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The New Media, Globalization, and the Public Interest: A Conversation with Newton N. Minow (2003)

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The New Media, Globalization, and the Public Interest: A Conversation with Newton N. Minow

This article provides a summary of a weekend-long convocation held in April 2002 that was sponsored by the Coudert Institute in West Palm Beach, Florida. The motto of the nonprofit group, which was founded by Dale Coudert in 2001, is, “Subjects That Matter, with People Who Make a Difference.” Each mid-winter through early-spring season, the nonpartisan and nonideological Coudert Institute organizes conversations and seminars on an eclectic array of topics featuring prominent academics, artists, musicians, and practitioners. The institute’s goal is to spark open and inclusive dialogue directed to critical reflection and enlightenment. This selection contains the fruits of a gathering that pondered the meaning of “the public interest” in a rapidly shifting media environment. It took place as digital communications tools were on the rise and before the advent of social media and other digital platforms. The legendary Newton N. Minow, chairman of the Federal Communications System in the early 1960s when broadcasting was coming of age—who also received the Presidential Medal of Honor from President Barack Obama in November 2016 for his lifetime of public service—was the guest of honor. This article presents the key topics and questions addressed, along with summary conclusions reached, to: (1) reinvest in public education, using revenues generated by auctioning portions of the digital spectrum; (2) create an international “Voice of Democracy” via a global coalition of democracies; and (3) organize a “philanthropic summit” to discuss the ways and means of leveraging endowment investment assets, across the portfolio, toward public interest purposes—specifically those concerning digital freedom and the advancement of democratic ideals and practices.

Preface

April 2–4, 2002

Coudert Institute, Palm Beach, Florida

The Coudert Institute would like to acknowledge and express its sincere gratitude to the RAM Trust, the Kaplan Family Foundation, and the Siebert Foundation for helping to support the production of this and future reports on the Institute’s seminars. In particular, we thank Bob and Milly Monks, Richard Kaplan and Edwina Sandys, and Muriel Siebert, whose vision, commitment, and good faith made this initiative possible.

We also would like to express our appreciation to Newton N. Minow, one of our nation’s living treasures who provided us with the unparalleled benefits of his extraordinary experience and mind. Together with his wife, Josephine Minow, and daughter, Nell Minow, who provided additional important commentary and insight, the April 2002 seminar provided us with world-class, triple billing. Another round of heartfelt thanks go to Ervin S. Duggan, former President of PBS and presidential appointee to the Federal Communications Commission, who lent a wise and witty presence to the gathering, particularly in posing the idea of a “Voice of Democracy.”

“The New Media, Globalization, and the Public Interest: A Conversation with Newton N. Minow” (West Palm Beach, FL: Coudert Institute, 2003). Reprinted by permission of the Coudert Institute.

Dr. Noel Brown did his usual masterful job at guiding the discussions as moderator; seminar participants gave generously of their time to reflect on the array of issues regarding how the new media might foster innovative and practical approaches to lifelong learning; Dr. Marcy Murningham skillfully wove multiple threads of the discussion into a coherent whole; Rusudan Grigolia and Audrey Megquier helped to convert the comments of strangers into a viable digital and written record; Matthew Vasconcellos' wizardry made the manuscript better; and Linda Ward assured, as always, the Institute's success by effectively managing the myriad tasks associated with putting on a program. Last but most certainly not least, Dr. Steven Rose provided the magnificent sculpture, which was awarded to Newton Minow as the inaugural Coudert Institute Prize. For this, and for countless other exceptional contributions, we are forever grateful.

—Dale Coudert, Founder and Chair, Coudert Institute
Palm Beach, February 2003

Introduction

A democratic society depends upon an informed and educated citizenry.
—Thomas Jefferson

The words “public interest” are at the heart of what Congress did in 1934, and they remain at the heart of our tomorrows. . . .

As the leader of the free world, it is time for us to do what's right—to speak of idealism, sacrifice, and the nurturing of values essential to human freedom—and to speak in a bold, clear voice. . . .

On September 11 everything changed except the way we think. It is hard to change the way we think. But we know that ideas last longer than people do, and that two important ideas of the 20th century are now in direct competition: the ideas of mass communication and mass destruction. The great question of our time is whether we will be wise enough to use one to avoid the other.

