activists around the country through the fall of '02, we thought—we were optimistic—that we could make a bigger difference, that we could use this opportunity to amplify the issues and get a lot more bang for the buck, if you want.

So we kind of nagged the official organizers of the hearing, saying this has to be a much larger thing. And we worked with them to get the hearing moved to a larger venue. We adopted a kind of three-part strategy around that. We promoted the hearing as a whole as a much larger thing than had originally been envisioned, that everyone had to come and talk to the FCC—a once in a lifetime experience. We also attempted to elevate the issue in terms of our local media coverage by drafting resolutions in favor of media-ownership diversity, which we got a local labor council to endorse, and then succeeded in getting our local city council to endorse this, which is sort of the way it slipped into media coverage and was covered that way. Thirdly, we also, with a little bit of foundation support from the Philadelphia Foundation and others, including several labor unions, organized a big rock and roll show. Because nothing brings out people like a rock and roll show. So we had Chuck D from Public Enemy who headlined a show, but also featured speakers, including one of our progressive congressmen in Washington state, Jenny Toomey from the Future of Music Coalition, Davey D, and not insignificantly, Commissioner Adelstein.

The result of all this, which also involved deep collaboration with student activists, community activists, and local musicians, who we had helped galvanize around these issues on their own terms over the past several months. And we didn't know what was going to happen. We didn't know if we would get 20 people or several hundred people. We ended up getting 800 people to appear at this hearing, which was far beyond anybody's expectations, including the FCC. And Commissioners Adelstein and Copps very graciously stayed riveted to their seats for an entire day's worth of panels and official this-and-that. And then they stayed there for three extra hours baking under the sunlight in their coats and ties, listening to what ordinary people had to say, listening to people talk about their own stories of local media and its importance, and why these arcane-seeming policy issues actually were really very important issues to their lives. Enough said. And they were thanking the commissioner for coming and talking to them and hearing what they had to say because it had never happened to them before that this had taken place. During our evening shebang with the rock and roll show, we also set up computer terminals using the software from Media Tank to enable people to write comments on the spot to the FCC. And hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people took advantage of that opportunity that very night. And Commissioner Adelstein left that hearing, and that weekend really transformed and that was a moment where he began to feel free to speak, and feel empowered like we had his back. So he became more of a public advocate for the positions that he and Commissioner Copps have so ably advocated for.

I want to fast forward again now to talk very briefly about some of our work about local cable franchises, which mostly came about in the fall of 2003 and 2004, where by this time the issue of media ownership had captured the progressive movement's public attention. Congress had gotten very interested in the issue as well, and the kind of public face of this branch of organizing had become more established. We're looking at other policy concerns of ours, public accountability and our cable franchises, for example, and asking ourselves how can we use the collective zeitgeist of this kind of work. How can we make use of the momentum that we're building and apply it to other areas that need our concern, trying to be strategic about how we can use the resources that we've developed together, which are so rare and so hard won, and direct them at places where we can actually make a difference?

And our local franchises—another issue for us is the amount of funding available for public access, educational and governmental programming, issues that were very local issues because these things are determined by local franchises, but which are also similarly local issues in Philadelphia and in San Francisco, in Chicago, and other places. We established local networks educating local constituencies who cared about public access or cared about the idea of access, and also developed stronger networks with our national allies like Media Tank in Philadelphia, Media Democracy in Chicago, and Media Alliance in San Francisco, and began collaborating, working together to combine our strengths and take projects that could never be managed by a single organization dependent on unemployed volunteer activists, very small amounts of money, and not a whole lot of time, and spread out work so we could do a piece over here. Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco could all do things that we could do on our own resources, but do them in such a way that they’re combined. Strategizing is one example of that, which is not tangible, but very important for our collaborative work. But we also generated collaboratively a resource called the *Reporter’s Guide to Broadband and Cable Internet*, which is available on the Reclaim the Media Web site, and which was produced collaboratively by these four groups.

Outcomes of these cable campaigns—the primary outcome, I think for us, is the collaborative work. These are struggles that take a very long time and the measurable markers of success, like getting a—winning a policy battle at a local level—are very hard won. And really we’re looking at a 5- to 10-year time line instead of a one- or two-year thing. So just generating these networks and establishing them is an important goal unto itself and we’ve begun to attain it.

Lastly, I want to mention a forum that we did last year called the Fixing Radio Forum where again as a—inspired by the public optimism and engagement around the FCC hearings that we had in Seattle and elsewhere, we wanted to magnify that empowerment but do an event that was less reactive to an opportunity and more coming out of what people’s actual interests were about radio, which are not necessarily policy focused [inaudible], but in fact come from what they care about the radio they listen to. What do they value about radio? What do they wish there was more of and is missing? And this—once again we leveraged our—the local networks we had created with communities of interest, including local musicians—a very active community in Seattle, communities of color who have a specific interest in radio which are not usually served by mainstream, and labor unions who represent, or in many cases do not represent, employees in the radio industry, and devised what we sort of thought of as a people’s hearing that was modeled in some ways after the FCC official hearings where you had panels of people discussing important issues about localism and about diversity in media, but taking our cues from what was important to us as a community. This galvanized our separate communities and our connections around these issues, but the most important outcome, the most tangible thing out of that, came a day after our public conference, where all the principles got together in a room and said, okay we talked about this yesterday, we heard a lot of community voices, how can we turn this into something that can make a difference in policy? And we composed over the course of a few months—just the people who worked in that forum together—a Seattle Statement on Radio, which I thought to bring to the podium with me—there are copies of this outside at the table as well—which is a bullet-point listing of the policy areas and specific recommendations that we



came up with, ranging from very simple practical things about supporting low-power FM, to more radical things like calling for the breakup of the largest media conglomerates in a Bell-style breakup of Clear Channel, Intercom, not thinking about what’s politically possible, but thinking about what’s pragmatically necessary. This document was entered into the official FCC record, and most importantly for us, we were able to use the document as a tool for lobbying our elected officials, most particularly, Senator Cantwell, who, through several meetings organized around this document, presenting it to her, moved from being a kind of, I’m-a-friend-of-yours advocate of these kinds of issues to being a very key powerful advocate on the Senate Commerce Committee, and who just a couple of weeks ago was one of the co-sponsors of a new bill favoring low-power FM, as well as other similar bills that she’s done. And this is something that came out of a piece of planning that happened among local organizations and went directly up to knocking on the doors of power in Washington, D.C.

In conclusion, to wrap up what are some of the things we learned from these distinct projects. First of all that local communities have the expertise about these issues. People understand even if they don’t identify where the sources of power are, or where to take their complaints, they have complaints, and they’re articulate. And given the chance to format those together through local organizing, local expertise can be coordinated to be unleashed in a productive angle. Community relationships among pre-existing organizations that are not concerned with media activism as their primary focus can be mobilized together to provide rapid responses to opportunities and crises. We’ve also had a real powerful shot in the arm in the last couple of years for what might have been considered naive optimism. Optimism about what we can actually accomplish from the local level has led to successes time and time again both in hard outcomes in policy, but also in organizing the capacity to do wondrous deeds in the future, which we’re all very firmly believing in this movement now. The successes that we have are often episodic, as in cable franchise issues, the FCC hearing, things that galvanize around a particular issue at a particular moment. What it will take to be really effective and to make these episodic successes sustainable is to have focus resources on planning these particular events, but then also to be able to sustain the work to continue to have these coalitions of action sticking together and having a sustained response in community education, community mobilization, and that’s where all of us come in in supporting this movement in various ways, and why I’m particularly grateful to have the opportunity to speak with you today. Thank you.

**Helen Brunner:** Thank you, Jonathan, very much for that. Pete Tridish, our third speaker, was a member of the founding collective Radio Mutiny 91.3 FM in Philadelphia. He is also a founder of the Prometheus Radio Project. In 1997, he was an organizer for Radio Mutiny’s demonstrations at Benjamin Franklin’s printing press and at the Liberty Bell, where on both occasions the station broadcast in open defiance of the FCC’s unfair rules that prohibit low-power community broadcasting. He has also worked on the first to micro-radio conferences on the East Coast and organized radio barn raisings in five communities around the United States. He’s actively participated in the rule making that led up to the adoption of the LPFM and helped build a number of low-power radio stations, provided advice to hundreds, including radio trainings in Guatemala, Colombia, Nepal, and other countries. He’s spoken and written about

these issues in a wide variety of venues along a spectrum from pirate radio stations to the Kato Institute, to the *New York Times*.

**Pete Tridish:** Thanks. I come from a community of activists. Most of us have been activists since we were 15 or 16. We’ve fought in every movement from—my very first was against nuclear weapons in the early eighties, going through the movement against Apartheid, housing, homelessness, environmentalism. But what we kept on finding in every movement that we fought for was that we knew how to raise the issue, but we could never quite get to the point where we would win. And it was because we could go out there without sign, and we could chain ourselves to something, and we could get people talking about the issue, but always our opponents would end up on the *Lehrer News Hour* for 15 minutes getting to explain why we’re wrong and they’re right. And there was a group of us in 1996—we didn’t know anything about communications policy, but somehow we found out that there was a law in this country that said that Clear Channel could own up to eight radio stations in Philadelphia. They could own 1,200 stations across the country. And we could own zero. We sort of said, well, that’s a stupid law. And if ever there was one that seemed worth breaking, that was it.

And so we decided we were going to learn about radio. None of us had ever been on the radio. None of us knew anything about radio. We bought one of these transmitters. We put it together, it blew up a couple of times on us. But then one day it started working. And we started broadcasting to our neighborhood. And within about three or four months we had 80 programmers on the air, and we had a community radio station where there really was none before. And it was a real transformative experience for me because I saw just how much talent there is in every community, how many people from all different walks of life will come together, and actually taking a lot of risks to themselves, want to communicate even if it is only about the music of lower Serbia that doesn’t make it onto the airwaves, or maybe things much more vital. We had shows like Incarceration Nation, which was someone who had just gotten out of the prison-industrial complex. He’s been in jail two years, and he’s made it his life’s work to communicate to people about what is going on in the prison system, how this is changing America.

So, eventually the station was busted. They kicked in the doors. They took it away. But something really strange happened, which was at that time, the newspapers and the television stations and the broadcasting stations could not own each other. And so the FCC went in to bust us thinking they would look like the policemen of the air, protecting the population from bad radio signals. But actually a lot of the newspaper articles that came out were actually very favorable. They thought that we were interesting, we were doing something very different. And of course, the TV and the radio never touched us, but the newspapers and the magazines started reporting the story. And what we saw after many months of this—we got in the habit of going around the country and building transmitters in places and just trying to create a law enforcement nightmare for the FCC—and eventually there was a change of heart by the FCC. And they really started to realize that there was no way that you could apply for a neighborhood radio license—there hadn’t been for about 20 years—and this was something that really had to change. So in June of 1998, they finally did come down and kick our door in and take the transmitter out.

But the same week, the commissioners at the FCC—and we’ve got one of them here with us, Gloria Tristani—announced that they were going to make it their business to make sure that there was a legal way to do the thing that we had done. And that it shouldn’t be that people have to break the law in order to express themselves over the airwaves.

We started Prometheus Radio Project after that. We spent several years learning everything we could about receiver selectivity and doing engineering studies and technical studies. And it culminated in 2000 with the passage of the Low Power Radio Service in January of 2000, which would have allowed thousands and thousands of new community radio stations to go on the air across the country. In almost every major city and almost every community there were at least a few new radio stations that could be given out. So we were used to traveling. We got on the road again. We started going around and telling people how to apply for these stations. And I never thought I would spend half my time teaching people how to fill out forms, but that’s what we started doing.

Unfortunately, the broadcasters struck back. And they went to Congress, told Congress that all the engineers at the FCC, the most expert people in the country that knew how to manage the broadcast band, did not know what they were doing, and that our 100-watt lightbulb radio stations were going to cause oceans of interference to the incumbent broadcasters with their 50,000-watt transmitters. We actually didn’t worry about it too much. It just sounded too ridiculous; we didn’t think it would go far. But that was where we were wrong. And it didn’t matter whether it made sense, it only mattered whether it was enough of a fig leaf to hide the pro-corporate policies of the FCC, of all these Congress people. And what ended up happening was, there was an appropriations rider slipped into a last-minute budget negotiation in the fall of 2000, which took away two-thirds of the possible channels. Under the original FCC plan there would have been about 25 new stations in the top 10 urban markets in the United States. Under the Congress rules, there was only one station given out in the top 50 urban markets. And that is why probably most of the people in this room have never heard a low-power radio station because we build them all in places like Opelousas, Louisiana; in Spokane, Washington; in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. And we are basically kept out of any of the major markets.

And what could we do at that point? We started just to build the stations that we could in the places that we could. And the way that we like to build radio stations is what we call a Radio Barn Raising, which is where we gather about 150 to 200 volunteers from all around. We have a weekend conference, which has about 30 or 40 workshops about how to cut a news story, how to talk into a microphone right, how to manage your station. But it goes beyond the conference because what we also do at the same time is we build the whole radio station over the course of three days. And you know, it’s just sitting there in a bunch of boxes and we get everybody to help. We get all these engineers and nerds and geeks from all over the country come together, and actually talk to each other instead of fiddling with equipment, and share skills, and really try to demystify the technology. Because our principle is that technology is not something that should be administered by an elite group of technocrats. It’s something that has to be in the service of everybody. And it’s something that everybody can understand.

