

Press Release from Lawrence Lessig

Professor, Stanford Law School & Founder, Center for Internet and Society

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Wednesday, April 25, 2007

PLEASE CONTACT:

FreeDebates@gmail.com

Massive Bipartisan Alliance Asks Republican and Democratic National Committees To Ensure All Presidential Debate Video Can Be Legally Put On Sites Like YouTube

Letters to RNC and DNC request all debate footage be put in public domain or licensed as “Creative Commons”

75 Signers Include: Leading technologists, Founders of Craigslist and Wikipedia, national women’s/civil rights/veterans/labor organizations, progressives MoveOn.org Civic Action and DailyKos.com, conservatives RedState.com and Michelle Malkin, and former FEC Chair

A massive bipartisan alliance released letters today to the Republican and Democratic National Committees – asking them to ensure that all presidential debate video can be legally shared, re-used, and blogged about without fear of legal repercussion. This would allow people to share candidates’ issue positions through sites like YouTube.

The letters were released in full on Stanford Law Professor [Lawrence Lessig’s blog](#) this morning. 75 signatories included: Lawrence Lessig and other leading technologists, the founders of Craigslist and Wikipedia, national women’s/civil rights/veterans/labor organizations, progressives like MoveOn.org and DailyKos.com, conservatives like Redstate.com and Michelle Malkin, and former Federal Election Commission Chair Brad Smith.

Rather than allowing television networks to retain exclusive rights to debate footage, the alliance asked that debate footage be explicitly be put in the [public domain](#) or licensed under a [Creative Commons \(Attribution\)](#) license – a concept [spearheaded](#) by [Lessig](#). Such a license makes video free for anyone to access, edit, and share with others with proper attribution.

“Technology has exploded the opportunity for people to comment upon and spread political speech,” said Lessig. “I am very hopeful that both the Republicans and the Democrats will help encourage the extraordinary public discussion around the election that the Internet has enabled, by removing any uncertainty about the right of the people to comment upon the speech of presidential candidates.”

“Grassroots activists are the lifeblood of any party,” said Mike Krempasky, Founder of RedState.com. “The RNC would be well-served to do anything and everything to encourage their supporters to get involved. The internet has made that easier than ever - and opening up the process by allowing free access to official video footage is an important step in the right direction.”

“This is about the Internet empowering the little guy in our democracy,” said Adam Green, of MoveOn.org Civic Action. “The big TV networks should not be the only ones determining which sound bites are newsworthy after a debate – everyday people should be able to put candidates’ positions on YouTube and share them with others without fear of breaking the law.”

“There is no job more important than that of the President, so it is critical that both parties conduct the discussions and debates between candidates in a transparent way,” said Michael Turk, former eCampaign Director for the Republican National Committee “Allowing unfettered access to the footage of the debates is a step in that direction.”

Below are the letters to the RNC and DNC. Interviews with signatories are available upon request. Please email: FreeDebates@gmail.com

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Letters publicly released 7/25/07 at: <http://www.lessig.org/blog/archives/003755.shtml>

LETTER TO RNC

Sen. Mel Martinez, General Chairman
Hon. Mike Duncan, Chairman
Republican National Committee
310 First Street, SE
Washington, DC 20003
(202) 863-8500

Chairmen Martinez and Duncan:

We are writing to request that the Republican National Committee help usher in the next stage of the Internet revolution that has made democracy more accessible to regular people and made politicians more accountable to their constituents.

In this letter, top technologists, grassroots organizations, bloggers, and others are asking the RNC to ensure that all video footage from Republican debates is able to be shared, re-used, and freely blogged about without the uploader of the video being deemed a lawbreaker.

In 1996, presidential candidates communicated on websites for the first time. In 2000, presidential candidates accepted online contributions for the first time. 2004 ushered in a new type of Internet-based people-powered activism.

In 2008, we need to ensure that the promise of online video is not inhibited. In the past, television stations that broadcast presidential debates have retained exclusive rights to debate footage after the event was over. By and large, such contract terms were not noticed by voters, activists, or news junkies – there was no widespread forum for regular people to share video content even if they wanted to.