—Newton N. Minow

One wonders how Thomas Jefferson's words might apply in our current “revolution,” a vastly changed environment wherein the revolution is not just about technology, but about social, political, economic, and cultural changes, too. As in other critical moments in American history, citizen sage Newton Minow reminds us, we have important promises to keep: to future generations, as well as to those timeless educational, civic, and cultural values we hold dear. We need to renew these promises, not just within our own nation, but also within a world that is increasingly interdependent and ambivalent about America's power.

Few would dispute Jefferson's assertion of the critical role of education and, by extension, communications technology—that is, the deliberate transmission of ideas, images, and information—in assuring a democratic society of self-governance. Disagreements occur over methods and means, as well as context and content. Yet within the American tradition, education has always served a public interest, and therefore been perceived as a public good, worthy of public support and public investment. Yet we seem to have forgotten this noble claim, as our “informed and educated citizenry” appears more eager to participate in commercial culture rather than civil society, and communications technologies inhabit oligopolistic networks responsive more to markets than wise politics and civic virtue.

This shift in emphasis poses a clear and present danger, not just to our own democratic society but also—as we come to understand how the rest of the world sees us—to our position in a rapidly globalizing society. Because the September 11 attack on America was an attack on American ideas—the ideas that make us who we are, such as democracy, freedom, justice, and the right to live a good life—as much as it was an attack on American culture, capitalism, and way of life, the manner in which we revive an “informed and educated citizenry”—not just in America, but throughout the world—has repercussions not only for our democratic society but for our national security as well.

Reflective Deliberation

Therein lies the problem that was addressed at a gathering organized by the Palm Beach-based Coudert Institute in April 2002, in conversation with Newton N. Minow, renowned champion of the notion that public communications technologies should be directed to the democratic ideal. Minow is a visionary, statesman, and champion of the notion that public communications technologies, particularly digital technologies, are survival tools in a moral adventure in service to liberty and the human heart. Among a lifetime of notable accomplishments too numerous to mention here, a few stand out: he was appointed by President John F. Kennedy as chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC); he also was both director and chairman of the Public Broadcasting System (PBS), the Rand Corporation, and Carnegie Corporation of New York. He was a board member of CBS and the Tribune Company and is a life trustee of Notre Dame and Northwestern Universities; in 1989 he was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Currently Senior Counsel to Sidley Austin Brown & Wood, an international law firm, Newt Minow also is the Annenberg Professor of Communications Law and Policy at Northwestern University, and co-author, with Craig LaMay, of *Abandoned in the Wasteland: Children, Television and the First Amendment*, published in 1995.¹ The “wasteland” title is drawn from a speech he gave to the National Association of Broadcasters on May 9, 1961—he was FCC chairman at the time—in which he famously referred to television as a “vast wasteland,” an oft-quoted term for years to come.² More recently, Minow also is co-author, with Lawrence K. Grossman, of *A Digital Gift to the Nation: Fulfilling the Promise of the Digital and Internet Age*, a compendium of background papers published by The Century Foundation, from a diverse group of distinguished parties on how the nonprofit sector might accomplish a smooth transition to the digital age. Taken together, *A Digital Gift to the Nation* envisions the creation of a public trust fund emanating from the proceeds of the ongoing public auctions of parts of the electromagnetic spectrum. That endowment could help underwrite the development of intellectual and cultural capital, as an alternative to the marketplace, writes Richard C. Leone, president of The Century Foundation in the book’s foreword.³ The volume is a project of the newly-formed Digital Promise project, <http://digitalpromise.org/>, whose aim is to harness digital technology in ways that improve learning opportunities.

Minow and his wife, Jo, a prominent museum trustee and civic leader in her own right, live in Chicago; they both continue to remain active in local and national public affairs. Joining the Minows for the Coudert conversations was their daughter, Nell, editor of *The Corporate Library* (which she co-founded with business partner Bob Monks) and one of the world’s leading authors and experts on corporate governance and accountability. Nell Minow is a perceptive and witty commentator on various corporate wrongdoings whose opinion is keenly sought by a range of electronic and print media. She also has a parallel career as a nationally syndicated movie critic,

with a book, *The Movie Mom's Guide to Family Movies*, website, and series of articles to her credit.⁴ Nell's husband David Apatoff, an artist and highly regarded co-chair of the intellectual property and technology group at the Washington D.C. law firm Arnold & Porter, also attended; his piquant contributions added depth to some of the finer points of media freedom.

