

The Center for Media and Democracy strengthens participatory democracy by investigating and exposing public relations spin and propaganda, and by promoting media literacy and citizen journalism. CMD provides in-depth reporting on PRWatch.org about corporate spin, government propaganda and the role of PR firms in polluting our information environment. On our SourceWatch.org site, we provide a platform for collaborative research and reporting on the individuals, organizations, and issues shaping the public agenda. Following are highlights from recent months.

## Watchdogging Freedom's Watch

CMD has kept a close eye on the activities, projects and goals of a variety of groups that have been created to shore up support for the Iraq War, and to encourage the public to go along with an attack on Iran. These groups intend to drown out genuine grassroots voices, like those of Iraq Veterans Against the War. The newest addition, Freedom's Watch, has emerged as the leading neo-con voice pushing for war with Iran. In response to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's visit to New York to address the general assembly of the United Nations, Freedom's Watch ran a full-page New York Times ad blasting his invitation to speak at Columbia University. Freedom's Watch president Bradley A. Blakeman explained that "Freedom's Watch could not sit back and allow a terrorist to come to America masquerading as a world leader. We have an obligation to warn the world of the dangers of a nuclear Iran and to uncover the true intent, that being, the destruction of the United States and the State of Israel. Let's be clear, Iran today kills American soldiers in Iraq and they will not stop there." Go to [www.PRWatch.org](http://www.PRWatch.org) and [www.SourceWatch.org](http://www.SourceWatch.org) and search for Freedom's Watch to get the real story.

## NY Arts Funding Up in Smoke

TobaccoWiki Editor Anne Landman took the NY arts community to task for bemoaning the loss of Altria/Philip Morris funding due to the corporation's move to Virginia. The idea that the source of the funding does not taint the recipients is one that is hard to swallow. Read more at [www.PRWatch.org/node/6527](http://www.PRWatch.org/node/6527).



## Citizen Journalism Alive and Well in Seoul

During a trip to Asia, Associate Director Judith Siers-Poisson was able to visit the newsroom of OhmyNews in Seoul, South Korea. OhmyNews is a striking example of citizen journalism at work. The original Korean language site ([www.ohmynews.com](http://www.ohmynews.com)) relies on more than 60,000 citizen writers to submit news stories, and the newer English language international site (<http://english.ohmynews.com>) already counts 3,000 citizen reporters writing from 100 countries. For more on this visit, go to [www.PRWatch.org/node/6407](http://www.PRWatch.org/node/6407).

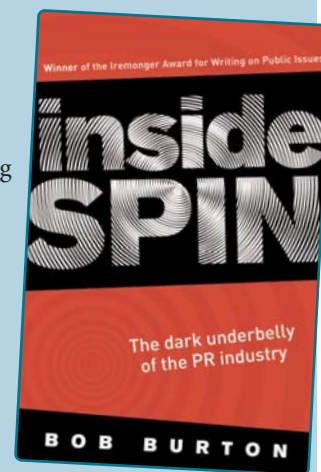
## Nuclear Industry Spinning Out of Control

CMD has been at the forefront of uncovering the efforts of the nuclear energy industry to spin itself as a green alternative that is needed in the face of global warming. Favorite tactics include the creation of front groups that are classic examples of "astroturf," or fake grassroots efforts. They have also enlisted powerful paid spokespeople, including former Greenpeace head Patrick Moore, and former New Jersey governor and Environmental Protection Agency head Christine Todd Whitman. CMD reporting on these issues can be found by clicking on the "nuclear power" subhead under the "environment" topic in the left navigation bar of [www.PRWatch.org](http://www.PRWatch.org). Recent CMD stories about Whitman and Moore are also available at [www.PRWatch.org/node/6370](http://www.PRWatch.org/node/6370) and [www.PRWatch.org/node/6470](http://www.PRWatch.org/node/6470) respectively.



## Inside Spin: Excerpts from SourceWatch Editor Bob Burton's New Book

CMD is proud to announce that SourceWatch Editor Bob Burton's new book, *Inside Spin: The Dark Underbelly of the PR Industry* is now available in Australia (look for it in the U.S. in Spring 2008). The Sunday Telegraph in Sydney, Australia says "*Inside Spin* should be compulsory reading for every journalist and, just as important, for a public trying to make sense of the daily news." As the book's back cover explains, "*Inside Spin* is the first behind-the-scenes investigation of the billion dollar a year Australian PR industry. Bob Burton illuminates the hardball and soft tactics used by PR companies to smother dissenting viewpoints, mask sponsors, court journalists, attack corporate competitors and influence politicians. Through detailed case studies from both private and public sectors, he shows just how much PR filters what we see, hear and think about the organisations that affect our lives and shape our society." Go to [www.PRWatch.org/blogs/7](http://www.PRWatch.org/blogs/7) to read excerpts from the book, or search for *Inside Spin: The Dark Underbelly of the PR Industry* on [www.SourceWatch.org](http://www.SourceWatch.org) for more information.



