

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.

How Many Iraqis Have Really Died?

Senior Researcher Diane Farsetta waded deep into the realm of statistics to bring clarity to the dispute over the number of Iraqis that have died as a result of the war. She looked at the Lancet study that has been criticized widely, but not for the reasons you might think. Read more at www.PRWatch.org/node/7034

Why Direct-to-Consumer Drug Ads are Dangerous to Your Health

Guest Writer Mary Ebeling wrote about the pharmaceutical industry's extensive use of direct-to-consumer marketing to sell its drugs. Did you know that this practice is banned in most developed countries, except in the U.S. and New Zealand? Find out what we are being subjected to, and what the dangers are, at www.PRWatch.org/node/7026



Taking a Closer Look at James Glassman

Diane Farsetta also dissected the career of James Glassman, the nominee for Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy. His background in both journalism and lobbying makes him an interesting candidate for a position at which it is hard to succeed. Find out more at www.PRWatch.org/node/6953

Designed Not to Succeed

TobaccoWiki Editor Anne Landman analyzed why many youth smoking prevention programs fail, and the PR techniques and tactics that Big Tobacco has employed to make sure that this continues to be the case. Read all about it at www.PRWatch.org/node/6891



How Does a Study's Patron Skew the Results?

Anne Landman also looked at how problematic the relationship is between universities and the funding they receive from industries like Big Tobacco. Can the results be trusted? Read more at www.PRWatch.org/node/7004.

The Superdelegate Transparency Project — Hosted on SourceWatch

A motley crew of citizen journalists, activists, bloggers and transparency advocates came together to create the Superdelegate Transparency Project (STP), and the results have been impressive. STP has produced the best, most transparent and highly detailed reporting anywhere on the Democratic superdelegates.



The collaborative research draws on nearly 300 citizen journalists, the folks at DemConWatch, LiteraryOutpost, the Huffington Post's OffTheBus project, OpenLeft and CMD's Congresspedia and SourceWatch communities. STP has produced a tally that rivals or bests those of the major media outlets. The STP even breaks the numbers down by state and congressional district with ever-expanding bios of hundreds of superdelegates, which is lacking in other compilations. And it's all on CMD's SourceWatch site.

With the growing possibility that neither Hillary Clinton nor Barack Obama will gain enough regular delegates through the primaries and caucuses to clinch the nomination, these so-called "superdelegates" to the Democratic convention could very well decide the nominee and are an increasingly controversial part of the process. Some superdelegates, like former vice-presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro, feel that superdelegates should make their decision based on their own instincts due to their status as the most loyal party members. Others, like Rep. John Lewis of Georgia, feel that a superdelegate should follow the will of the people and vote the way that the voters in their district or state did.

While the members of the STP all came to the project with different opinions on who the best nominee should be or even what voting philosophy superdelegates should follow, they are motivated by a common belief in bringing this process into the light so that voters know who is representing them at the convention and to decide what action, if any, they want to take.

A massive research project like this needed extensive participation and it is particularly poetic that it took regular citizens, cooperating in an open and transparent manner, to make this information public.

Profile: Blake Hall



Blake Hall joined the Center for Media and Democracy as Senior Web Developer in the Fall of 2007. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin with degrees in Physics and History in 2003. After graduation Blake spent two years as an AmeriCorps volunteer helping non-profits with their technology challenges.

CMD's work relies on taking advantage of the best and most advanced technologies available, so adding a new IT position was a high priority. Because our PRWatch.org website is built on Drupal, we were looking especially for someone with expertise in that platform. Blake was a great fit. He said, "I wanted to work at the Center for several reasons. Besides believing in our mission, I knew I'd be able to work with great people, leveraging technology to assist important citizen journalism projects. I enjoy being able to empower people using open source tools like Drupal and Mediawiki."

As an advocate for open source software, Blake has been an active member of the Drupal community. He also has helped organize multiple technology events in the area, including a local Drupal user group, and regional events such as BarCamp Milwaukee, BarCamp Madison, and DrupalCamp WI. Along with Research Director Sheldon Rampton and IT Director Tricia Barden, Blake recently attended the DrupalCon in Boston.

Outside of work, Blake enjoys spending time with his wife Jeni, who works at two Madison dance studios teaching ballet, tap, jazz and modern. They enjoy spending time with their extended family, especially at the cabin in Crivitz. Blake and Jeni look forward to finding a house and starting a family in the near future.

You Can't Hide from the CoalSwarm



When author Ted Nace set out last year to profile the emerging No New Coal Plants movement for *Orion* magazine, he had no idea that the assignment would turn into more than just a single article. Nace had become interested in the anti-coal movement after reading an article in *The Nation* magazine, in which NASA's chief climate scientist James E. Hansen warned of dramatic climate change and made clear that the most important step to be taken to avoid such a consequence was an immediate moratorium on new coal-fired power plants.

As Nace explored the anti-coal movement, he found that some of the most effective work was being done by small, rurally-based, grassroots groups linked together informally through computer networks. His *Orion* article, "Stopping Coal in Its Tracks," noted that in many cases this decentralized "swarm" had been more militant and more effective than the large groups known as Big Green. Nace set up the Coal Moratorium Now! website (CMN) to organize the information he was gathering on coal, then recruited two researchers to help him track the status of every proposed coal plant they could locate. As word of the coal plants database spread, several people proposed putting it in a wiki so that it could be easily accessed and edited by multiple researchers.

In December 2007, Nace researched both the options of building a new wiki and of joining an existing one. CMD's SourceWatch quickly emerged as the best option due to the opportunity to create a unique badge and portal within SourceWatch, allowing a strong community identity to be created; the fact that search engines like Google tended to give high rankings to SourceWatch articles; the expertise of CMD's editors and tech staff.