And a couple of the stations that we've built that have been so thrilling. We built the first radio station that was ever put on the air by an environmental organization in Maryland. We did the first radio station that was ever owned by a civil rights organization, which is the Southern Development Foundation in Opelousas, Louisiana. They do a lot of work on school reform, on local economic development. They also host the world's largest Zydeco music festival. And what's kind of amazing about Opelousas, Louisiana, people come all around the world, they come from Japan, they come from all over the planet to go to this Zydeco festival every year. If you turn on the radio dial in Opelousas, Louisiana, you can hear a lot of alternative country, you can hear a lot of classic rock, but the only Zydeco music comes from the low-power radio station. And it didn't exist, and it was the kind of music that risked disappearing, but it was something that the folks in Opelousas really understood as important.

Another station that we're just really, really thrilled about is the station of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, which is in Immokalee, Florida. They just recently won the Human Rights Award for their work against modern-day slavery in Florida in the fields. And we had one of these barn raisings there. We loved working with them because they work the same way that we do, always at the last minute, and they travel around the country. Very interesting parallels in our methods. And one thing that happened recently there was the radio station, a lot of the workers were being hired by this company called Balance that went around and helped clean up after the hurricanes, and the workers for weeks and weeks were not getting paid. And finally someone went up on the radio and said, hey, is anyone else not getting paid by Balance Company? Because we're getting kind of concerned here. And at first they just said, why don't you come down and register your—register with us, so we see how big this is. Within three hours, 300 of the workers were down at the offices of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers. Remember that the main way they organized before the radio station was that they would knock on doors. They would go from trailer home to trailer home and knock on the doors of each of these places. And within three hours, 300 of them were there. They went to the offices and the president of the company ended up flying down from South Carolina and dispersing \$57,000 that night to all the workers that hadn't been paid yet.

So, where they have been allowed they've been an incredible success. But we still were left with so many people who wanted to build these stations around the country, who have been denied as a result of the act of Congress. And that's where the ownership proceeding came in. We saw with Powell coming in—other people have talked about his agenda—basically, he wanted to make sure that media corporations could get much, much bigger, could buy anything they felt like—we saw that this was a movement that we had to support, that we couldn't just think about the low-power stations that we were accustomed to working with, that we had to mobilize this group to fight the ownership rules. And one reason that it was very important that we do that was because low-power radio is one of the relatively few things that have been won in communications through a citizens' movement at the FCC in recent years. And so it was our fool low-power radio operators who were just foolish enough to think that you write a comment to the FCC and then, well, maybe something changes. And so it was very early on. We collaborated with Inja and a few other groups to build these comment tools. And the first five or

10,000 comments on the media-ownership proceeding came from low-power radio operators and people that were part of these very, very small grassroots groups around the country.

It was then that people were able to go and start going to the National Organization of Women, and go to Common Cause, and go to all the partners that came through and starting shilling this issue to their lists to hundreds of thousands of people. But it was that first expression of interest, and that first determination from people that took the policy process seriously. They weren't so jaded to think that we thought we usually lost, not always lost. So that really sort of set the ball rolling. It culminated in the FCC's decision to just go ahead and allow massive mergers in the media, to allow these corporations to own—I won't go through the laundry list—but to own everything. And there were a number of us that were in the room that were possible plaintiffs for this lawsuit and really a lot of it's the luck of the draw that it ended up being Prometheus that ended up being the plaintiff. But what we all decided was that it really was time to sue the FCC, and it was time to get them to pay attention to the 2.2 million comments, and to look at what they were doing and look at how concerned so many people were about their very, very ill-informed decision.

September 2<sup>nd</sup> we were in the court in Philadelphia, the Third Circuit Court of Appeals. And the next day, I mean the newspaper chains were about to buy the TV chains, the TV chains were about to buy the radio chains, and there were billions of dollars ready to change hands. And we realized that tens of thousands of people were probably going to lose their jobs as they consolidated, as they merged, as they did what corporations do when they go together. And amazingly enough, the judges looked at that, they looked at the issues, they said, 2.2 million people commented on an FCC proceeding—okay, hold the phone, we've got to look back. I don't know who these three weirdoes in the basement office of West Philadelphia are that brought this lawsuit, but we have to look at it. We have to look at it. And as the record developed, as the suit got argued, the judges, at first one of the judges who didn't even want to take the case, he ended up asking the most probing and toughest questions when the FCC went up there. And we ended up with a decision that held back the media concentration of ownership about a year later.

This had a great effect on our organizing. At first we were very nervous and we weren't sure whether we should go through with this lawsuit. I mean, we'd gotten our little piece of the pie, we have a couple of these, about 500 or 600 of running stations around the country that are running on these low-power licenses. We didn't know what the FCC was going to do to us, or more importantly, what they were going to do to our constituency of people that run these tiny little radio stations because we were mucking with their favorite, most important policy agenda. And so we were nervous. And the FCC had been dribbling out construction permits. Michael Powell really never cared much about low-power radio. It was the law, and it was done before him, so he told the guys at the audio processing division, go ahead give out a couple of licenses a week. We'll do what we have to do, but this is not a priority for us.

An amazing thing happened like around August, 2000, right after the lawsuit went in. All of a sudden all these construction permits for low-power radio stations start flying out of the FCC

faster than we had ever seen it before. And we're getting all these calls. Where do I buy a transmitter? How should I set up my programming policy? I've got this paperwork I have to deal with. We realized that what they were trying to do was make sure we were too busy to sue them. And so it had a great effect for us in terms of our constituents were actually finally starting to get on the air. And I guess we had a great moment a few weeks ago when the FCC had its Low-Power Radio Day, marking five years of low-power radio stations being on the air. And Chairman Powell got up there and he started talking, he was like, I just love low-power radio. You could sort of see the thought bubble above his head: “Oh my gosh, three years ago people were calling me a potential presidential candidate. I didn't have to talk to any of these people, and gosh, who'd have thunk it.” So it was kind of a great moment for us to see him like say, I am going to personally supervise making sure that low-power radio moves forward. And before the end of my term in three weeks, we're going to really move some of these items that have needed to be fixed for a long time to help low-power grow.

So I think for the media reform movement the lesson for me is clear. It's that solidarity works, that not just working on your particular interest is very, very important, and sort of seeing the larger issues around you and working together as much as we possibly can to move these seemingly small, technocratic issues to the point where we can really win on them. Thanks.

**Helen Brunner:** Thanks, Pete. Our final speaker this morning before we go to questions is Malkia Cyril. Malkia is a writer, organizer and media strategist who has worked with racial and economic justice, youth, community, and activist groups in the San Francisco Bay Area for the past nine years. As director of the Youth Media Council and co-funder of the Media Justice Network, Malkia's goals are to build the strategic communications capacity of the progressive movement to move a racial economic justice agenda, and to build the power of youth and other marginalized communities to hold corporate media accountable for biased content and policy. As you will hear, she believes that communications is a human right, and should not be for sale, and has been a powerful advocate for that belief. Malkia was recently featured in the documentary *Outfoxed*, and is the primary author of numerous articles and studies, including *Speaking for Ourselves*, and *KMEL: The People's Station*. Thank you, Malkia.

**Malkia Cyril:** I'm so glad we get to stand up, because don't you just want to stand up for all the incredible work that's being done around media policy change. I want to stand up for that too, so thank you for that suggestion.

You know it's always hard to close. You know you feel you have to bring the house down or something, but I'm not doing that. But what I am going to do is hopefully talk a little bit about why issues of media policy, issues of media reform, broadly, media issues, are central to all people, but not central to all people the same way. And how important it is to understand the unique relationship that marginalized communities have to media, and therefore to media policy, so we can create a majority strategy that results in victories for all of us.

So I want to start off basically by telling you a little bit about myself because I know you're very interested in my personal life. I grew up in the 1980s, I was born in 1974. So eighties, nineties,

and even though I live in Oakland and work at the Youth Media Council, which is based in Oakland, I grew up here in Brooklyn. And I want to make a little heaviness on the New York accent real quick, so you really understand I’m from Brooklyn. I’m not from Oakland. But anyway, in Brooklyn, in New York, in the 1980s, I don’t know how many of you were here in the eighties, but you remember that media content was devastating, right? There was the quote-unquote crack epidemic, and the emergence of AIDS as a social crisis. And in coverage, right, broadly in policy, stuff was being contained or talked about as a “war on drugs,” and in terms of a “war on crime.” So I grew up amongst this rhetoric of war domestically. And in media content and media coverage, I saw images of the communities that I was from, being completely distorted, extremely unfair, lies—lies, trash, and garbage, as my mother would say—and it’s something that really shaped my understanding of the relationship that young people and people of color had to media, existing as both a threat and an opportunity, right. So we call it at the Youth Media Council a double bind, right. It’s a double-edged sword. It isn’t simply a point of critical engagement, it’s also a potentially devastating threat.

And so this question started to emerge for me about speaking for ourselves. What does that truly mean? What does it mean to engage an institution that is thoroughly, appears anyway, thoroughly dedicated to defaming you and people like you? And yet, whereas public engagement face-to-face with decision makers was becoming more and more narrow, and the only kind of places you could engage around policy issues was in the media. So how then, do you access your citizenship right to engage around policy, if you can neither face your decision makers, nor can you engage in the media? So it’s a problem. So this double bind, this unique relationship that marginalized communities have to the media, is why essentially media policy is a racial and economic justice issue. And while we talk about a majority strategy and strategies that result in victories for all people, what that means is that we have to see it as such, as a racial justice issue, as an economic justice issue. Not so that we can make it a wedge issue, because that’s what comes to my mind when people start talking about race and class, is all of a sudden that’s divisive, and that’s what I hear when I bring it up. People say, oh, we can’t really talk about that, media policy is an American issue. Well, Americans are not all treated equally as we all know. And not only that, but a free press is based upon the acknowledgement that that press was developed in a colonial environment. As the Bill of Rights was being written, as the Constitution was being written, it was existing within a colonial environment that it created inherently a structural relationship, a relationship between the media and marginalized communities that meant from day one it was a double bind. So I want to start this piece by saying that in fact the current trends, the current conditions of consolidation, unfair regulation—because we all know deregulation is a myth, right. It’s just not regulated in our interest, it’s just in the corporate interest and corporate control are new trends, but the structural problem is an old problem. And we have to remember that as we seek to make policy change, that media policy change is a bridge toward another world, it is not the end. So that’s where I’ll start.

And I’m going to talk very, very briefly about a campaign that we’re working on at the Youth Media Council called, Build the People’s Station campaign. And so everybody knows, so I’m going to get the details out of the way, in 1996 the Telecommunications Act, ownership caps

lifted, blah, blah, blah, blah. Clear Channel goes from owning a couple of radio stations to owning 1,200 plus. And one of those radio stations is in the Bay Area and it's called 106.1 KMEL. It's a hip-hop station. And I listen to hip-hop. I love hip-hop. I love music. But more than that thousands and thousands and thousands of young people like me listen to hip-hop, and thousands and thousands of young people not like me listen to hip-hop. So in fact if you're trying to organize around youth policy, you need to get with 106.1 KMEL because your base is listening to it, and not just your base that can't vote, but also your base of 18 to 25 year olds. So not just your under-18-year-old base, but in fact the largest group of people who listen to hip-hop stations are actually young adults.

So it became really important when I was doing youth organizing in the Bay Area that we started getting with 106.1 KMEL. And it was a good thing because 106.1 KMEL was a good radio station, a long time ago. And when I got involved in dealing with 106.1 KMEL it was sort of toward the beginning on their history with Clear Channel. Clear Channel had recently bought it, probably like five or six years before we engaged with it. And I wish I had brought this, but I forgot, but there was a front page article as a result of this campaign which I'll get to later which said, “How Clear Channel Destroyed KMEL.” And I want to talk about that article in a minute. But the point is that as a result of being purchased by Clear Channel, shows that used to be community affairs shows, that engaged the voices of progressive young people, and had real debates about real policy issues, they were gone.

In 2001, right after September 11, our friend and mentor Davey D. was fired from 106.1 KMEL. Now his show, Street Knowledge, was one of the shows that really enabled organizers to get on the air and really be in dialogue with their community. And the thing is that Davey D., Davey D. is our brother. He was an entry point. He was a doorway. It didn't even matter if we were friends. It wasn't about that. It was about the fact that he opened a door for hundreds and hundreds of people to get on the radio that normally wouldn't be able to get on the radio. So they not only fired him, they cancelled the show, and they ended and eliminated the position. I want to say that to you. They fired him, so there's the question of who's able to be in journalism and who isn't, who's able to be on radio. They ended the show, right. 'Cause they could have fired him and kept the show, but they ended the show. And they eliminated the position of community affairs director and replaced it with promotions director. So I just want you to really feel me that there was an agenda at work; there wasn't a personal beef. Because otherwise it would have ended with the firing, but it didn't.