Another special guest at the April meeting who lent the wisdom of several decades of public service was Ervin Duggan, PBS President (1994–1999) and passionate advocate for media ethics. Duggan joined PBS as its fourth president and chief executive officer. Under his leadership, PBS extended its mission of education, culture, and citizenship into the digital era and interactive TV; PBS Online on the Internet, Schedule X on DBS satellites, and PBS records on compact discs are examples of the broadcasting unit's transformation into its digital self. During his tenure, Duggan also worked to create a more entrepreneurial climate at PBS that would generate new sources of revenue for public television. Prior to his PBS duties, Duggan served as a commissioner of the FCC, appointed by President George Bush. He has been involved with public broadcasting since 1967 when, as a member of President Lyndon B. Johnson's staff, he helped craft the Public Broadcasting Act. He began his Washington career as a reporter for the *Washington Post* in the early 1960s. Erv Duggan currently serves as President of the nonprofit Society for the Four Arts in Palm Beach.

With combined professional experience covering the entire lifetime of public broadcasting, both Minow and Duggan provided timely insights into the forces giving rise to our current condition and the opportunity for public broadcasting and the "new media"—comprising both entertainment and journalism—to deal with it. Joining them in the discussion were 33 leaders in the worlds of entertainment and the arts, journalism and public broadcasting, business, education, public service, health care, nonprofit organizations, and the law, all of whom are members of the Palm Beach community.

While the primary focus throughout the 1½-day program was on how digital technologies can enhance freedom, both domestically and globally, the conversations yielded major insights into the state of public lifelong education as well as the opportunity for global media partnerships, all in pursuit of the democratic ideal.

Key questions addressed were:

How might America restore her power in the cultivation of an informed and educated citizenry that sustains freedom and democracy, thus keeping faith with our democratic ideals?

What can we do, both here and abroad—recognizing that such boundary distinctions are inadequate to today's world—to restore America's voice, a voice that gives expression to the unfinished project of building a better world, with liberty and justice for all?

In doing so, how might we create space for other voices, for encouraging broader reflection and discussion of how others might do the same, for how human dignity might be elevated, not diminished, and better able to confront those with vast arsenals and small minds?

Put another way, how might American values be used as tools for promoting freedom and democracy, thus effectively combating the combustible forces of oppression, hatred, ignorance, and fear?

Furthermore, in communicating its message, how might America avoid making matters worse, or enriching the xenophobic soil that is the terrorists' breeding ground?

In a wide-ranging, structured conversation, the distinguished group of participants examined the forces giving rise to our current condition and the opportunity for public broadcasting and the

“new media” to address it. Under scrutiny was the woeful neglect of our public interest obligation, both domestic and worldwide, and what we should do about it. Beyond the descriptive and analytic discussions, the group concluded with an appeal for rededicating ourselves to reconnecting public assets—especially communications and digital technologies—to the public interest, and employing the tools of popular culture and journalism in doing so. Specifically, the group considered three strategic options, described below.

Reinvest in Education

Revenues generated by the auction of the digital spectrum should be reinvested in important needs in education, particularly the creation of quality program content and the support of innovative ideas and techniques that enhance learning and help build civic integrity. This would involve either steering dollars toward existing reputable and trustworthy institutions (such as the National Science Foundation or the Library of Congress), or through the endowment of new structures specifically charged to stimulate experimental approaches to the nation’s educational and informational mission (such as the Digital Opportunity Investment Trust proposed by the Digital Promise Project).

International “Voice of Democracy”

Working with an international coalition of democracies, a “Voice of Democracy” should be established that helps to convey democratic ideas and ideals, while cultivating the “open space” for the free exchange of ideas and information, the amelioration of popular discontent and enmity, and the emergence of institutions and laws hospitable to freedom and democracy. This “Voice of Democracy” would pursue two media avenues, one pertaining to entertainment and the other to building a free press, both of which pave the way toward a culture of democracy and civil society. Thus does the Voice of Democracy offer opportunities and ideas that can find root in closed societies and transform them, rather than inflame them to further acts of hostility and violence.