## CMD In the News

- In early September, Senior Researcher Diane Farsetta spoke on “Exposing and Fighting Fake News: The Video News Release Epidemic,” at a conference on “Communication and Conflict: Propaganda, Spin and Lobbying in the Global Age,” held at Strathclyde University, Glasgow, Scotland.

- CMD Founder and Executive Director John Stauber was the subject of a *Capital Times* (Madison, WI) profile piece titled “Spin takes it on the chin: Stauber shines light on public relations industry propaganda.” You can read the entire article at [www.madison.com/tct/news/227253](http://www.madison.com/tct/news/227253)

- In August, Research Director Sheldon Rampton spoke at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association in New York City, on a panel titled “The Media and Corporate Fraud and Abuse.”

- John Stauber debated the VNR industry on a panel titled “Paid and Played: The Ethics of Using Video News Releases” at the Society of Professional Journalists’ conference in Washington, DC in early October.

- Congresspedia Editor Conor Kenny and Executive Director John Stauber attended the Business Ethics Network (BEN) conference in Oakland in October. Stauber took part in a panel titled, “Media Wars: How to battle front groups and slanted media.” Kenny demonstrated CMD’s SourceWatch site as a powerful tool for corporate campaigners.

- TobaccoWiki Editor Anne Landman presented to about 100 public health/tobacco control workers as the guest of the Oklahoma State Department of Health. She also presented at the National Conference on Tobacco or Health in Minneapolis in October. The TobaccoWiki project was launched in October at the American Legacy Foundation in DC.

## Fake News Heats Up, and CMD Makes History!

The U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) announced on September 21, 2007, that it was fining Comcast Corp. \$4,000, for its cable channel CN8’s broadcast of fake TV news, a video news release (VNR) without disclosure.



The Comcast fine is the first-ever sanction for airing a VNR, a sponsored PR video that mimics the structure and style of television news reports. The fine is a direct result of Center for Media and Democracy (CMD) investigations, and of a joint complaint filed with the FCC by CMD and Free Press.

The FCC’s action against Comcast is precedent-setting. It firmly rejects the public relations industry’s argument that no disclosure is needed if television stations are not paid to air VNRs. Hopefully, the FCC will soon address the nearly 140 other undisclosed VNR broadcasts that were documented in CMD’s two reports, “Fake TV News” and “Still Not the News.” (Both are available at [www.PRWatch.org](http://www.PRWatch.org))

However, one aspect of the FCC’s action is troubling. The VNR that CN8 aired and Comcast was fined for was remarkable — but not unique — in its extent of product promotion. The sleep aid “Nelson’s Rescue Sleep” was shown and mentioned by name repeatedly. Disclosure requirements should not be limited only to VNRs that contain such especially egregious product promotion. Hopefully, in levying this fine, the FCC does not mean to imply that there is no need to disclose VNRs that show a product label only two or three times. To meet the FCC’s own benchmark — that “viewers are entitled to know who seeks to persuade them,” as it stated in its April 2005 Public Notice on VNRs — all VNRs should be disclosed, whether they promote policies or products, and regardless of the level of overt promotion.

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## Open Mouth, Insert Foot . . .



“It’s not the first time that citizen ‘investigative journalists’ have uncovered some embarrassing, or telling, nugget from the past that apparently remained buried for years,” writes Editor and Publisher magazine. “But it has happened again with the posting of a now wildly popular video on YouTube that shows Dick Cheney explaining in 1994 that trying to take over Iraq would be a bad idea and lead to a ‘quagmire.’” You can find the video on YouTube.com by searching “Cheney quagmire,” and can join the nearly one million viewers to date.



A year ago, Melanie Morgan of the Move America Forward front group publicly fantasized about having New York Times editor Bill Keller sent to the gas chamber or the electric chair (she couldn’t decide which). In a July appearance on MSNBC’s *Hardball* with Chris Matthews, Morgan repeated her claim that Keller and other journalists who reported on the government’s SWIFT program for tracking terrorist bank transactions “should be tried for treason. If they were found guilty of treason, I would have no problem with them being executed.”

## Fake News, *continued*

According to the trade publication *O'Dwyer's PR Daily*, "Cable operator Comcast said it is 'perplexed' by the Federal Communications Commission's proposed \$4K fine against its CN8 network." Sena Fitzmaurice, Comcast's senior director of corporate communications, asserts that the FCC disclosure rules do not apply to cable programming. She told *O'Dwyer's*, "Even if it did apply to cable programming, there was no benefit or exchange of value for showing the VNR, and these were decisions made by journalists with their own editorial judgments." Comcast is planning to appeal the fine, but the FCC's support for the sanction is reported to be strong.