So what we understood as a community was that we had to do something. So we started monitoring. We started paying attention to their drive-time shows. Really, what's going on at KMEL; there's a problem. And we noticed—we documented that they—we documented the issue of playlist, we documented the fact that they didn't play local artists. We documented the change after Davey D. was fired. And we documented that our, the organizations that we worked with—Youth Media Council's a membership-based organization and we have organizational members—that they couldn't get their PSAs on the air. But a group like the Boys and Girls Club, for example, that had no political persuasion, or maybe do, but anyway, they could get their thing on the air. So we were concerned so we started documenting and



monitoring and paying attention. And we engaged young people in that process. And we came up with a study—looks like this—very small. Young people worked this—it’s *KMEL: The People’s Station?* And we just asked it as a question. We’re not saying you’re not, but if you are, let’s investigate. You know that’s a big claim to say that you’re the people’s station, and that was their message.

So the end result of that was that we got a letter from Michael Martin after we wrote this. First we got a front-page article, the one I was just telling you about, “How Clear Channel Destroyed KMEL.” And then we got a letter from Michael Martin, who’s the director of programming. He’s the regional director of programming for Clear Channel. And the letter was addressed to me. And he said, Why are you talking to me about your problems? Why are you telling me about the poverty of your community? I have no interest in that. If you’re poor that’s your fault. And that’s a quote. You know because we had written about how the lack of engagement in certain political policy issues, and the lack of voices of young people, generated a set of conditions that resulted in poverty, incarceration. And that was his response, If you’re poor it’s your fault. It has nothing to do with me. So we sent that to a couple of newspapers and that generated a lot more coverage and that was great. And we also did delegation visits. We did actions. We did face-to-face actions. We did phone and fax actions. And it wasn’t even that much to be honest with you. We didn’t do that much. You know, we did a little something. And it didn’t take much. And that’s what I’m trying to share with you. It didn’t take much. It took a little shame. It took a little light. It took a little of the public paying attention. That’s all it took. And it’s secrecy that allows these kinds of deals, these kind of back deals, and these kinds of decisions to be made. So when we get rid of the secrecy a lot is able to happen.

And one of the real important points I want to make here is that this wasn’t a group of policy wonks, you know, angry about policy decisions. This was a group of teenagers and young adults, students, community college, folks that were in community colleges. This was welfare, folks on welfare, kids that had just recently been adjudicated. This was people that normally you would not find at a lot of the media-policy discussions. And they were standing there in front of KMEL talking, this is our radio station, what are you doing? And I think that it’s important to understand that marginalized constituencies are key stakeholders in media policy debates and media reform movement. And it’s not just about increasing the diversity of voices. That’s not the point, diversity for diversity sake. The point is that there are key stakeholders that matter. There are people whose leadership is necessary in order to win. A majority strategy is necessary in order to win.

What we did win, and you know Build the People’s Station campaign exists in multiple parts. That was the first part. So conducting content analyses and trying to win small victories at local outlets is the first step. The second step, and what we won in that step was for the first time ever 106.1 did a live on air broadcast of an accountability session against them. And I find that to be incredibly victorious. That was beautiful. I was very happy. You know, there was a lot of arguing. I loved it. We also—what that also influenced was a year before that we had done a similar accountability session with KTB Channel 2 in Oakland. And KTB Channel 2 actually wrote the letter to 106.1 KMEL to ask them to conduct this accountability session. So I

think that getting these outlets to, once you confront them and tell them, you ain't doing right, you messin' up right here. Then turning around and having them advocate on your behalf, that's a beautiful thing and that's very unusual. And not only advocating on your behalf, but think about it, advocating on behalf of constituencies they don't even rightly serve. So I think that's a beautiful thing.

So I'm going to close here by saying what lessons that we learned from this process. One is that content is a catalyst for change. Looking at and dealing with, assessing content, using content as the primary vehicle for engaging constituencies that would normally not engage in these kinds of policy fights. That's a catalyst for change. And one quick example, I don't know how many people here have heard about the song about the Tsunami that Hot 97 here in New York was playing. Anybody here heard about that? So, briefly there's a song that Hot 97, which is not owned by Clear Channel, it's owned by another similarly large company, and it was all about how it was a good thing that Tsunami killed so many people. That's what the song was about basically. And I won't get into the details of what it said because it was pretty graphically disgusting. But the fact that that aired. It was racist. It was racist particularly targeting the Asian community. The fact that that aired made people of color all over the city come out and protest, not only Hot 97's content, but also it began to make them ask the question, well why can't I hold them accountable? There's no law that says you can't do that. Well, there really isn't. There really isn't a law that says you can't do that. And the public interest standards at the FCC don't even really say that you can't do that. And that's something that we need to understand. When we think about media policy as a racial justice and economic justice issue we begin to have to re-examine the standards, right, and the laws that currently exist. We're not just trying to hold the FCC accountable to the laws that exist today, we're actually trying to change the laws so that we can actually have something real.

And that's why when we talk about media reform as a racial justice issue, we call it media justice. Because it's media policy reform in the service of a broader vision, in the service of a broader set of policy changes that we're looking for to make a difference in this world. We understood that it was not only alternatives. Alternatives are absolutely not only necessary, but that's the vision. That's what sets the groundwork for transformation. But in order to create a force—I don't know who studies physics around here, and I don't, so let me just say that real clearly. But I love the ideas behind it, and the idea is you need force to make a change. You need something to move you to make something happen. Accountability is the force behind alternatives. People stand up for alternatives when they have a way to hold what exists accountable. And so we have to combine those two strategies, accountability and alternatives, and that will produce change.

We also learned that localism isn't about just paying attention to what's going on here in the local community. Localism is about local accountability, right. It's not just about talking about local content. So we need to, we had to really think about in the campaign that we were running, and currently in the campaign that we're about to run to try to revoke Clear Channel's broadcast license. We know we're not going to revoke any licenses. That's not the point. The point is that we have to create a groundswell so that when the Telecommunications Act, when they attempt to

revise that, we have some kind of ground on which to stand. That’s the point. The ground is important. I guess if I could say nothing more. We need the umbrella organizations. We must have an umbrella to protect us from the rain. But I tell you, you can’t walk to shelter if you have no ground to stand on. That’s it.

**Helen Brunner:** That’s great. Thank you so much, Malkia, for those words to send us off into the next five or six years of battle. I didn’t protect enough time for questions as I should have, and I apologize. But we will have lunch together with these panelists, and we can continue questions then. But we do have though about 10 minutes. And if you could please use the microphone because, wonderfully, this is being so well documented and will appear on GFEM’s website. And we really want to capture people’s concerns, thoughts, confusions about this so that we can work to further educate the funding community. So please use the mic. Please identify yourself and your affiliation. And who’s up first?

**Comment:** Antwuan Wallace with the Funding Exchange, the Media Justice Foundation. First of all, I’m really happy to be here and kind of jealous that I’m not on the panel as a new funder. Thank you so much for highlighting some of the issues here today. And I just want to put a question out to the panel for the larger good of this conversation, which is engaging underserved communities. And certainly we’ve talked about youth and people of color, but when we started talking about Immokalee, we’re talking about limited English, persons with disabilities. I’d like to hear about your work in bringing together some of these groups so they can see the interest. So that the funding community can understand just how that organizing takes place and what it would take from our community to enable you to do that kind of work. If you could briefly talk about that—I’m sorry—in terms of building a broader constituency. If you could share some of work around Philadelphia.

**Inja Coates:** I think all of our organizations probably address that issue in different ways. I think for Media Tank, community education is one of our big areas. Our work is divided between local community education, media organizing, and then this third piece of national movement building, field building that we’re involved in. Our local programs—we do projects that are really intentional about reaching out to different audiences around different issues. For instance, when we did, I can’t even remember what year it was, 2003 I think, when we did this big project around copyright and intellectual property, we partnered with arts and cultural institutions, lawyers, all different kinds of folks. And knowing that those would be issues that would be particularly resonant to a lot of independent artists and musicians, and primarily content creators, academics. And we had a really diverse participation and it was spread out over a month. We also had one day where we specifically focused on those issues as they exist within the hip-hop community because we did want to specifically engage that audience. And so we really try to push ourselves to reframe issues in a way that they will be as broadly resonant as possible. Another example, we did this Youth Media Summit where we actually brought someone from Youth Media Council and some other places and really did outreach to the organizations in Philadelphia that are doing youth organizing work that have not been really active on media issues. Just as a beginning step in trying to build those relationships, we also were working with educators and people who are interested in media literacy work, and bringing

that all together in a different sort of a way. And then with the cable stuff, the whole cross sector of social justice, labor, media groups. And another thing that is a new aspect that we're working on, bringing into that, is senior citizens. And there's already a lot of interest amongst that community in getting involved to advocate for that piece, the cable platform that we're building. I could go on, but I think that gives you an idea of how you can reframe issues in a way and do this outreach work to build the constituency. And we do that very intentionally.

**Helen Brunner:** Other questions?

**Comment:** Meg Gage with the Proteus Fund. To what extent are the low-frequency stations in touch with each other, able and willing to communicate? They sound so diverse, and for example, coordinate possible activity around the Telecommunications Act review. What's the nature of that network?

**Pete Tridish:** The thing with low-power radio is, one thing about the FCC is that they are very careful about the regulation of content. So you can apply for a low-power radio station whether you are an anarchist, an Anabaptist, an aardvark veterinarians group, anything. So these stations come from really all over the map. And it's tough. It's tough to organize with them because it's not always—they don't exactly share their message, often.

We just got in a lot of trouble the other day because we're building a station in Tennessee with Free Radio Nashville. And they want to be a progressive voice, the first progressive voice in Nashville. Their slogan for their station is, Unbuckling the Bible Belt. Now, we thought that was really funny. But we work closely—we don't build Christian radio stations—but we work closely on passing this legislation with a number of Christian groups that are building small community radio stations. And they face a similar problem really, which is sort of the “Walmart-ization” of Christianity. You know you have these giant chains like Calvary Chapel going around scooping up all the broadcast frequencies and putting these small local churches out of business. They're super in favor of low-power radio. I don't think we could agree on almost anything else that we work on. So it's tricky work for us. Also, just in terms of why did I get into this? I didn't get into this to build small Christian community radio stations around the country. But working with allies that you didn't know that you had, and working in the places that you do have common interests to make changes in the policy process. That's the sort of work that we try to do.

So what we've tried to do in low-power radio is we've steered away from building a single organization of all the low-power radio stations. What we've done instead is we've encouraged the progressive ones to join Pacifica and to join the National Federation of Community Broadcasters—other stations that have at least some similar sense of humor. And the Christian ones to join those organizations, but then to bring them together when the policy stuff comes down that really affects both of us when we're trying to fight for laws to pass. 'Cause we need those Christian stations standing next to us when we go into those offices of Trent Lott and, who's the one who voted with us, Brownback. Brownback voted with us for low-power radio, which was incredible.

**Helen Brunner:** One more question and then I’m afraid we’re going to have to break for lunch. Deborah?

**Comment:** Thanks. Deborah Rappaport. And this is also sort of about the low-power radio, but somewhat broader. There’s sort of an analogous movement afoot on the Web to do sort of homegrown video broadcasting on the Web. There’s a group up in Wooster that I’m working with called the Participatory Culture Foundation that’s using a software called Bittorrent to do that sort of thing. I’m wondering if you have any relationship with the media-based or Internet-based analogues to what you’re doing in low-power radio.

**Pete Tridish:** To some extent. The question that I always got really early in this was, why don’t you all just go onto the Internet? Which is, I always said, if Clear Channel wants to trade me the 1,200 stations, the 1,200 radio stations for my Web site, ink the deal today. I think that it’s very important for the stations that we work with to also get onto the Web because that is going to be where broadcasting’s going to be in eight years. We continue working in this sort of ancestral technology because, well, that’s what people use now. And what the corporations are doing is they are using the old technologies, the billboards, to control the policies to make sure that they are the winners, when it comes to the control and the domination of the Internet, and whatever tomorrow’s communications technologies are going to be. So it’s very important for us to push our constituency. A lot of them aren’t Webcasting yet, but we’re going to make sure that they are. Because they—a lot of them—are working on—most of them don’t have people who can listen to them over the Internet yet. When you’re talking about the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, with people living eight to a trailer, Webcasting does very little for them. But they are starting to think about it and they’re starting to realize, well, you know, we’re going to do it.

**Deborah Rappaport:** I meant no disrespect to radio. It’s where I got my start, too.

**Helen Brunner:** Thank you. And on behalf of Becky and myself, I really want to thank the panel for their hard work, and also invite all of you to join us for lunch....

### **Afternoon Panel**

**Becky Lentz:** What we wanted to do in the morning was really emphasize, as you know, the local work that’s going on. And the folks that we have for us to talk to you in the afternoon, are really going to focus on the linkages. If you can listen for strategies, and so on, when we get to the Q&A, it would be really great to have a lot of discussion about that. And so David, would you like to make a few remarks, and then I’ll introduce our panel chair.