On the former, the Voice of Democracy would draw upon on primary vehicles of contemporary media and popular culture—television shows, movies, music, the Internet and other electronic technologies—as well as respected journalists in “telling democracy’s story” in all its rich and varied form. The use of narrative in expanding mutual awareness is a positive response to what has already been demonstrated: that the artifacts of American culture hold the power to both enchant and repel those who do not know us very well.

On the latter, the Voice of Democracy would be a vehicle for media freedom, helping to channel assistance to so-called closed societies, expose their journalists to international news standards, foster the growth of media entrepreneurs, and help build media outlets that are independent of government restriction. Precedent for this already exists in the efforts to promote independent media following the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe. This form of social investing holds the promise of being extended to other regions, as well.

Coudert Institute discussants were quick to caution against further inflammation of America’s global pop cultural hegemony, or promulgation of program content that contradicts the truths for which democratic societies stand. The choice of outlets will influence credibility; a special challenge will be to accommodate the very different interpretations of democracy within—and among—nations that embrace it. Nevertheless, the general feeling was that we do a better job selling Coke and MTV than we do our policies and principles, and we should utilize these tools in cultivating broader understanding of the human side of democratic enterprise.

Despite the fact that democratic values are not commodities, to be bought and sold in the global marketplace, a “Voice of Democracy” could serve as a platform for putting a human face on the quest for self-governance and self-determination, beyond the crass commercialism that currently dominates global perceptions and in recognition of the multiple layers of our shared human condition.

Leverage Investment Assets toward Public Purposes

Billions of dollars in assets invested by nonprofit institutional investors, particularly endowments, could be leveraged in ways that help advance these ideas. A first step: convene major endowments in a “philanthropic summit” to identify ways in which their various assets, both financial and nonfinancial, might be mobilized in pursuit of both of these ideas. As grantmakers, shareowners, community builders, and gadflies, foundations and other endowments are in a key position to provide the necessary catalytic combustion that initiates and accelerates interest in harnessing communication technologies toward democratic ideals, particularly the cultivation of an “educated and informed citizenry,” both domestic and global. Coudert Institute participants were enthusiastic about convening a select group of foundation and endowment leaders to discuss ways and means of moving forward.

The Media and the Public Interest Standard

Robert Hutchins once said something that had a deep impact on me. He said, “Most of us spend our lives on the urgent, rather than the important.” Most of us spend our lives on the urgent rather than on the important things. It’s true. We’re racing for what has to be done in the next few minutes and very seldom take the time to really think about things.
—Newton N. Minow

The event began with a reception and dinner, followed by a program that featured special guest Newton N. Minow being interviewed by his daughter, Nell. Shared here were critical incidents and issues, as lived by one of the nation’s foremost statesmen—“someone who has constantly been trying to change things, and has been a witness,” as Bob Monks put it in his introductory remarks—which also provided a framework for subsequent dialogue.

A key topic involved our nation’s public commitment to lifelong education, and how best to keep this commitment: the development of a national educational endowment or trust fund, supported by revenues flowing from government auctions of the electromagnetic spectrum. Earnings from the investments of the proposed national endowment, called the Digital Opportunity Investment Trust (“DO IT”), would then be used to help underwrite innovative ventures in lifelong learning, forge public and private sector partnerships with our vast array of cultural resources, and draw on the power of the Internet and other new information technologies to improve opportunities for lifelong learning.

Bob Monks again: “What Newt Minow and his colleague [former president of NBC News and PBS], Larry Grossman, spoke about was to try to take these billions of dollars from selling bandwidth, and to have an entrepreneurial operation that takes advantage of the new ideas. “If you have an entrepreneurial institution with enough money, it’s possible that we can create something of quality that will not have to do the impossible job of competing with entrenched people, the guys that own the networks.”