FCC Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein, who has led the agency's work on the issue, welcomed the fine against Comcast. He said in a statement that "Viewers have a right to know who is trying to persuade them so they can make up their own minds about what they are presented."

*O'Dwyer's* reports that Comcast's Fitzmaurice believes that there are other possible fines pending against Comcast, as well as other cable and broadcast stations. CMD will keep you apprised of developments in this landmark action. Please visit [www.prwatch.org](http://www.prwatch.org) to see how you can take action.

## About PR Watch

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## Profile: Bob Burton

Bob Burton has been a contributor to *PR Watch* since 1997, and CMD's SourceWatch Editor since October 2003. In that position, he oversees the editing of CMD's collaborative, on-line encyclopedia of people, issues, and organizations shaping the public agenda. He also supports both new and long-time contributors to SourceWatch, answers general inquiries about the site, and contributes articles to CMD's general website, [www.PRWatch.org](http://www.PRWatch.org)

Bob lives and works in Canberra, Australia, so he is definitely the furthest flung member of CMD's staff. He was aware of CMD and especially the writing of John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton almost from the beginning. In fact, he organized a speaking tour of Australia for John to publicize *Toxic Sludge Is Good for You* in 1997. There was a natural affinity between the muckraking work that Bob was doing in Australia and the work of CMD, so when the opportunity to add a staff person to oversee SourceWatch presented itself, Bob was the obvious choice, despite the geographic distance.

Bob has had a creative year in more ways than one. Bob, his partner Fran, and their four-year old daughter Isla, just welcomed a new baby, Charlie

Franklin Burton, to the family in early September. And Bob also published his second book, *Inside Spin: The Dark Underbelly of the PR Industry* this fall. He was able to develop the book as the result of winning

the Iremonger Award for Writing on Public Issues, which is given annually in Australia. Bob previously co-authored *Secrets and Lies: The Anatomy of an Anti-Environmental Campaign* in 1999 with New Zealander Nicky Hager.



*Bob, Isla & Charlie*

## Show Your Support of CMD: Become a Monthly Donor for our 15th Anniversary Year!

When John Stauber founded the Center for Media and Democracy in 1993, little did he know that CMD would grow into such a well-respected and effective public interest watchdog. But real investigative work like ours isn't cheap, and in our case, we don't take grants from governments, corporations or labor unions. That makes support from individuals that much more important.

Our goal is to sign up 50 new monthly donors at the \$15 per month level or more by January 1, 2008. **It's an ambitious goal, but we can do it with your help!** Go to [www.PRWatch.org/donate](http://www.PRWatch.org/donate) and recurring donation will be an option. Every new monthly donor of \$15 or more will receive signed copies of both *The Best War Ever* and *Toxic Sludge Is Good for You* — perfect for year-end giving! **Thank you!**



# Patti Smith Rocks CMD's World!

On Sunday, August 5, 2007, CMD was very pleased to be part of the Patti Smith concert at the Barrymore Theater in our home base of Madison, Wisconsin. Thanks to music promoter and CMD friend Tag Evers and his True Endeavors agency, CMD was able to organize a silent auction to be held in the lobby in conjunction with the concert.

Since Patti had agreed to sign a guitar, the centerpiece of the auction was a 1958 Gibson LG-1 acoustic that CMD's IT Director Tricia Barden donated to the cause. In a former life, Tricia was a rock guitarist, and had owned and enjoyed the Gibson for thirty years. After the concert, Tricia shared, "I began looking forward to meeting the quintessential godmother of punk rock. Little did I know how special the evening would turn out to be."

And it certainly was special. Tricia received the gift of a lifetime from Patti, who now could more accurately be called the fairy godmother of punk rock. As Tricia and other CMD staffers were setting up for the auction, Patti appeared next to them in the lobby. In Tricia's words, "Patti asked to see the guitar, and asked if it was mine. I said that it was, and that I'd owned it since I was 21. She asked, 'Are you sure you want to

sell it?' I replied that I had decided to let it go, especially as it would benefit a great cause. She walked around the lobby strumming my guitar and then asked me to sit down on the sofa with her.



*CMD IT Director Tricia Barden (right), with Patti Smith*

"She asked what the suggested bid on the guitar was. I told her \$750 and she replied, 'How about if I donate \$1,000 to CMD and you keep your guitar?' Needless to say, I was dumbstruck by her selflessness and generosity. I accepted her offer and asked if she'd sign the Gibson for me. She inscribed 'People have the power - Patti Smith' in the upper left-hand corner of the body (where it won't be touched when it's played).

CMD greatly appreciates the generosity of Patti Smith and all the local business that donated items for the auction. Thanks to all of them, and to Tag for providing the connection, we were able to raise almost \$4,000 on site, and received an additional \$1,000 donation from a reader who felt touched by the story of Patti's generosity to Tricia.



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