**David Haas:** Well, I’ll make this really brief because I know we have a terrific presentation this afternoon. And I’ve heard this morning was wonderful and I’m sorry I missed it. Although I should say that we are documenting all of our media policy briefings significantly, and they will be available via our Web site and other forms—video and text documentation. I just wanted to

point out a couple of quick reminders. Grantmakers in Film and Electronic Media and its Electronic Media Policy Working Group, which organized these sessions is going to be leading a funders delegation to the National Conference on Media Reform in St. Louis, that's May 13-15, and there's a flyer in your packet, both about the conference as well as the funder delegation, It's really an interesting conglomeration of all the work and people doing work in this field. And we'll be leading a group there to help learn more and interact with those issues. Please also take a look at your evaluation sheet....(various announcements)

**Becky Lentz:** We're happy to be led this second section by Liza Dichter and her colleague Catherine also has some interesting literature, which Liza will tell us about, which sort of maps out how all this stuff fits together. I'm sure you're having questions—they're talking about wireless; they're talking about radio; they're talking about media consolidation, too much. So there's some really interesting field-mapping work that they've been doing, and I'm really happy that Liza has pulled this panel together with us. Liza is co-founder and director of programs of the Center for International Media Action, and I think their Web site goes live today? And she's going to, what CIMA does is they provide strategic services to media advocacy reform and education groups. And I'll let Liza take it from there.

**Liza Dichter:** Thanks. I want to just start by thanking Becky, thanking Lynn Stern, thanking Roger, David Haas, Sarah Amour-Jones, who works with him, Lawana Handwerk, all the co-sponsors, and everybody who made this event possible. This is really exciting for me. I'm really honored to work with all the people on the first panel and the second panel. And I'm really excited to be with all of you. It's a real honor to be here and to moderate this panel. And I just want to recognize that we are in the company of heroes here. Those are the heroes who move people and heroes who move money. And one of the people that I just wanted to stop and take a little moderator privilege here to recognize is a particular hero who for some of us in this work basically taught us that policy change really is possible for the work we want to do. Somebody who helped create the LPFM service, someone who helped us see that regulatory agencies actually could be a place where we could find positive change. And somebody who is now working with an incredibly important organization, the United Church of Christ, who actually made it possible originally for citizens and community groups to have a stake at the FCC. And that's Gloria Tristani. So, Gloria. We can get Gloria on microphone.

**Gloria Tristani:** Thank you, Liza. Liza asked me over lunch whether I'd like to say a few words, and I told her well, my throat really hurts and I've been hacking here. People behind me are probably wishing they weren't sitting behind me because I'm spreading germs. I do want to say a few words, and I think I want to make a couple of points, which have been made before. It would seem that you all get it that grassroots does matter. But when I was sitting at the FCC for four years—except, because I was trying to remember the things that were going on, except for the LPFM battle—we did not hear from grassroots in any way, shape or form. And you think that media consolidation started when Michael Powell put out those horrible proposed rules? It was happening in the former FCC, in the former Democratic FCC. Because we were allowing these huge media mergers. We were letting radio transactions go through that shouldn't have gone through because of, help me Harold, market issues. Because we had rules that Clear

Channel could own eight radio stations, but there were also rules and considerations on how much of the market could one radio owner control. We had merger after merger of radio stations where they would end up controlling 90% of the advertiser dollars in the market. And I with another commissioner, Commissioner Susan Ness, would very quietly say, not quietly, dissent from these transactions. But the public was clueless and we didn't know how to engage the public. And I want to thank all the policy wonks that are here—Gene Kimmelman, Harold—because you do marvelous work. But we couldn't do it at the FCC just with the marvelous work of the lawyers, and they couldn't be at every proceeding. We needed what you are doing now, so I want to really, really tell you it does matter. I also want to say that Michael Powell did everybody a favor because by taking the arrogant, horrible attitude that he took, he mobilized us. I also want to say that you should listen to what Michael Copps said, which is you may get a worse result this time around at the FCC. So don't give up.

And lastly, I want to talk a little bit about the United Church of Christ and the work we do. A lot of young people here, I think, think that these media battles are new. They've been going on for decades and we need to win more of them. Back in the sixties, the Office of Communication in the United Church of Christ challenged a television station in Jackson, Mississippi, because imagine in the sixties in Jackson, Mississippi, they weren't covering civil rights issues, civil rights battles. And it was so bad, imagine that, that the network news that was being fed into that station and all the stations in the South was blacked out if it had to do anything with civil rights. So we talk about how we don't have representation on the airwaves, in the South black people didn't exist and their struggles didn't exist. Well, anyway, to make a long story short, the United Church of Christ filed that lawsuit with civil rights activists, with the community activists, because they couldn't do it alone. And after many, many years back and forth with the courts, they won the lawsuit and the right of communities and of viewers of those stations to hold those stations accountable. We're still doing that work. But I go back to, you need the activists. So I want to thank every one of you. I knew some of the stories. I didn't know your story. Every one of you is doing wonderful work. And that's enough, thank you.

**Liza Dichter:** Thank you, Gloria. As you began to hear this morning, and as Gloria was mentioning, and you'll hear more this afternoon, the leaders and organizations represented here today are doing some of the most vital and innovative work today to change the media system. As Becky mentioned, what is the work to change the media system? One of the things we recently did was we produced a map, which is on this back wall here. You'll be able to pick it up afterwards. And we sort of broke it down. We said there's groups trying to change the media system because they're concerned with democracy and civic engagement. There's groups trying to change the media system on behalf of independent media makers, to do what Amy was talking about this morning. There's groups trying to change the media system on behalf of consumer rights, our rights to privacy, our rights to affordability, our rights to diversity and choice. There's groups working on behalf of children and education, and trying to change the media with those concerns. There's groups that haven't been discussed, but we know are out there, concerned about morality and decency, and trying to change the media system because of what they see as the values its promoting in that direction. There's groups working for media workers, a number of the unions, Inja mentioned a little bit this morning, a number of the media worker

unions. And there’s groups concerned about social justice and civil rights. Who has power, who doesn’t, and how the media system plays into that.

The groups doing this kind of work, and we sort of broke down over a hundred groups into those categories, generally as we saw it, this could be cut a lot of different ways. We divided it as five different strategies: *education*, educating youth and adults to understand the system, understand how media works, assess media content; *advocacy*, pushing policy positions through legal means, through legislative and lobbying means, through the press, doing that kind of advocacy; *research*, think tanks, developing white papers, developing analysis, monitoring content, monitoring the industry; *mobilization*, that’s the term we’re using for groups that get a bunch of people to act on a certain thing, send out an e-mail alert and they get 100,000 people to act; and then *organizing*, and what we see as organizing is actually engaging and building the community capacity for constituency groups and communities to advocate and win for their own interests in the media field.

The diversity of strategies is our strength, but none of these strategies can win alone. I think we all see that. We see that in other issue areas. We see that here. No lawyers will win without real clients who can tell them what the problems are that they’re experiencing. No advocates on the Hill in D.C. can convince policy makers without a chorus of constituency voices and real stories behind them. And even an e-mail list of 100,000, 200,000 activists ready to sign petitions, needs to be backed by sustained grassroots and community organizing so people will continue to fight for their media rights after that action alert has passed and for whatever comes up. The work is interdependent. And these panelists are going to lead us in a discussion of how we serve that interdependence, how we build and strengthen the interconnections that take the value of that interdependence and make it a strength, and how we build especially the principled and productive relationships, the resourced collaborations, the resourced network capacity, so that we can together and serve as a force for lasting visionary and urgent media change. And with that I’m going to turn this over to this really incredible panel.

The first person who’s going to speak with us is Gene Kimmelman, the public policy director of Consumers Union, which some of you may know as the producer of *Consumer Reports* magazine, others may know as the folks who try and keep our food safe and our toys safe, and which some of us know as one of the leading groups fighting on the legislative level about media and telecommunications policy. For more than 20 years, Gene has been representing the public in D.C., making sure phone companies provide service to the poor, fighting price-gauging cable bills, and holding the barricades against media monopolies. I started working with Gene directly when he contacted us because they were working on a major Web site project and they wanted to make sure it was useful and accessible and valuable to advocacy groups and communities and constituencies. Because as Gene has taught me, and we have learned together, unless those groups can do the work they need to do, we can’t win. So I’m going to turn it over to Gene to talk to us a little bit about why it is that we can’t win without the work around the country.



**Gene Kimmelman:** Thank you, Liza, and without your work we wouldn't be where we are today, so I really appreciate you with all your efforts. And I want to echo your thanks to Becky and all her colleagues for putting this together.

Now, why in the world would I be here to talk about grassroots when we're *Consumer Reports* magazine, and it's where you look to to get a car or something like that, right? But we do run a public policy program and I'm in charge of it, and a lot of what we do is put together disparate causes to fight in the political arena. And it's often industry groups or it's labor groups with consumer groups, civil rights groups. And we're always looking for the strange combinations that can actually move policy. One of the difficult things in this area is, it's hard to find them. Yes, we work with some conservative groups that Commissioner Copps pointed out earlier. We found a few publishers who really do care about independent newspapers and want to preserve family-owned newspapers. We found a few broadcasters who truly care about not being part of larger conglomerates. But this is a very difficult area to put together those kinds of coalitions.

So I have to tell you that in just listening to the stories this morning, I was amazingly impressed with what our community, with what people in this field have put together. Really, the grassroots groups deserve a major applause from all of us for what they have done. This has just been phenomenal. I've never seen anything like it in this area. And because there are not these other coalitions that are easy to put together, that can win a political fight, it's even that much more important in the area of media democracy.

So I was trying to think what kind of story from Washington fits that's anywhere near as fun and exciting as what you heard this morning, especially after you just had a big lunch and you're probably tired. I can't do it, but let me tell you a little story that gets at least into the realm of the interdependence. When the decision came down from the FCC to overturn the media ownership rules, the Senate Commerce Committee quickly convened to vote on a resolution to reject that decision. I met with Senator Dorgan who was the leader in fighting against the media-ownership rules, totally on our side through that spring leading up to this vote. And here's our champion, and I don't think he would mind me telling you that he said, I don't think we can do it. I don't think we can win this. This is all the media companies against us, Republican-controlled Congress, Republican White House. They're all going to support Michael Powell's decision. We just can't do it. And what people don't recognize often is that even your major champion needs a boost, a big boost, and that's what grassroots helped with enormously. It really took people who were totally on our side, who wanted to fight. But they have to worry about military spending. They have to worry about appropriations. They have to worry about education back home. They've got so many things they care about. How to get their attention on this issue was very much dependent on how much their constituents cared about it.

Now there's another group of senators on that same committee. They're Republicans who were also on our side. Senator Lott, mentioned by Commissioner Copps, had seen his local newspaper bought by the Gannett chain and he thought it had turned for the worse. Senator Hutchison from Texas had run-ins with the Belo Company, feeling that they were doing unfair reporting and they owned both broadcasting and newspapers in Dallas and they had too much of the market from

her point of view. They weren't necessarily going to do anything even though they really were on our side. Why? Because the Chairman of the FCC was from their party. The president was backing him, was from their party. This was not an easy thing to do. One key factor about media policy that everyone has to keep in mind is, why is it that we care about it? Because the media is so powerful. These people were only going to fight this fight if they thought they could win, because to lose taking on Gannett, or to lose taking on Belo, meant there were going to be editorials against you. Or there was going to be negative coverage. You were going to be shown frowning somewhere in the pictures in the newspaper. It could be subtle, but every politician knows the power of the media and they were only going to fight this fight if they thought they could win.

The retaliation of the media is a fundamental problem in this entire battle. It was the grassroots activities that were building up, not just on the narrow media ownership fight, but on a lot of media justice issues. People were becoming aware in Congress that this mattered to their constituents. And so it was that set of interdependencies that brought all these people together. And it was that vote that totally surprised the administration, caught them totally off guard, that almost half the Republicans on this committee voted to turn over their own policy. And that started a whole new set of activities and it invigorated our community from grassroots all the way up. But the next fight will be tougher because they learn from their own mistakes. And so we have to be that much stronger—that's why grassroots matters even more this go round.

What we're doing at Consumers Union for the first time with more than 6 million subscribers to our various print products is we're finally going out to our subscribers and asking them if they care about this issue and many other issues. It's never been done before. Some of that comes out of our experience of seeing how activists respond to public policy issues and where we can go with that. We, with generous support from the Ford Foundation and substantial support from Open Society Institute, have this Hear Us Now Web site. We've got material outside. As Liza said, she was instrumental in helping us get a broader constituency to participate in planning, putting it together. It promotes the work of more than 100 organizations right now. It's called, Hear Us Now. The “us” is not Consumers Union; the “us” is all of you. It's a platform for trying to be prepared for the next fight. And it is just material. It is just a Web site. It is the groups that will use it, the groups that will inform it, the groups who will share stories about it who matter. So they're the ones who need resources to keep this battle going. Thank you.