In addition to personal reflections and lifelong learning, the third part of program concentrated on America's role in world politics, and how media and entertainment vehicles can be part of an overall approach to public diplomacy. Examined here were the Voice of America, its strengths and limitations (Minow considers it less a "voice" than a "whisper"), and the need for Americans to be more aware of the perceptions and concerns of other global citizens.

Several thematic tracks emerged, along with a host of related questions. These tracks included:

- The media and the public interest standard
- The media and domestic politics
- The media and lifelong education
- The media, national security, and public diplomacy

What Public Interest?

Many of us worry about declining participation in public life, higher expectations and lowered levels of educational achievement, and the use and nature of American power in the rest of the world. We distrust politicians, journalists, and business leaders, and have little patience for reassurances that "the invisible hand" will make things better. Indeed, we know that "the invisible hand" is connected to the body politic, driven by the behavior of capital markets and consumers who have very real feelings, aspirations, and sentiments. We shudder at the thought of another attack like September 11th, take on the unfamiliar mantle of security readiness, and wonder if, among other measures, "public diplomacy" will immunize us from extremist actions that can outfox our mighty arsenals. (As those living in Northern Ireland, Beirut, and other divided societies have known for ages, all it takes is one person with a homemade bomb to change the course of history—thus the term "asymmetric," to describe this new kind of balance of power.)

While media markets are not serving us very well, the advent and convergence of new digital tools and "content-distribution systems" (cable, satellite, wireless, video, digital video disk, and so on) have shaken the status quo, thus challenging us to devise new policies, laws, and structures that are compatible with our values and principles. The time is ripe for bold thinking and action, where the new technologies are used to enrich and promote lifelong learning, both in America and throughout the world.

What does "the public interest" mean—that is, whose interest is being served? Who should decide? Who bears responsibility for fulfilling it? What methods should be used? How can we gauge our progress, and make needed adjustments? What do we do about differences of opinion? How might agreements on "the public interest" be reached without sacrificing unique preferences and traditions, or resorting to violent forms of persuasion?

In a pluralist society, there will never be perfect agreement as to how we should hold broadcasters accountable to a "public interest standard," despite many decades of academic inquiry, judicial analysis, and political debate. And like many big concepts, the idea of "the public interest" has meant different things at different times. Former FCC Chairman Minow noted that, beginning with the Radio Act of 1927, the phrase "public interest, convenience and necessity" has provided the battleground for broadcasting's regulatory debate. The phrase continues to be a source of criticism, with some charging that it "is vague to the point of vacuousness, providing neither guidance nor constraint on the [regulatory] agency's action."⁵

In response to a question posed by his daughter, Nell, Minow recounts a story about the origins of the public interest standard in the Federal Communications Act. “I wanted to track down the author of that and I found him. His name was Senator Clarence Dill, of the State of Washington, and he was still alive.

He was no longer a Senator, but I called him in the State of Washington and I told him I wanted this meeting, so he came to Washington to my office. I said, “Senator Dill, I’ve read that act now 40 times. What did you mean when you said the public interest, convenience and necessity?””

He said, “Well, you know, we wrote that law during the Depression. We wanted people to risk their investment to go into the broadcasting business, and at the same time we knew that it was affected by the obligations of public service because not everybody could have a channel.”

Minow continued, recalling Dill’s words:

I had a young man who worked for me, who came from the Interstate Commerce Commission, and he said, “Senator Dill, the Interstate Commerce Act says that the statutory test is the public interest, convenience and necessity.” Senator Dill said, “*That sounds pretty good,*” so they put that in the law. The problem with that is that the Interstate Commerce Act regulates public utilities, people who have monopolies, people who are obligated to serve everyone, whereas the broadcasting act says in the next section broadcasters are not the public utility.

In addition to its unclear meaning and manifestation, “the public interest” also was discussed in terms of corporate monopolies and political influence. Everyone acknowledged that existing carriers, even the Public Broadcasting Corporation, are part of a consolidating business world in which survival depends on being big, and the FCC has not made up its mind about how big is big enough, as well as its proper regulatory role. Most agreed that corporate “bigness” does not translate automatically into “the public interest” or “the common good”; without enlightened leadership, it can easily produce “the common bad.”

