



## Audio Now Available From National Conference For Media Reform in Boston

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NCMR by FreePress

Last weekend we popped in to the National Conference for Media Reform in Boston, hosted by FreePress.org, the most outspoken advocate for net neutrality over ten years. It ran last Friday to Sunday, combining the themes of media, technology and democracy. I personally checked in on Saturday where I attended four panels, heard a few speeches and made the rounds. OpEdNews was well received as a source for independent web journalism countering widespread dissatisfaction with mainstream media.

It was well worth the visit, packed with useful ways to network, harness emerging technology and understand ways to get involved, be more effective or cross-pollinate with others. Anyone who missed the event can now catch up in a major way as [full, free audio for the presentations have been posted online here](#).

I missed keynote speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senator Bernie Sanders, Donna Edwards, Joseph Stieglitz, Craig Newmark of craigslist.org, Katrina vanden Heuval and John Nichols of

The Nation, but I caught outgoing FCC commissioner Michael Copps and Rep. Ted Markey warning about overtures which now seek to diminish the independence of voices on the internet.

One panel featuring marquee names like Glenn Greenwald, Amy Goodman and Christopher Warren was [WikiLeaks, Journalism and Modern-Day Muckraking](#) which now has the full audio online. There were many great workshops being offered simultaneously so it was hard to choose which to attend in person. The rooms were overcrowded, with attendees sitting all over the floor and the sessions were followed by furious networking.

The first panel I attended was called "The Future of Journalism is...Comics" which featured comic geeks (like me) covering the ways comic art has been creeping into journalism - [nice example here](#). Panelists Sarah Jaffee of GRITtv and war-correspondent cartoonist Matt Bors shared innovative ways the comic medium is creeping into new media. Presenter Susan Cagle (who had a cartoon infographic on the front page of Huffington Post the same day) shared her vision for connecting with audiences in new and more immersive ways. Matt Renner of truthout.org was among the many attendees, recognizing that media constantly needs fresh approaches in the quest for the new voter, the youth demographic, or the jaded media watcher. Hear the [full audio of the panel online free here](#).

[Another workshop](#) explained the process of building community radio stations using low power FM signals which cover a 4-8 mile radius. Congress just recently passed a bill allowing LPFM licenses for the first time, meaning anyone can start a public radio station. Prometheus Radio Project didn't just offer primers on engineering, set up and licensing, they were actively recruiting potential broadcasters to help train, fund and get underway in the cause of social change.

The next symposium on my list was [Open Sourcing Community Media](#) which offered advice on how to start and maintain a digital media-based website featuring audio, video, stills and original writing. It may seem obvious today that anyone can start a blog or a YouTube channel, but the presenters stressed the importance of hosting and controlling your own content as time goes on and the project gets more involved.

Though it may seem costly and prohibitively technical, it's easier than ever today to build and host a site using free open source software such as Drupal, so it is wise for sites with large, valuable digital archives to preserve and control access. Another pall hanging over the NCMR event was news of the House vote just weeks ago which blocked implementation of the new FCC net neutrality rules. Also discussed were host sites onerous user agreements and privacy policies, but [rumors are already swirling](#) around market-leading Google launching a micropay model for online video viewing.

The last panel I attended was [Real Issues vs. Astroturf: Confronting the Koch Brothers](#). It was packed to the gills with extensive media coverage and ran out of time long before the questions ran out, a stunning look inside the network of billionaires that have been

affecting policy and public opinion by manipulating media. Presenters included Lee Fang of ThinkProgress, Timothy Karr from event host FreePress.org, Doug Clopp from Common Cause, Lisa Graves from SourceWatch.org and Kert Davies from Greenpeace.

This presentation was a good example of what "media reform" means, inviting people to get more informed, more active, more interconnected and more organized using the internet, mobile devices and technologies that enable "crowdsourcing", or collaborative reporting which uses geographical mapping, datastreams, timestamping or networking to harness the aggregate strength in numbers. SourceWatch, for example put out the call for volunteer editors to help document what you are seeing in the news and identify who is behind the many front groups we see buying ads, making campaign donations or sponsoring deceptive media that doesn't accurately represent real people. But there is much more help now needed.

A major concern looking ahead to 2012 will be the pervasive influence of "Citizens United" donations which fund attack ads in "indirect" support of national candidates and can now be both unlimited and fully anonymous. Secretive superPACs and bundlers like the Koch Brother's Americans for Prosperity, the Cato Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the US Chamber of Commerce, FreedomWorks and Karl Rove's CrossroadsGPS will be shattering spending records in trying to take over the US Senate and fortify the GOP majority in the House via heavy spending.

Indeed, the new chair of the RNC is Wisconsin's Reince Preibus who used these tactics to take out Senator Russ Feingold and put in Governor Scott Walker, so the stage is set for massive ad buys using corporate funds to target candidates from coast to coast, meaning "reform media" will need all hands on deck. How can you help? Besides insider leaks, whistleblowers, activists and advocates, citizen journalists, photographers or researchers can help by finding contact info for secret PACs, identifying officers, taking pictures of their offices or PO Boxes or [simply documenting who sponsors ads on radio or TV](#).

[The Sunlight Foundation](#) website offers powerful tools for transparency like Follow the Unlimited Money, Influence Tracker and many more which offer valuable data for writers and researchers tracing [campaign funds to candidates](#), legislation, subsidies and more. But government is vast and so these connections get more and more well-concealed, especially on the local level. So it's up to the people who live in the district to take over the job the press no longer does, connecting the dots for the voter to counter the effect of the secret corporate media blitz that has given us some of the least liked Congresses in history.

Some of the useful tips for technology use can be found in [Mobile Democracy: Your Phone Is Political](#) which teaches organizers how smartphones can be a powerful real-time tool for collecting contacts, fundraising or petitioning. Picture a speaker at a rally with a huge fired up audience announcing a simple SMS address listeners can text to sign themselves up in seconds. But also imagine citizens for example reporting which streets had not yet been plowed to debunk the claims of a deceptive mayor.

Think also how vital info-gathering has been in places like Cairo, Tehran, Tunisia, Libya or Yemen where it is crucial to document government crackdowns, or anywhere outbreaks of violence need to be publicized. The ability to take and share text, pictures, audio and video is also changing the face of security, litigation, exit polling, and much more. Meaning 'witness' in Swahili, the [Ushahidi](#) mobile app platform allows real-time crisis reporting, election watching, data mapping, crime statistic compilation and more. New apps for mobile phones even allow concerned smartphone users to help on a comprehensive census of honeybees.

Another useful tip for attendees to continue discussions beyond the conference was the use of Twitter hashtags (#) for each topic. For example, those who want to stay in touch via tweeting following the comics panel have been using #graphicjournos. This allows anyone to search Twitter using that hashtag to find tweets from anyone else. The #NCOMR hashtag has also been seeing use all this week by attendees.

Below are just a few of the [over 70 panel topics](#) presented which you can now click on to hear the full audio. Feel free to come back here after listening to share or discuss.

[Cracking the Code: How to Get Your Message Across to the Mainstream Media](#)

[What's Next for Net Neutrality?](#)

[Tools for Change: Mapping Media in Your Community](#)

[Emerging Technologies for Community-Controlled Infrastructure](#)

[Mobile Voices, Mobile Justice: A Strategy Session on Telephones, Wireless Policy and Social Change](#)

[The New Face of Media Concentration: Mega Mergers and Covert Consolidation](#)