**Liza Dichter:** Thank you, Gene. And thank you for your consistent support of the work that happens outside the Beltway, and for advocating for us inside the Beltway and inside spaces like this.

We're all deeply concerned about the current state of media and communications. What's particularly hard for public interest work is that the technology is moving so fast. As industry groups spend millions of dollars to make sure that they can use these upcoming technologies and the new ones for maximum profit, our future is being protected in part by a lawyer in a tiny nonprofit public interest firm, who not only understands the geekiest and wonkiest issues of wireless and digital broadcasting technologies, he also knows and believes deeply enough about

social justice and real community needs to fight for innovative public interest possibilities from even an old technology, FM radio. So I just want to turn the microphone over to Harold Feld of the Media Access Project, and in doing so, also thank him for all of his hard work.

**Harold Feld:** Thank you to Liza and Becky and everybody else who was involved in organizing this. Since I only have five minutes I don't have near enough time to thank everybody who should be thanked.

But what I would like to talk about today is, we are experiencing a real change in how the business of public advocacy is done. The old view, and it wasn't just in media policy, it was in environmental policy—all things that have complex issues—is the issues are complicated, the technology is difficult to understand, and people fundamentally don't care. Those who do care express their caring by becoming members of organizations like Sierra Club or other organizations that pool members. And those organizations handle the details and you, the individual, write the check every year and sometimes you get an action alert, which tells you exactly what you're supposed to say and exactly to whom. And that's how we fight the good fight, and we have to be organized and disciplined and have a very top-down structure in order to effect social change.

This is the new reality. The new reality is people do care and they do get it. And what they want to know is, one, how does this relate to me and, number two, what can I do about it? People are fundamentally fed up with feeling powerless, and for the first time they have come to understand, through the media fight, that they have power. That at the end of the day, their elected officials work for them. And that it doesn't matter how big the war chests are that those people collect from companies, provided that voters make themselves clear that you work for us, not for big media. So we are seeing a real shift here. In addition, the issues are not only complex, they're too complex to be managed by any one organization or group of organizations. There is simply too much going on. There are too many fronts. And there are a heck of a lot of people involved. And one of the things which is important to understand is there are lots of people involved at lots of different levels—everyone from the person who has made this their life to the person who cares about this and at the same time is struggling to feed a family, work 12 hours a day, manage their kids, but really wants to see change.

And how do you get that done? So we are shifting from a top-down model to something else. Something which has its roots in how the Internet evolved and is using those technologies. What we now see is that national organizations serve a coordinating and resource role. What we have is instead of a single group or a coalition of groups that sets an agenda, we have essentially a cloud of groups united by common goals and common interests. Local groups understand what is going on in their neck of the woods. They see what's happening in the real world. That information flows both up and out to other local groups. National groups try to maintain a large, holistic picture of what is going on. How does what's going on with a Clear Channel station in your neighborhood fit into the broader picture, both so that those in Washington can come in and make the case to the national policy makers and show that this is not a fluke, but a pattern, but also so that all of the individuals on the ground can share from these experiences and understand

that they are not just dealing with a local situation, they are part of a broader national and, in many ways, international movement.

We see rough consensus rather than a dictate of what you will or won't do. We have evolved networks of trust because it is impossible for me to know everybody who is involved. And there's an old saying that goes, on the Internet nobody knows you're a dog. One of the other problems is that it is always possible for people, whether they are well meaning, whether they are deliberate troublemakers, whether they are corporate shells, to set themselves out as advocates of the public interest, or as people who have information to provide. And the only way to sort the grit from the gold is to turn to the other people in the neighborhood and say, is this group real or are they a bunch of lunatics? Or do they work for Verizon? And similarly if people want to know about a group outside of their neighborhood, they go to the national organizations and say, Have you ever heard of Pets for Media Justice? So we see a model, which is one that is based on cooperation around common goals. One which relies very heavily on organizations in the field, both to sustain the movement and keep the movement, to bring information back to the national organizations so that they can influence policy makers, and so that we can make suggestions for useful policies.

One of the things that we never should forget in Washington, D.C., when I spend a lot of time at the FCC fighting for various rules, is that these rules have to enable people in the end to do the things that we care about. It doesn't do any good for me to fight for an LPFM service when that service can be wiped out by the expanding of power in high-power radio stations, which is a problem I didn't even know about until we had the LPFM forum, and I started hearing from people like, wow, this is a major problem. Then, what I can do is say, why don't we try this, this or that, and find out whether that will work at the FCC, whether that works within the communities. We formulate policy together based on our different views, different expertise, and the information we all bring to the table.

I'd like to close with a little story that's not from the media-ownership fight, but from the fight that's going on on municipal broadband. I'm not sure how many of you are familiar with this issue. The question that is raging right now is whether local governments should be allowed to serve their citizens or not. This sounds like a dumb question, but we are seeing around the country those people who want you to pay \$50 for your broadband connection, your DSL or cable, are not happy when local cities or local counties who are tired of waiting for these guys to show up, or who want to offer these services for other reasons, or to people who can't pay \$50 a month, decide to roll them out and do it themselves. So we have all of these guys, what we call in fancy Washington speak, “the incumbent local exchange carriers,” or big phone companies and the cable companies, going to their buddies in the state legislatures and saying, okay, here's a bill I'd like you to pass because governments shouldn't compete in a free market. It's bad. Oh, you should keep giving us our subsidies, and you should keep giving us everything that we want, but government should not be allowed to offer competing services.

There are bills like this springing up all over the country. Industries, in fact, moving to state and local levels because they think they can win there more easily than they can in the federal

government. So we've got a lot of fires going on. One of these that most recently came up was in Indiana. A truly terrible bill that would effectively prevent any locality from offering broadband Internet service, and would freeze those networks that currently exist at their current levels of service, and even to their current subscriber levels. So if you were on the wrong side of the street because the city hadn't deployed out to you by the time the bill passed, you're out of luck even if your neighbor is getting decent broadband service from the city.

Now what happened in Indiana, which is, I remind you, a red state, it's the reddest state in the Rust Belt, is that we in Washington read this bill and said, that's awful. We started generating whatever tools we could, and calling whoever we knew in Indiana, saying this is a real awful bill. Here's what we learned from fighting about this in Pennsylvania in November. We'll do what we can to help you, but you guys got to do the organizing. You're the ones who know the terrain. You're the ones who know the legislators. People got themselves organized. There was no mastermind. There was no single person coordinating the plan, but the cities that had networks decided they were going to stand up and fight for them. Newspapers across Indiana editorialized against the bill. Various citizens organizations on the left and the right got together, whether it was because they thought municipalities should be serving poor people, or whether it was because they thought, God damn it, state government should leave us local folks alone. They showed up for the hearing for the bill last week in Indiana, and it didn't get out of subcommittee, despite the fact that it had the backing from those invincible interests, the big local telephone monopoly and the big local cable company. They were sent with their tails between their legs, when citizens stood up and told their representatives, you work for us!

And that is what we need to see because I'll tell you a sadder story, which is Nebraska. Nebraska has an even worse bill pending, but the only people we know down there who are willing to fight it are one Common Cause chapter, and that's not enough to win in Nebraska. Now it may be that I will find out about more people in Nebraska, so that we can replicate in Nebraska what we did in Indiana. But where there are no people on the ground, where there are no local groups who can carry this forward. Where there are no people for whom this is really their fight, rather than something that a national organization is parachuting into town to try to do because we, who are not part of the community, think it's good for you, we can't win.

So if there's one thing that I hope we can take away from this, this isn't about one campaign. This isn't about one fight. This is about building an ecology of local groups who care about this, who are engaged on this, and who remember at the end of the day, we are all citizens, not serfs. Thank you.

**Liza Dichter:** Thank you, Harold. And to me, both what Gene said and what Harold said echoed for me in a very important thing, which is, we can't anticipate a lot of this stuff. These aren't projects we can plan nine months in advance in a proposal, and map out and get all of our coalition partners in a line, and know how it's going to go. It really is a question of what kind of capacity and relationships we're able to build in our communities and across our communities so that we're ready when it comes. And that's really essential, and that really is a nice lead-in to our next speaker.

When working in the public interest and when talking about progressive social change, we often, very often, talk about serving the most marginalized, serving the disenfranchised, serving exploited communities. But for many groups, and particularly on a national level, those goals are talked about, but the actual work and the actual practice isn't necessarily done all that much. The actual work of going into a community, listening to their needs, serving those needs, doesn't necessarily happen all that often, even with those of us who ardently and passionately stand for those values. But this is what Saskia Fisher does. Through the Media Empowerment Project, which is based at the Office of Communications of the United Church of Christ, which has this incredible legacy, as Gloria spoke to us, and is doing work now, Saskia is working directly in communities. She's helping to build their capacity—their capacity to self-determine their own needs, to assess their own situation, and to assert their interests in the media and communications systems they want, and to hold accountable the media and situations they've been given. She's providing them with capacity. She's helping them figure out what tools they need, helping provide them with those tools, and helping create the kind of sustainability, so that when things come down, not only are we ready, but we've started to be proactive in pushing for what we want. So, Saskia.

**Saskia Fisher:** Thank you, Liza, for that. I am going to, as briefly as I can, tell you a little bit about the projects, and then talk with you, share with you, some of the things that we're learning as we do this work about national-local partnerships, as well as some of the things that we need in order to do our work better.

So as Gloria said, and Liza also mentioned, the United Church of Christ is involved in this kind of work primarily from a concern for social justice. That is the underlying thread in both the policy work in D.C. and the organizing that I do. We're also involved in the work and in the Media Empowerment Project in particular, because there's a recognition that grassroots organizing is critical, not only to strengthen national policy work, but it has a distinct value in and of itself. As Liza mentioned and as Harold mentioned as well, we need to organize communities to build long-term capacity for communities to define their own needs, and to learn the skills in order to keep pressure up on local media outlets. So it's a question also of changing the lives of people in their local communities as they change their relationship to their media.

So the project is working, or I am working with four different communities around the country. I'm dealing primarily with issues of access and representation for women and people of color specifically. I'm working in San Antonio, Texas, with a coalition of Latino community organizations, and in Dearborn, Michigan, with primarily Arab-American organizations. And in those two communities what we're doing is looking at questions of representation in the local media and following media monitoring and community surveys. The other two communities I'm working with are in rural North Carolina, and they both African-American communities where the primary interest is in getting access to technology, and particularly the Internet, which is so crucial to the strength, the economic strength, the political strength, and the social strength of these communities.

So the Media Empowerment Project started a year ago at a really amazing time in the media reform movement. There’s an incredible opportunity for us to achieve something and to build on the gains that have already been made. The people I work with understand very well the importance of media. They don’t need long conversations about why it matters. They understand that for social justice, for the particular issues that they’re fighting for in their communities, they need to address media. So the question is really one of providing them with the resources and skills, and connecting them with others who are also doing this work. That is where the—that’s the crux of the issue for us doing this.

I’m just going to briefly now give you an outline of what we, or what the project defines as community organizing. Essentially it is local, community-based and -directed organizing that grows from local justice concerns and then connects these with media. It also involves collaborations with different organizations and stakeholders in the community from labor, the environment, and so on. And it’s organizing that both achieves short-term victories, or short and midterm victories in communities, but also very importantly, that educates communities in a more long-term, ongoing fashion. So that when larger fights come up they’re able to activate themselves, and that they’re also able to maintain pressure on local media outlets. So as Liza said, what we primarily do is build the capacity of local groups to do this work in a sustainable way. So this involves training. This involves bringing different organizations together. And it also involves producing materials and bringing materials from other groups around the country that are doing this work. So this is an organizing manual that we put together for the project that tells some of the stories that you heard earlier today. And this is one of things that we’re using in the community.

So now, just briefly about our learning. There are two primary points that I want to make in respect to this. The first one is about collaboration and parity. When a national organization goes to work with local groups, it’s very important to not go with a fully formed project that you are just asking the local communities to implement. It’s really important to take the time, and it does take time and research, to work with the local community organizations who have expressed an interest in working on media, to work with them to develop a plan that resonates with them, that addresses directly the justice concerns that they have in their communities. So it involves a lot of listening and collaboration.

And then the other thing is that we are working to translate some of these complex policy issues, national policy issues, and local policy issues into a language that can be used in organizing. And one other small point, or important point actually, is that it’s very important for national groups to support and to understand different kinds of community organizing. There are many different methodologies, approaches to organizing, and that’s something that needs to be taken into account when thinking of developing different models for this kind of work.

The second main learning for the project is a question of trust and resources. And the reason that I connect these together is that they are very intimately connected in local communities. The first questions I was asked when I went to these four different communities to speak with people about the project was, how long are you going to be here? How long is the Media Empowerment

Project going to exist? And how much are you going to give us? And that is really important because when you are working with...um...there was an inherent distrust of the project, of a national group coming in. And the reason for that was because these communities have experienced national groups coming in before and then leaving as soon as their deliverables were achieved. And that's not the idea of the project, so you need to be able to demonstrate a commitment to this work over time. And you also need to be able to provide resources for staff to hire local staff, to make photocopies and phone calls, and thing like that, very important things, which allow you to make this work sustainable for the community. And also, more broadly, to achieve, to help build leadership of people of color in the national media reform movement, and to help get their voices out there.