Whatever our presumptions might be concerning “the public interest”—and on that there is no clear consensus—one hears very little current discussion of it, or what minimum standards should be applied. Complicating the picture, as several pointed out, is the fact that even if there *was* some loose agreement on just what “the public interest” includes, the advent of the Internet and other wireless technologies bring such decentralization and fragmentation that deliberate and coordinated policy action becomes difficult.

Attendees involved with education said that the “digital divide” between those having access to the new media and those who do not works against the public interest, and is a big impediment to preparing young people for an uncertain future. It also poses a problem regarding future civic engagement, which is a potential threat to democracy.

Everyone agreed that broadcasting is not only a private business, it is a public trust. The public owns the airwaves, and broadcasters are licensed to use frequency, or bandwidth, in exchange for a commitment to allocate a portion of their programming to the public interest. But, according to Minow (whose experience, in his words, “covers the waterfront from the government to public broadcasting to commercial broadcasting—I’ve seen every side of it”), referring to the origins of the Federal Communications Act, “We started off from the beginning

with an inherent contradiction. The Federal Communications Act says that broadcasters are obligated by law to serve ‘the public interest, convenience and necessity.’”

The law relies on this standard to regulate private broadcasters, but does not consider them public assets. Instead of the best of both worlds, there has always been confusion and disagreement. “We started off from the beginning with an inherent contradiction and the wrestling goes on,” he said.

The idea of the public interest, and what it means—we went off in two directions at the same time. The problem is we’ve set up a very bad system. We have never laid out as other countries have done, the minimum obligations of public service in exchange for a broadcast license. We’ve never said, “You’ve got to provide time for political candidates without charge.” We’ve never said, “You got to do this, you got to do that.” We have laid it all out, and it’s now a rough, competitive marketplace. If I was a commercial broadcaster today, I would be extremely upset by the fact that cable, my principle competitor, has two sources of income—the subscription income from the home viewer and advertising income—while I only have one possible source of income—advertising. . . . It’s not fair.

The Media and Domestic Politics

What should the media be doing to encourage higher levels of civic engagement, particularly voter participation, citizen representation, and free and fair elections? What about the business of campaign finance? Or the business of media itself, particularly the preservation of quality journalism and a free press, against market pressures and the (black) bottom line?

Another area addressed by the group was the role of politics in assuring that broadcasters fulfill their public interest obligation, however ambivalent or elusive this may be. The thing about politics, however, is that special interests, rather than the public interest, often carry the day—and in this modern era of high-priced campaign costs, the preferences of broadcasters and their lobbyists often trump those of the voting population.

“I learned when I was at the FCC that outside of your mother, the local broadcaster was probably the greatest influence on a congressman’s life because the local broadcaster could make you or break you in the minds of most congressmen,” said Minow. “And when they called, everything stopped.”

“The airwaves belong to the American people, the American people belong to the Congress, and the Congress belongs to the local TV broadcasters,” said Bob Monks, in reference to the Minow’s observation. “There must be some way in which decently motivated, decently intelligent people can figure out a way in which to be constructively involved in finding a solution.” He went on to ask whether there is any way of breaking that “iron connection,” or thinking of the problem in different ways more likely to succeed.

“I’m not sure under the current system you can change it,” Minow replied. “The political force, the lobbying force, the congressmen—and this is not even about partisanship. This is as true of the Republicans as the Democrats, and the fact of life is that a congressman does not want to offend his local broadcaster. He’s dependent on him.”

There was more consensus in the Coudert group as to the need for the U.S. to be more involved in helping to build a free press in other parts of the world than there was over the media’s obligation to cultivate citizenship, and assure free and fair elections here at home. “There are only three countries in the world that do not provide some form of public service time

for political candidates without candidates having to buy that time,” Minow told the group during the first evening’s discussion track. “They are Sri Lanka, Taiwan and the United States.

“All other countries in the world—particularly the English speaking countries like the UK and Canada, and countries like Japan and Germany and the Scandinavian countries—all provide some form of television. The term that they use for it, which in my opinion is the wrong word, is ‘free time.’ I don’t regard it as ‘free time.’ The people who have free time are the broadcasters who get their channels without having to pay anything for them—unlike the cell phone or other people who have to buy the channels. The broadcasters have free time. The idea is in exchange for that free time, they’re supposed to provide public service. And nothing is more important obviously, in a democratic country than the election process and the chance for candidates to present their views to the nation. . . .