But in the age of online video sharing, corporations retaining exclusive rights to debate footage is an obvious barrier to democratic participation. No concerned voter should ever be labeled a lawbreaker for wanting to share video of a presidential debate with others.

We, the undersigned, request that the Republican National Committee publicly urge state parties and other Republican debate sponsors to specify in debate contracts that video footage will be put into the public domain or licensed under a Creative Commons (Attribution) license – so that after the debate, the video will be free for anyone to access, edit, and share with others with proper attribution.

We ask you to follow the lead of C-SPAN, which this year announced they would allow expanded use of their video content by others – paving the way for a more informed electorate through online video sharing.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss details, we'd be happy to make time for that discussion.

Sincerely,

Lawrence Lessig – Professor, Stanford Law School & Founder, Center for Internet and Society

Craig Newmark – Founder of Craigslist

Jimmy Wales – Founder of Wikipedia

Brad Smith - Former FEC Chair, and current Chair of the Center for Competitive Politics

Michael Turk – Former eCampaign Director, Republican National Committee

Michelle Malkin – Conservative columnist and blogger, and founder of michellemalkin.com and hotair.com

Mike Krempasky – Founder of RedState.com

Glenn Reynolds – Professor, University of Tennessee Law, and founder of Instapundit.com blog

Dr. William Greene – President, RightMarch.com

Shari Steele, Executive Director, Electronic Frontier Foundation

Fred von Lohmann – Senior Staff Attorney, Electronic Frontier Foundation (Intellectual Property issues)

Tim Wu – Professor, Columbia Law School & Founder of Columbia's Program on Law & Technology

Cory Doctorow – Annenberg Center for Public Diplomacy, University of Southern California

Paul Rieckhoff – Executive Director, Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA)

Wade Henderson – President and CEO, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights

Kim Gandy – President, National Organization for Women

Andy Stern - International President, SEIU

Karen Ackerman - Political Director, AFL-CIO

Micah Sifry – Personal Democracy Forum and TechPresident.com

Arianna Huffington – Huffington Post

David Moore – Executive Director, Participatory Politics Foundation and OpenCongress.org

Josh Silver – Executive Director, Free Press

Carl Malamud – Founder of Public.Resource.Org

Roger Hickey – Co-director, Campaign for America's Future

John Schwartz – Founder of Free Speech TV

Paul Jay – CEO, Independent World Television

Helen De Michiel -- Co-Director, National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture

Nicholas Reville – Co-Founder, Participatory Culture Foundation

Lark Corbeil – Founder & Managing Editor, Public News Service

David Michaelis – Director of Current Affairs, Link TV

Linda Jue – Executive Director, New Voices in Independent Journalism

LETTER TO DNC

Chairman Howard Dean
Democratic National Committee
430 S. Capitol St. SE
Washington, DC 20003
(202) 863-8000

Chairman Dean:

We are writing to request that the Democratic National Committee help usher in the next stage of the Internet revolution that has made democracy more accessible to regular people and made politicians more accountable to their constituents.

In this letter, top technologists, progressive grassroots organizations, bloggers, and others are asking the DNC to ensure that all video footage from Democratic debates is able to be shared, re-used, and freely blogged about without the uploader of the video being deemed a lawbreaker.

In 1996, presidential candidates communicated on websites for the first time. In 2000, presidential candidates accepted online contributions for the first time. In 2004, your campaign helped usher in a new type of Internet-based people-powered activism.

In 2008, we need to ensure that the promise of online video is not inhibited. In the past, television stations that broadcast presidential debates have retained exclusive rights to debate footage after the event was over. By and large, such contract terms were not noticed by voters, activists, or news junkies – there was no widespread forum for regular people to share video content even if they wanted to.

But in the age of online video sharing, corporations retaining exclusive rights to debate footage is an obvious barrier to democratic participation. No concerned voter should ever be labeled a lawbreaker for wanting to share video of a presidential debate with others.

The Democratic National Committee recently announced it would sanction six official presidential debates. We, the undersigned, request that no debate get the official sanction of the DNC unless contract terms specify that video footage will be put into the public domain or licensed under a Creative Commons

(Attribution) license – so that after the debate, the video will be free for anyone to access, edit, and share with others with proper attribution.