The final three points that I wanted to make were about what we need in order to make our work more effective. Firstly, again, resources are critical in this, resources going to grassroots groups to build the infrastructure around the country of different organized communities who are able to work then with national groups and just with themselves in their communities. The other thing is that we need to have open and equitable channels of communication between grassroots groups and D.C. groups so that we can learn from D.C. groups what are the issues that are particularly pressing at this time and that we can work on in our communities. But also, the other way around, so that D.C. groups can start to define policy issues and areas of focus in conjunction with grassroots groups, and particularly with groups of people of color, groups that are usually not part of this conversation. And then the final thing that I wanted to mention is that for us, for grassroots organizations to really work effectively we need to be really speaking with each other. We need to develop some kind of network where we can share resources, share ideas, share strategies with each other and also with groups in D.C. So, thank you.

**Liza Dichter:** Doesn't this all make you all feel really hopeful? I mean it makes me feel hopeful. I just feel there's wisdom, there's energy, there's experience. I hope there's also some rest and care for all the people who do the hard work, so we don't lose you in a couple of years. But it's really exciting and an honor to be amongst all these folks in my daily work and today.

When we talk about the greatest stakeholders in the fight to change the media system, often there are some key groups that are mentioned: social justice advocates; civic and community groups; youth; independent media and journalists. For nearly 30 years these are the kinds of groups that Media Alliance of California has been bringing into the discussion around how to change the media, what we need, what we want to create. Jeff Perlstein, the executive director of Media Alliance is an alliance builder. He's an organizer, and together with his colleagues at Media Alliance, he has been building coalitions; he has been doing community education; he has been creating forums for social justice advocacy in media. And pivotally, he has been working to strengthen networks and relationships horizontally, as Saskia was mentioning, and also in collaboration with national policy public interest groups. Some of the stuff we saw this morning in the video, that big hearing in Monterey—that was work that Media Alliance was pivotal in, the cable coalitions that are happening around the country, and a number of the different projects. They've really been just doing incredible work for a long time, and as was mentioned earlier, these are not new fights. These are old fights and we're really grateful to have that



legacy coming from an outside the Beltway source. I’m going to be looking to Jeff to learn more, as I often learn from him, a little bit about where we need to go and what we need to get there as our closing speaker of the day. And then we’re going to have some time for you all to dialogue with these folks. So, Jeff.

**Jeff Perlstien:** Thanks Liza for the very generous introduction. I want to thank Becky Lentz, David Haas, my colleagues here, too, and all of you for making it, especially, it’s a really crucial space and discussion. And I hope there’ll be further discussion that moves us from describing and making the case to really figuring out next steps and strategy. That’s part of what I’d like to focus on today.

First, I just want to take a couple of minutes and briefly tell you a little bit about Media Alliance, which I’m the director currently. As was mentioned, Media Alliance is in its 29<sup>th</sup> year. We’re actually, we believe, the longest-running regional media advocacy hub in the country, and perhaps the longest-running media activists, advocacy project, in general. That’s a value because really over time that’s allowed us to build lots of principled relationships with folks locally where we are, regionally, statewide, and nationally. And that’s been really crucial as far as advancing the concerns of our local constituencies, and really linking them with other local constituencies around the country powerfully that can inform national policy work. And we’ve seen some victories around that.

But I wanted to quickly talk about a piece of this, which is related to membership and constituency. Media Alliance actually is also somewhat unique in that it was founded way back when by professional media workers, by folks that were working in the mainstream, but actually were very disenchanted with the trends that they were just starting to see around them at that time. And a lot of them had come out of the civic journalism movements that were happening and emerging from the social movements of the sixties and seventies. And they were doing lots of crucial work around community journalism, community reporting, and did a lot of great work around that. Significantly, the organization, after about 15 years, was claimed, and I use that word intentionally, was claimed by community-based organizers, social justice organizers, who actually came to the journalist folks and said, if you all are serious about your lofty mission statement around meeting the needs of local communities through media, then this needs to be more than just an association, an organization, of, by, and for journalists. We need to be part of this. There’s value in us informing each other’s strategies, and there’s real power in how we can work together in mutually reinforcing ways. And we feel all the work that happens needs to be driven from and grounded from the organizing and concerns we’re hearing daily in the racial justice work that we do, the economic justice work that we do, the housing fights, and all that sort of stuff. So it’s a very interesting grounding and make-up in that way, and I think very powerful.

I want to just reference a just a few victories that I think maybe embody some of the ways this has worked, and I think also have demonstrated the replicability. And how we ground some of this stuff in the local, and then work as much as we can to share it with other folks, and where

the impacts have been. I’ll move through these quickly, I promise, and hopefully some of these will be familiar to you.

One very significant victory that we had, which was grounded in the local folks concerns, was around local radio station KPFA. People are familiar with KPFA. Can we get a round of applause for that? KPFA being the initial station of Pacific network, also being the first to put together a very community-driven, listener-sponsored model, absolutely crucial in supporting the work for social justice in the Bay Area and well beyond. And as you may know KPFA was really under attack from corporate raiders a number of years ago. And again, I just want to point out that the way this worked was Media Alliance got very involved in defending the station and reclaiming it, not because we had a certain policy analysis around consolidation, etc. It came from a very real organizing need, and I think that’s what a lot of people have spoken to throughout the day, so I won’t belabor the point. But it’s really crucial because organizers came to us and said this is a very rare, powerful, and important space for us to do our organizing, to have conversations around what our communities are facing and what strategies are for change. And so that’s how Media Alliance got really involved in that piece, and really was intentional about figuring out how replicable strategies could be shared with folks in other places around the country. And that led to, not just the reclaiming of KPFA as a more democratically community-based and driven institution, but also the entire Pacifica network then that rippled across. And that was really crucial in changing and moving us back toward participatory process there.

I won’t go into too many other examples, but to just mention a few, one around also a very community-driven piece that met local concerns, local communities needs, was around community radio and pirate radio. Before it was called low-power FM, it was referred to as pirate radio because essentially it was electronic civil disobedience. And the reason people took to it wasn’t because they wanted to create a low-power FM service, for example. It wasn’t because they had a critical media studies background necessarily. It’s because most of them in all these cities and towns around the country were shut out, and they were organizers, and they knew and understood the power of sharing these stories and linking up with people. So we worked with folks in the Bay Area with Free Radio Berkeley, which was one of the early stations, Radio Libre in the Mission, and others, to really nurture that and to also make the linkages with folks across the country and with D.C. around what policy remedies might be.

So now I want to go to this, a little bit around this policy remedy thing. And I think it’s been really crucial that we’ve heard from people, and we’ve affirmed in a number of ways from my peers that are working at the local level, and my allies who are working at the national level, affirm the value and power of local organizing in national policy fights and victories. I also think that we’ve heard that it’s really crucial that we not just think of those policy victories as the end goal. Because we all know that they’re very fragile, a number of them have been rolled back, a number of them are incomplete and don’t really meet the needs that all of us have. We want to have a truly transformed social society system and that sort of stuff. I said stuff there. So what I wanted to say about that is, it’s not just around winning the national, it’s not just the grassroots as helping be foot soldiers for the national policy victories. The folks at the grassroots are innovating strategies, they’re helping frame these issues in ways that make sense to people

beyond the Beltway. They’re really working in principled ways with folks in D.C. to figure out strategies that resonate with people in a very deep way. And that’s crucial.

That said, that is crucial, but what we need to sustain is, we need to move beyond these episodic fights. This has been raised as well earlier today. And the way that we expand this base, and we expand the leadership, and we expand the base, is by making sure there are resources and infrastructures to keep people involved and engaged at the local level in an ongoing way. The way to do that is to, again—really hear from people, sit down with folks, and build principled, trusting relationships around what they need. Figure that piece out, figure out what campaigns that emerge from that, and how that can ripple up, as was mentioned a number of times. I think we’re all here because we want to win. And I don’t mean win in some simplistic way of winning one policy victory or that sort of thing. I think we’re here because we want to see fundamental transformative social change happen. And I’m not necessarily convinced that it will happen in our lifetime, but I believe that we are definitely part of leading to moving that discussion.

So I just want to highlight what I think we’ve heard tonight, too, and make some suggestions around that because I have the privileged space of doing a little bit of wrap-up. We’ve heard that there’s a deep problem. There’s a crisis in our media system that affects all of us, and affects some of us in different and more significant ways. For some people this is a life-and-death issue every day. We’ve heard that. We heard also that there is a major looming policy battle on the horizon. There’s going to be all kinds of revisiting of what happened around the ownership rules, there’s going to be the reopening of the Telecommunications Act, which affects all of this. The good news is that we’ve also heard there are innovative strategies, some previous victories that have happened, and some really important linkages happening at the local level, across local folks, across regions, and then with allies in D.C. What I think we’ve heard also, and this is where I want to move towards wrapping up, explicitly and implicitly, although I’m going to make it explicit, is the need for resourcing this work, resourcing the local hubs that we have and organizations, resourcing the linkages across and the campaigns that people are building that are really affirming the local, but going beyond that and amplifying the impact. And what we identified, a number of us groups, an emerging peer network that we are proud to be a part of, is that we need infrastructure and resources also for the conversations around network development. And that’s one piece that we want to put out to you all as funders gathered here. Because right now, and I just want to be real, that most of these dynamic, amazing, powerful groups that you’ve heard from, some of them don’t even have paid staff. If they do have paid staff, they may have one. I think maybe two of the groups have more than two paid staff. Okay, so if you believe, if you’ve bought this, if the case has been made today, if the case has been made and you get it, if you believe that there’s a deep problem and that this is part of the solution, and I say one key part towards addressing change and addressing these problems, then we’re really asking you to support the organizations in the regions and support coordinated work amongst each other and coordinated work with our allies in D.C. I want to make a point around that that we’re not just talking about linking up the groups that are already a part of the conversation. We’re very clear that there are lots of folks that are not in this conversation that need to be. There are groups in movement in other sectors that clearly see how media policy work affects them and is part and parcel of their work, but we don’t have the framework or

infrastructure for them to quickly, in a pretty sustainable way, to plug into all of this. And that’s part of what we’re really strategizing about, but we need resources to bring these great minds together more frequently. We were lucky that because we were brought here today we had a pre-meeting yesterday, and it was really productive, but it’s really an early part of this conversation, and I really want to ask you to support resources particularly around this network development piece to strengthen coordination amongst current allies, and also so we can really work with folks who are not currently part of this conversation, but we know are key allies in making the deep change that we want to make. Thanks very much and I look forward to Q&A and that sort of stuff.

**Liza Dichter:** Before we get to the Q&A, I just want to quickly do one more hero call-out, or shout-out. There’s a lot of people I could shout-out in this room. I’m just going to do one here, because there’s a very particular legacy to this specific event and to the work that we’ve all been talking about. This is somebody who has built community radio stations for years. Somebody who’s built national coalitions. Somebody who’s built international networks. And somebody who’s recognized that none of that work was ever done alone. Somebody who brought together many of us working in D.C, working around the country, in 2002 at the Highlander Research and Education Center, to really dig deep and begin to dig deep around questions of privilege, race, power, how that affects how we think and work about the media. And someone who also served as a consultant to Becky Lentz here as she was formulating her grantmaking and developing her work, which also as I’ve seen has been very powerful as, although she’ll deny it, an organizer, organizing money, and funders, and folks, and really the move to opening up the way we think about policy change and the way we think about work. Nan Rubin, who is sitting almost directly across from me is currently, among a number of things, doing a major project for digital archiving of public broadcasting content. She’s a board member of the Prometheus Radio Project. And speaking personally, but I bet many of the people in the room would say the same thing, she’s a mentor, she’s an ally, she’s a collaborator. And as I said, a hero, so I just want to acknowledge Nan. And I also want to recognize that we actually made ourselves on time so we have lots of good time for this conversations, so let’s open it up to folks who want to engage in some dialogue around all the things we’ve been hearing.

**Nan Rubin:** I actually have a question I want to ask. Thank you for that, Liza, I’m really embarrassed by it. But I’m thrilled that this is going on, and I really hope that the momentum is going to be able to really build, because I think we still really need it, seriously.

I wanted to ask Saskia if you would tell us a little bit more description about the projects you’re working on, particularly in San Antonio and Detroit, because I think that these are communities that are pretty invisible and I’d really like to hear what they’re doing in terms of media empowerment.

**Saskia Fisher:** In San Antonio, as I’m sure you all know, there was an FCC hearing, a localism hearing in January of last year (2004), which was really well-organized. I know there were people from Prometheus who went there to work with local people. And basically that was a really good galvanizing moment for people to come together around these issues. So in the

aftermath of that what we have been doing is talking about monitoring. Monitoring is something that really resonates with the community. The kind of model that the Youth Media Council has put out there is something very powerful and something that we are working on. So media monitoring, in terms specifically of race and class and gender. Most of the people I work with in San Antonio are Latina women organizers. So that’s kind of the framework for the work there.