“We now have candidates scrambling to sell the Lincoln bedroom, to rent it out to raise money, to have these massive, multi-million dollar fundraisers—this is, both parties, not one or the other, they’re both the same. It’s such an irony to me. They sell access to something all of us own—namely, our government—so that they can then buy access to something *else* all of us own, which are the radio-television channels. So it’s a terrible system and most of the pressure for money that the candidate raise goes to buy radio and television time.”

While everyone agreed that the high costs of political campaigns are bad for democracy, a spirited discussion was waged over whether or not candidates should be given free media time during election season. A few individuals said it was not the government’s job to determine the amount of money candidates should receive, and that “content carriers” should donate airspace for otherwise-costly campaign messages. Newt Minow said he would give broadcasters the choice: Pay for their license, or volunteer to provide access to candidates. The precedent for granting free licensure in exchange for public service already exists; Minow would modify this, giving companies an alternative—with proceeds helping to underwrite innovative educational programs.

Other Questions

Throughout the gathering, participants addressed other major issues.

The Media and Lifelong Education

How can we reduce the “digital divide” by expanding access to technologies of freedom? What public goods should be reinvested in public education, for all ages? How can the media, especially digital forms, make our nation’s cultural treasures more accessible to everyone? How can the media better leverage its considerable assets—tangible and intangible—into constructive educational partnerships with other companies, government, and nonprofit institutions?

The Media, National Security, and Public Diplomacy

How can we reduce global misperceptions and inaccuracies of who we Americans are? Speaking of which: What do we mean by “America”? How can we reduce American misperceptions and inaccuracies of who “they” are? How can we reduce the gap between the “we” and the “they”? How might we listen better? How might we be more successful at getting others to listen to us?

As part of this commitment to improve global communication and understanding, what opportunities for joint production, financing, and distribution of television, radio, and film

programs can we create with talented people from other democratic societies in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Pacific Islands?

Notes

¹ Newton N. Minow and Craig LaMay, *Abandoned in the Wasteland: Children, Television and the First Amendment* (New York: Hill & Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1995).

² “Television and the Public Interest,” which he delivered on May 9, 1961, at the National Association of Broadcasters, was Minow’s inaugural public address as President Kennedy’s Chairman of the FCC. *American Rhetoric Top 100 Speeches* maintains an audio and text version of the speech at <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/newtonminow.htm>. Both the speech and a three-hour “Emmy TV Legends” interview, conducted by Chuck Olin on July 21, 1999, can be accessed at the Archive of American Television, <http://www.emmytvlegends.org/interviews/people/newton-n-minow>.

³ Lawrence K. Grossman and Newton N. Minow, *A Digital Gift to the Nation: Fulfilling the Promise of the Digital and Internet Age* (New York: The Century Foundation Press, 2001).

⁴ Nell Minow, *The Movie Mom’s Guide to Family Movies* (New York: Avon Books, 1999). See also www.moviemom.com.

⁵ The statutory core of the “public interest standard” can be found in Sections 307 and 309 of the 1934 Communications Act, which authorized the FCC to grant the use of a frequency for a limited term to an applicant that demonstrates that the proposed service would serve “the public interest, convenience, and necessity.” License renewal applicants are to be evaluated under the same standard. The meaning of the public interest standard and the regulatory authority it vests in the FCC have evolved; what worked in 1934 may need to be revised to suit the demands and expectations of the 21st century. Quotations extracted from Glen O. Robinson, “Title I, The Federal Communications Act: An Essay on Origins and Regulatory Purpose,” in Max D. Paglin, ed., *A Legislative History of the Communications Act of 1934* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), and appeared in a lucid elaboration of the evolution of the public interest standard that highlighted key parts of the current debate: See Erwin G. Krasnow, *The “Public Interest Standard”: The Elusive Search for the Holy Grail*, Briefing Paper Prepared for the Advisory Committee on Public Interest Obligations of Digital Television Broadcasters (Washington, D.C.: October 22, 1997).