We ask you to follow the lead of C-SPAN, which this year announced they would allow expanded use of their video content by others – paving the way for a more informed electorate through online video sharing.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss details, we'd be happy to make time for that discussion.

Sincerely,

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Paul Rieckhoff – Executive Director, Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA)

Kim Gandy – President, National Organization for Women

Andy Stern - International President, SEIU

Karen Ackerman - Political Director, AFL-CIO

Eli Pariser – Executive Director, MoveOn.org Civic Action

James Rucker – Executive Director, ColorOfChange.org

Markos Moulitsas – Founder of DailyKos.com

Arianna Huffington – Founder of the Huffington Post

David Halperin - Director, Campus Progress & Senior Vice President, Center for American Progress

Alexandra Acker - Executive Director, Young Democrats of America

Roger Hickey – Co-director, Campaign for America's Future

Josh Silver – Executive Director, Free Press

Shari Steele, Executive Director, Electronic Frontier Foundation

Fred von Lohmann – Senior Staff Attorney, Electronic Frontier Foundation (Intellectual Property issues)

Tim Wu – Professor, Columbia Law School & Founder of Columbia's Program on Law & Technology

Cory Doctorow – Annenberg Center for Public Diplomacy, University of Southern California

Micah Sifry – Personal Democracy Forum and TechPresident.com

David Moore – Executive Director, Participatory Politics Foundation and OpenCongress.org

Spencer Overton – Professor, GW Law & Founder of Blackprof.com blog

Robert Greenwald – Director, BraveNewFilms

Dan Manatt – Founder of PoliticsTV.com

Duncan Black – Founder of Atrios

Jane Hamsher – Founder of FireDogLake.com

Christy Hardin Smith – Front-page blogger, FireDogLake.com

Matt Stoller – Front-page blogger, MyDD.com

Chris Bowers – Front-page blogger, MyDD.com

David Waldman – Front-page blogger, DailyKos.com

Christopher M. Rabb – Founder and Chief Evangelist, Afro-Netizen

John Amato – Founder of Crooksandliars.com

John Aravosis – Founder of AMERICAblog.com

Don Hazen – Executive Editor, Alternet.org

Lowell Feld - Founder of RaisingKaine.com & former Netroots Coordinator, Webb for Senate (Virginia blog)

Juan Melli – Founder of Blue Jersey.com (New Jersey blog)

Mark Nickolas – Publisher, BluegrassReport.org (Kentucky blog)

David Kravitz – Co-founder, BlueMassGroup.com (Massachusetts blog)

Matt Singer – Founder of LeftInTheWest.com & former blogger for Tester for Senate (Montana blog)

Hugh Jackson – Founder of LasVegasGleaner.com (Nevada blog)

Myrna Minx – Founder of RenoDiscontent.com (Nevada blog)

Adam Green – Civic Communications Director, MoveOn.org Civic Action

Jane Fleming Kleeb – Executive Director, Young Voter PAC

Mike Lux – American Family Voices

Nicholas Reville – Co-Founder, Participatory Culture Foundation

Carl Malamud – Founder of Public.Resource.Org

Roz Lemieux – Executive Director, New Organizing Institute

Michael Silberman – Co-Founder and Director, EchoDitto

John Schwartz – Founder of Free Speech TV and freespeech.org

Paul Jay – CEO, Independent World Television and TheRealNews.com

Julie Bergman Sender – Filmmaker, Balcony Films

Garlin Gilchrist II – Blogger, TheSuperSpade.com

Helen De Michiel -- Co-Director, National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture

Jay Harris – President & Publisher, Mother Jones

Bruce Dixon – Black Agenda Report

Jill Tubman – Publisher, JackAndJill.com politics blog

Frank Emspak – Executive Producer, Workers Independent News

Lark Corbeil – Founder & Managing Editor, Public News Service

Tracy Van Slyke – Publisher, In These Times

Joel Bleifuss – Editor, In These Times

Roberto Lovato – New America Media

David Michaelis – Director of Current Affairs, Link TV

Ty West – Senior Producer, NOW on PBS

Marc Favreau – Editorial Director, The New Press

Ina Howard – Communications Director, The New Press

Linda Jue – Executive Director, New Voices in Independent Journalism

Rinku Sen – Publisher, Colorlines magazine