In Dearborn, as you can imagine, since September 11 in particular, but this has been going on a lot longer than that, the Arab community, and there are different, and obviously there are many different Arab communities in Dearborn. There’s not one. There are people from all over the world living there. They are being persecuted. This has become a life-and-death issue for them—there are disappearances and so on. But the other thing that they are concerned with is that they are represented only ever in relation to the Middle East or Iraq. They don’t exist as people who need education or welfare or this kind of thing. So again, that’s a monitoring project looking at that, at the representation of the community. And trying to put forward a holistic—here’s how you can really represent, this is who we are, this is what we need from you, our local media. And there are also in both places community—which are often called ethnic—press, newspapers, Latina and Arab newspapers that are part of the project.

**Jeff Perlstein:** I just wanted to briefly mention, which I didn’t because I was trying to keep to our time and time is tight, but that all of our work together, a number of the groups that have spoken today and other groups that we work with, have identified a few core campaigns and strategies that really resonate with local folks and make sense that we’ve seen to really be key entry points for folks to work around policy. Because as has been mentioned here, it’s really tough to do organizing, go out to folks, and say, you know what, the Telecom Act is about to be revisited. Get stirred up about it. And the reality is that just generally doesn’t happen. With some folks it does. But if we’re talking about a really principled, deep movement that addresses questions of race, gender and class, and not just in an analysis framework, but really incorporates folks that are coming from identities and communities where that’s something they’re living and dealing with everyday, some of these questions. Then we need to engage people around different pieces of this in a different way. And that’s where I just wanted to piggyback on what Saskia was saying, is that we’ve found over time in our work, and as was mentioned by Youth Media Council and other folks, that this monitoring, this content piece, is really the entry point for a lot of folks around policy. Because everyone’s clear that there’s problems with the media. There’s problems about how our issues are talked about, how other people’s issues are talked about, how people are underrepresented and also actively misrepresented. And so that’s the starting point for lots of conversation that we’ve found are really powerful, and then leading to an understanding and discussion around, well, why is it that way? What are the media structures, a real structural analysis? It’s absolutely crucial for us to then move to a policy piece, right? And then policy—I just want to quickly clarify, too—that we’re also clear that there are legislative and regulatory policy changes. And there’s also corporate policy changes. And we can look at all those areas as far as policy that we need to address to open up space for these communities and also for independent media and those voices as well.

**Comment:** You sort of just answered this a little bit with the content-based organizing, but I work with Democracy Now! with Amy Goodman. I’m working with supporters all over the country that are starting campaigns to bring the show to new stations. And the first thing I always do is say, find others, find allies, get connected in your own communities. And I was wondering if you could speak to any tips that one might give these organizers to say that it is so important that you do organize around class, race, and gender lines, across those lines. And how do you find each other, and just any thoughts on that.

**Harold Feld:** I will start and then pass it on as somebody who’s in Washington, and often I’m trying to explain this to other folks. What I say is number one, every community is going to be different. You need to, number one, my own experiences have been, the first thing you have to do is relate to people why they care, either because they’re not getting what they should be getting, or someone is taking away from them something that they have a right to. Many people are just not aware, and as I say, I really feel from talking to people that it is not that people magically don’t care, it is that, one, people are usually so busy with the mechanics of their daily lives that it is difficult to focus on these things. And number two, the message that is hammered into us in every single medium is that you are powerless except for your power to buy things. So it’s hard to reach out to people on kind of a higher plane, where the things that offend us morally; it’s very tough. So the first thing you have to do is know who you’re talking to, try to understand what are their concerns going to be, what are things that are going to impact this person or this community? Look for fights in the past in which other people may have been active in entirely different areas. Environmental fights, who was active then, or who was active around a zoning issue but expressed concerns that are consonant with the things that are of concern in the media, organizing against Walmart because it hurts local communities. Know who the reporters are in your area who cover what, is another important thing because you really have to in many ways work with the press in these areas. People will want to find you if you show up in the press. Whenever we get quoted in the press, particularly if it’s radio or television, but also in local papers, you will get calls from people who then say, wow, I read about what you’re doing and I care, and I want to do something to help. So those are the things that I can think of off the top of my head.

**Liza Dichter:** I’m also going to respond to that really quickly on some tactical questions. I may be jumping on Gene’s thunder, but as much as I appreciate him advocating for us, I’m going to do the reverse here. One, the tactical of how do you find folks. I heard yesterday from Jonathan Lawson in Seattle that he got contacted by a state Republican politician concerned about media because he found out about Reclaim the Media through the Web site that Gene mentioned, Hereusnow.org. What they’ve done, as he mentioned, is linking about 100 groups. In terms of folks who are already sensitized to media and telecommunications issues, that’s a great resource. Our organizations, MediaActionCenter.org, also does a lot of organizing around pulling the information together about who’s doing what where. I also want to say you’ve heard the term hubs a lot here, and what we have in the room is some very powerful regional hubs. These are folks who know who’s in their community, not necessarily already tuned into media, but probably already generally aware of that. So, Media Tank’s in Philadelphia. We’ve got Media Alliance in California. Youth Media Council also in California. We’ve got Media

Empowerment Project working in the neighborhoods and communities that were mentioned. Reclaim the Media in Seattle. And there's others, we've got allies in Chicago. So there's some hubs that you can turn to in terms of that local work, and I'd really recommend that.

One more sort tactical piece, and this gets into a little bit of what Harold was saying, when you're building coalitions, when we're building coalitions, one of the things that we've really come to identify is understanding who you are and what you want first, and where you want to go. And then figuring out where other folks are and where they want to go can make it a lot easier to do whatever you want to do together. So I would just really encourage that, particularly around some of the stuff, the multicultural and multiracial challenges. There are some tools out there from folks that have done some of that work, because there are really important things to think through. The Applied Research Center, [arc.org](http://arc.org), has some of those tools. And again, at [mediaactioncenter.org](http://mediaactioncenter.org), we've actually been collecting a whole bunch of tools around coalition building, around alliance building, including those tools. So that's just sort of some tactical stuff, where to get whose where and all of that. So Gene, if you want to add on to that.

**Gene Kimmelman:** (starts off mic)... Share your stories. We want people to share experiences so that things aren't dictated down, so there's a medium for sharing what's going on everywhere, and where people can start finding new ways to come together. And just to amplify what Jeff said, this is not just the bill in your legislature or the bill in Congress, or the regulation, we want to know what tactics people have used to change corporate policy or to get attention, or what got you on a PEG channel. Or give us some video streaming. We'd love to share it with people around the country. So this is an open invitation to everyone to go to our site and use it to your advantage.

**Jeff Perlestein:** If I may just chime in. I know I just spoke. I don't want to dominate too much. One piece that I'll just reiterate. It's crucial for us to have sustained ongoing infrastructure in cities and towns all around the country. So we have rapid response, not just to national policy stuff, but to local stuff. If there's messed-up racist coverage in your local alternative weekly, that there's the ability to mobilize quickly and respond. Similarly, if your community radio station's under threat, that sort of stuff, this ability to respond. If there's an opportunity to put on a new program, that there's some constituency trust and relationships out there where people can quickly come together. And I think it's really crucial that we figure out as part of that, and I won't belabor this point, not just what we're asking people to do, but also what we're giving them, what we're sharing, what we can contribute. And one piece that I think is really crucial for advocacy groups to think about is also what services we can provide that aren't just around information and come join this campaign. So we've really prioritized, I know the Youth Media Council has and other folks, the Media Empowerment Project, is a training component for folks after we ask them, well, what are your needs around media, they say, well, we need help also, that's nice you want us to come be in this campaign, or you want us to make our own radio program, but we really need help with the work we're already doing, pitching our stories, crafting a good press release, being a good on-camera spokesperson. And we say, okay, that's maybe something we can help you with. And that develops a very different relationship that

then is part of something that we can call on, and we do call on, in different ways on both sides of that relationship.

**Comment:** (Gloria Tristani) I have a follow-up question on what you were talking about, and I really do appreciate all the Internet-based networking that’s being done in reaching out. But the fact is that a lot of the people that really are left out all the time are not connected to the Internet in any way, shape, or form and it’s an economic justice issue. So I’d like to hear from you, how do you reach out to those communities that are totally clueless?

**Gene Kimmelman:** From a national point of view, this is one of the hardest, most labor-intensive problems. First of all, we’re trying to do everything in pamphlet form as well as online and looking for avenues to get it out. We’re trying to do everything in Spanish as well as English. We’ve got one avenue now that we’re using where we have a project related to the pharmaceutical industry that we’re calling Best Buy Drugs, where we’re going out with grant support to low-income elderly communities and showing people the least cost-effective drug to meet their ailments. And it’s non-Web based and we’re going to piggyback off of that for our media and telecommunications work and everything else. But from a national group point of view it is the most costly and expensive outreach there. And this is where I think support for grassroots, creating the networking creates the avenue for that exchange that’s not Web-based.

**Jeff Perlstein:** I just want to say, and I think it was mentioned earlier, Malkia made a great point. I just wanted to raise a conversation I had a couple of years ago, is when we were working on the KMEL campaign, because folks came to us just because over the years if there’s biased, messed-up stuff in Bay Area media content, they call Media Alliance, now they call Youth Media Council, so we got really involved in that. And we started working on this project around accountability and monitoring and policy change. And I was talking to one of our D.C. allies, who will go unnamed, about how we really wanted to prioritize this piece. And they were saying, well, you know radio’s dead. It’s really old school. It’s completely consolidated, and all that stuff. It’s done, there’s not a fight there anymore. And I think we were really clear that for the folks we work with, and that we want to be working with, radio is crucial. You can’t ignore radio and television. We can’t just shut those doors, even if you don’t think there’s necessarily a major policy opportunity right now, it’s a crucial organizing opportunity to build relationships around for the long haul and talk about what is strategic around those mediums and also around the Internet and other kind of digital policy.

**Becky Lentz:** I want to add one thing for the funders in the room. I think it’s really complicated, the question someone asked about how do you find out about stuff when you’re traveling and seeing things that say, go here. There are some interesting portals that we’ve been supporting that help network. I think on Free Press’s site, on Hear Us Now’s site, and other things, you can go in and type in your zip code and find out who’s working locally. And then you can print that out and give it to people. So funders, I think, could be helpful if they could find some time to go to those places and look who’s doing the work. And I think sometimes the groups that are doing really important work aren’t really visible to us because they don’t have the resources to come visit us. They don’t know that we exist, and so on and so forth. So I think it’s



one of the great things about the work that you’re doing is building some learning for us, too, to network ourselves to you.

**Comment:** I’m Branda Miller and I’m with the Lynn Blumenthal Memorial Fund. I also wear several other hats. I’m a professor at RPI and as a media artist and community media maker and activist, I’ve gotten involved in cable re-franchising on the local level in New York State. We’re struggling in Troy, New York, Albany, Schenectady, and it’s rippling out. All the communities of New York State are watching. And so I have a question. I think I’ll start it with Harold because you can directly hit it. But back to the funder hat that I wear, as we see the national movement for media reform growing and the success growing, what we’re watching is these telecommunications giants, the cable industry, the phone industry, do a and run (?) on the state and the local level as far as policy. And then you’re left with communities on the local and state level—here in New York State we have New Media Alliance trying to start to work on this, but these people are left really in a David-and-Goliath situation where you have professor, or an artist, or a community activist standing up and trying to really make change on this kind of big policy level. So my question is, what advice do you have for us as funders to impact and solidify the infrastructure necessary to empower these people on the ground?

**Gene Kimmelman:** That is the perennial problem and it is not new, but we are at a very interesting juncture because Harold hit upon community wireless. We’re never going to have the technological problem that just solves our problems because most of the technology will be controlled by those who have the most resources. But there are avenues available, and I think what we’re learning in this stage of the fight is that we can’t just go back and beg the broadcasters and challenge big cable companies to create a little bit of space for us here, a little bit of space there. We have to fight the fights on monitoring and holding them accountable, but we have to have a new space. And where funders I think can be most, most helpful, is don’t just look at the content—the content is critical to what people see. The content never gets there if you don’t have the platform to get it there. And the public gets the content—we need funders to help us build the platform, or help us find the platform. Otherwise we’ll never be able to reach real people.

**Harold Feld:** In response to cable in particular and the broader question Gene touched on, we need both the local and the national organizations. There is a need to have the larger organizations and the Washington-based organizations to, number one, affect the national policies. PEG is there in no small part because people fought to keep it in the cable statute when that was passed. It’s useless without folks on the ground to demand it, implement it, but it wouldn’t exist if you didn’t have people in Washington who knew what to ask for, and when and how to fight for it. So we can’t just say, now we’re going to fund large national groups. Now we’re going to fund grassroots. I have to say, as someone who is on the receiving end of this, I often feel a sense of frustration with the way that funders would like to put things in neat categories, and this is a very messy world. I think that from a funders’ perspective is to try to appreciate the messiness and think about the goals that you want to achieve in your programmatic areas, rather than necessarily the methods or a particular class of organizations. Look to see who’s being effective in the space, who is coming forward with either really

innovative ideas, or people who are being pointed to as, without help of this or that group, we’re just not going to be able to, or this or that kind of resource, we’re not going to be able to be successful.

**Liza Dichter:** I just want to add on that, PEG, which was referenced—some of you are probably familiar with the acronym, some of you may not be. That stands for the Public, Educational and Government—set asides the ability for a municipality to have the cable company, monopoly cable company in their region provide resources for public access use, which was talked a lot about in the first panel. And I just want to say that I don’t think it can be said enough—infrastructure networks, infrastructure networks. If that comes up in your state or in your city and you know who to call on that you’re going to get access to the lawyers, you’re going to get access to Gene’s strategy, you’re going to get access to local groups in other places who have fought similar fights, that’s going to all of a sudden make you part of something that’s much bigger. It’s about building infrastructure for something that can be very responsive to unanticipated needs.

**Comment:** Antwuan again. You just talked about infrastructure networks. I’d be very interested in, as a funder, how you’ve accessed perhaps ethnic media as a way to do organizing work. I think that would be very informative for us, particularly in the age of digital divide, contrary to what this administration would have you believe. Could you talk about that in terms of your access to ethnic media and how that’s helped you organize your work?

**Jeff Perlstein:** Maybe I’ll just give one example. Right now in San Francisco we’re participating—well, we have a cable campaign. The cable contract in San Francisco is being renegotiated for the first time in 40 years. So we have basically standards and criteria from about 40 years ago, 30 some years ago. But we didn’t just decide on that campaign in the abstract. It actually emerged from ongoing work we’ve had with folks and dealing with folks about wanting and needing more space to tell community-based stories. Wanting and needing more resources for community-based media production, wanting to have more discussion around corporate accountability. After having those conversations with folks in our ongoing work, then we identified, oh, there’s this policy piece which is a re-franchising happening. And we said, if you’re interested please be aware of this and how would you like to work on it, right? So setting that up. And part of that conversation then in working with folks who are based in local communities is that they rely on local, community, and ethnic media. It’s part and parcel, in California it’s actually the majority media. And in California, where we are, the majority of the population is folks that are considered minorities elsewhere. So not only is it strategic, but it’s also part of the organizing model. We already work with folks, and these are the places that they turn to. So we’ve been doing, for example, a series of community workshops in preparation for this upcoming needs assessment that the city is conducting. And so in the community workshops, we’re spending a lot of time promoting and working with the local press in the Mission district, in the Spanish-language paper there. There’s a community paper we’ve worked with for a long time in Hunters Point, a black-owned paper. And they’re really involved actually right this very week. They have an editorial; we have a calendar listing; there’s a sidebar in three pieces around this workshop that’s going to happen, and then the hearing that’s going to follow.

It's absolutely crucial that we figure out a strategy. And I think there's a lot of openness on the part of ethnic and community media to this discussion because they recognize what's at stake for them as media producers and also for their constituents and their communities. But it hasn't really been figured out. I think the conversations are still at a very early place as far as what policy agendas make sense and how to message and frame those in a way that's really resonating with all of us. We have a principled back and forth around these conversations.

**Comment:** Hi, my name's Alison Stein, and I'm here also wearing two hats. I founded a group called the Younger Women's Task Force, which is a coalition of women in their late twenties and earlier thirties, in 42 states in the country. I'm working to define younger women's issues and how they may be different from issues addressed by the mainstream women's movement. And we had a conference of 200 women exactly a month ago to define a nine-point issues agenda. And while some of the issues were similar to the mainstream women's movement, there were three or four that were completely different and one of them was media. We interviewed over 500 people to say their top three issue concerns, and the fact that media made it on there shows that at least 50 people put it in their top three younger women's issues. And I found that fascinating because I follow media just in my own time. So I'm also here representing a small family foundation that we work with, and the foundation is interested in funding and working with a group that might focus on younger women in the media in particular. So I'm asking anyone what's out there, what's being done, who can we partner with? And it's not just younger women's portrayal in the media, but a lot of people spoke about not enough young women in the media. Anything you have to tell me would be much appreciated.

**Liza Dichter:** At the risk of breaking the no pitch rule, I will mention that I am on the board of a group called Women in Media and News. It's a new group that is working very specifically on those issues, and also echo that we had Youth Media Council talking earlier, when you talk about younger folks. And also March 18-20 in Boston at MIT is the Women and Media conference, and it's a very large conference at which there will probably be folks talking on a whole range of levels about that stuff. So those are three places to go pretty quickly on that.

**Harold Feld:** In good Socratic fashion I will throw a question back at you, which is, it depends on what you mean when you say that media is one of your policy concerns. If the issues are about how do you develop opportunities to own media outlets, or how do you develop opportunities to develop careers in the media, some of those things are going to move you in very different directions. If what you want to do is try to work within the system to bring women into news and so forth, number one, there's going to be a problem because the whole news industry is kind of going to hell. But number two, then you look frankly to partners who are more industry partners, which means you don't want to touch us with a 10-foot pole. By contrast, if what you want to do is something that's going to try to kick over the ant hill and assume that any system will create more opportunities for women, especially younger women, to come in either in new media or by shaking things up in old media, then you may want to look at more radical kinds of things that are interested in more fundamental change.

**Saskia Fisher:** I just want to add one thing. In terms of resources, which you may well know about, the Media Education Foundation’s *Killing Me Softly*, that series of films. Media literacy programs and workshops are a good way to get into this. You could go to schools and hold these workshops, and that would be a way of organizing people and getting them involved.

**Comment:** Hi, I’m Wyatt Closs with SEIU Service Employees National Union. And I just wanted to ask one question that goes back to the map that you whipped out at the very beginning, and it relates to some of the more recent comments. We’ve engaged as an organization in issues related to media policy and media democracy as it relates to the fact that we represent primarily low-income people of color and women that work in the service sector and their access to media as well as the portrayal and perceptions of working families and union life in general. And to that end, we’ve taken a couple of steps most recently just hosting a popular media-organizing retreat with the Arco Foundation, which was very interesting, had a range of a couple of folks from this room and some other rooms around the country. But I noticed there really weren’t that many organizations or constituencies connected yet to this fight, and when I think about something like all the tremendous activity that happened in 2004 through a variety of vehicles, whether it was America Come Together or America Votes or other types of mediums, tremendous coalitions. And now that the circus left town from a lot of those towns, you still have in each community folks holding on to those coalitions, and in fact, trying to define issues for 2005, 2006 that are locally-based, that are not connected to anything going on nationally in terms of the elections or whatever. It just seems like a perfect vehicle, where this should be hitched, and I guess I would ask just what the experience has been, or if there’s some reason for that. And I think it’s something that we would be interested in trying to help figure out how to break out because there should be SEIU, Sierra Club, women organizations, all down the line, should be in that green column you got there.

**Gene Kimmelman:** Your help would be most welcome. Linda Foley has done a lot with CWA. There’s a fundamental problem that we’ve had that we certainly could use help on and that is a lot of the national groups and civil rights groups, environmental groups, intellectually understand that there’s a connection here and there’s an important issue. But they’re fighting judicial nominees. They’re fighting to preserve the Arctic Wildlife. They’re fighting day-to-day battles and it’s hard to get those organizations to see this as of equal importance, and it probably isn’t in some fundamental way to their day-to-day lives. So there’s a need for a way to reach out that’s more thorough and complete and in a time frame that works for organizations that have these other compelling day-to-day needs. And we haven’t really cracked that one. We had a discussion at lunch about possibly even doing some of this more from the ground up, from the grassroots level, where there may be a way of bringing more of these groups together and having it trickle up to their national leaders. That’s what happened with MoveOn. MoveOn was not really involved in the media ownership fight until their own people came to them and said, why aren’t we involved? And they polled them and they found, lo and behold, there was a huge segment of MoveOn constituency that wanted to get involved. And that may be how we have to do it here.

**Harold Feld:** I would just add one more thing to this, which is when I talked about the networks of trust and so forth, one of the other things that we have to have happen in my experience has been that a lot of well-established groups, a lot of these larger groups, take a very long time to decide on anything. And that they are—how do I put this politely—they have a legitimate concern about not lending their names to things that might ultimately rebound to their discredit. And therefore, they are very reluctant to participate in campaigns that they do not control. I think that one of the main things that needs to happen is for organizations, and again, this, I think, has to come from the ground up from the members informing the leadership about this, is to say look, this is an important issue, and we don't have six months to a year for you to decide that this is going to be the next big thing and you're going to sign on to it. You should just get to know the organizations that are in this space and agree to work with them and devote what resources you can, which may only be signing on to letters, but even that helps. And be willing to put your name out there a little more even when you're less in control of the process.

**Liza Dichter:** We have time for two more. And I also just want to encourage everybody—take names, take numbers, take cards, continue the conversation outside of the room. Hopefully this isn't the last time we get to talk with each other.

**Comment:** Meg Gage, the Proteus Fund. It's an interesting discussion about the relation between local and national, and there have been some references to states. And I was interested in Harold's story about the Nebraska and Indiana broadband fights. But I wonder—it's a very large country and thousands and thousands and thousands of communities, if there are other state-based strategies. The Telecommunications Reauthorization suggests targeting senators or members of Congress, but I'm wondering what other policies or strategies or tactics there might be, especially because there's a really strong emerging network of state, of efforts to coordinate some of this kind of reform work at the state level.

**Liza Dichter:** Let's get to the final question, and then we'll get to the final comments by the panel.

**Comment:** (Deborah Rappaport) This actually is not so much a question as something you guys or anybody else might find helpful, which is an organization I've helped fund and am currently incubating upstairs from my office called Civic Space. And I don't know how familiar any of you are with it, but it's an open source software tool that's being built specifically to allow individual organizations to do their organizing. But even more powerfully to allow coalitions of organizations to basically convene online, share lists to whatever degree and extent they're comfortable with, do mailings, do retail. They've got all kinds of tools and it's sort of like a, you can take whatever modules you want. It, as of today I hope, has c3 status, if they got everything signed, and is going to be housed in a foundation. And then there are various consultants who help organizations put together Civic Space sites. But Jeff, especially listening to you, it sounds like something that might be really useful. They're based in Redwood City, and I would encourage anybody to contact me, and I'll give you their number, you can just call them in Redwood City, California.

**Harold Feld:** Now, I did want to answer the question prior to that. Since I talked on the last one, I didn't want to break in on that one, too. But as far as state campaigns guide, one is, there are a lot of people who are doing some thinking around the big issues. And I could rattle off a list here or we could talk offline about what I think are the big issues. And you could ask everybody else up here, and they could tell you what are the big issues. But the other really important thing is seizing the targets of opportunity, which is why having sustained organizations out there is so important. If you have people who are motivated to try to do community media, put out better content, do educational stuff. What national organizations can try to offer these, and what funders can try to create resources for, are the ability to train those local and state groups to identify and seek out possible opportunities.

**Jeff Perlestein:** I just wanted to jump in, hopefully merging a point that I hoped to make earlier, and hopefully it will fit with what Harold said a bit. But in order to really address this theme that we've heard around the need for ongoing infrastructure in local and regional hubs that can really be mobilized around national stuff, but also respond to the daily needs of folks in local communities and build those relationships, there needs to be a little bit of a shift in funding of this work. And we've talked about more funding, but we also wanted to talk not just around quantity, but the type of funding. So I just, to briefly make this point, because we'd meant to earlier because Malkia and I were talking about this point, is we need to learn from the Right in some really clear ways. And we don't want to be the Right of course, but there are some strategic things that they've done really well. And especially around funding, we just wanted to make the point that they have been very clear around certain funding strategies, and I'll just be very specific and concise. They give multiyear grants. They give general operating grants and they have what they call a principle called aggressive funding, which doesn't mean that they're pushing you, pushing you, pushing you. But they're funding organizations are doing edgy, innovative, cutting-edge stuff that really is pushing the boundaries and is really having a rapid response impact on the ongoing work that we all need to do. So this is a funder's briefing. I'll confess it's my first one ever. I'm not sure if I've been completely inappropriate, but we wanted to push that back to you. And this was one of the things in the day long session yesterday amongst these peer orgs as we build toward really solidifying and strengthening our work together and figuring out a framework where other groups can plug in quickly and powerfully, this was one piece that we wanted to suggest to you all, and just really want to thank you for considering that.

**Liza Dichter:** I want to thank Jeff and all the panelists. I want to particularly thank you for bringing it back on home to the ground that we stand on, and hope that you all have a really productive beginning of a discussion, or continuing of discussion as you all meet now. I want to mention again about continuing the conversation. As David mentioned there is the National Conference on Media Reform that's coming up in St. Louis in May. There's also other events coming up. FreePress.net, my organization, mediaactioncenter.org has calendars of events.....(more on calendars)

**Becky Lentz:** announcements....thanks...

**David Haas:** more announcements....