Nace, joined by former Yahoo project manager Kaethin Prizer and Rainforest Action Network intern Adrian Wilson, settled on the name coalSwarm. John Grimes

designed the logo (above). The coalSwarm crew designed a portal page and set to work transferring over 200 coal project descriptions from the CMN database into SourceWatch. Next, they began writing new articles on coal-related topics, such as Nonviolent Direct Actions Against Coal and U.S. Coal Politics.

In January, coalSwarm, in conjunction with Rainforest Action Network, released its first report to the media, "Progress Towards a Coal Moratorium." The report, which revealed that 59 proposed coal plants had been canceled or placed on hold during 2007, had an immediate impact on the debate over U.S. coal and environmental policy. Citing the coalSwarm report, WorldWatch's Lester Brown told a conference call of journalists: "We may be on the verge of a monumental victory in the worldwide effort to stabilize climate." David Roberts, the widely read columnist at online environmental journal *Grist*, commented that "coal is on the ropes" and referred readers to coalSwarm's cancellation report. Within little over than a month after being posted, the article had received more than 3,300 visits.

To Nace, the coal plant cancellation study is just one example of how the coalSwarm, working within SourceWatch, can play an essential role in the national debate over coal policy. "In the past several months," said Nace, "the national media has reported that the coal industry plans to spend \$35 million on its 'clean coal' campaign aimed at convincing the American public to support continued expansion of coal. With such a huge megaphone in the hands of industry front groups like Americans for Balanced Energy Choices, it is essential for the emergence of a democratic energy policy that there be solid research tools like coalSwarm available to activists, journalists, students, policy makers, and others."

About *PR Watch*

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Front Groups Beware of Full Frontal Scrutiny

“The American public deserves to know when someone is trying to persuade them.”
— U.S. Federal Communications Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein, Thursday, January 17, 2008



On January 29, 2008, the Center for Media and Democracy and our partners at Consumer Reports WebWatch launched an exciting new project, called “Full

Frontal Scrutiny.” The site seeks to shine a light on front groups — organizations that state a particular agenda, while hiding or obscuring their identity, membership or sponsorship. Google the term “front groups” and the number one return is CMD’s extensive article on the topic on its SourceWatch website.

WebWatch and CMD will create original content for Full Frontal Scrutiny, which will also publish selected content from WebWatch and from the CMD’s SourceWatch and PRwatch sites, as well as aggregating news about front groups from other reliable sources.

Full Frontal Scrutiny adds to the CMD mix the extensive experience that Consumer Reports’ WebWatch brings. “For six years, Consumer Reports WebWatch has evaluated sites against five simple guidelines for credibility and trustworthiness,” said Beau

Brendler, WebWatch’s director. “Who owns the site? What’s its purpose and mission? Does it disclose sources of funding or key relationships with third parties? These are important questions for consumers to ask about any Web site, and they’re also remarkably effective for ferreting out sites that intend to spin, obfuscate or dress up an unpopular agenda.”

Full Frontal Scrutiny will focus on front groups in the health, personal finance, electronics and Internet, automotive, home, environment, travel and other topic areas of particular interest to Consumers Union and within its expertise. Other types of front groups will still be reported on within SourceWatch and on CMD’s home site as part of CMD’s wider mission.

The project received very positive reviews when it was launched. Craig Newmark, founder of Craigslist and a board member of Consumers Union, has been a great supporter of the project. As he said on his blog on Huffington Post, “You’re probably already aware of front groups, which pretend to represent grassroots efforts, and are actually run by suspect politicians or shady corporations. They’re sometimes called ‘astroturf,’ since they’re the opposite of honest grassroots efforts. More bluntly, the purpose of a front group is to deceive consumers or voters. ... I’ve taken a good look at all involved, and they’re for real, CU and CMD have outstanding records for integrity and accuracy.”

Ari Melber of *The Nation* said that, “Activists are using a new, open source web campaign to expose companies that are faking open source web campaigns. You read that right. Some companies have seized on web organizing to create fake ‘astroturf’ groups or pose as citizen journalists to advance corporate PR. ... those dogged Wisconsin organizers at the Center for Media and Democracy launched a new wiki-powered activist site to expose such front operations, called Full Frontal Scrutiny.”

Find out more by going to the Full Frontal Scrutiny website at www.frontgroups.org

It’s our fifteenth birthday, and gifts are welcome!

CMD is celebrating its 15th anniversary in 2008, and we couldn’t have come this far without your support. Please help us in this special year to be stronger than ever.

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.

Please consider a generous gift to CMD today. You can go to www.PRWatch.org/donate to donate on-line over our secure server. Or mail your gift to CMD, 520 University Avenue, Suite 227, Madison, WI 53703 using the enclosed envelope. **Thank you!**

CMD Hits the Airwaves with the Weekly Radio Spin!



The Center for Media and Democracy has broken the sound barrier! Well, not really, but we have ventured into the audio world. In September 2007, CMD began producing the Weekly Radio Spin — an audio version of the

best items in the Weekly Spin email digest. CMD Senior Researcher Diane Farsetta (right) and Associate Director Judith Siers-Poisson write, voice and produce the segments.

Those of you that are long-time CMD fans might remember that former staffer Laura Miller did a Weekly Radio Spin several years ago. We are building on that project, and making it even more jazzy and fun to listen to. (And we mean jazzy literally — the background music is by jazz trumpeter Kenny Rampton, brother of Research Director Sheldon Rampton.) The Weekly Radio Spin is a five-minute segment recorded

and available on line each Friday afternoon. Regular features include “Six Degrees of Spin and Fakin,” which is our look at the connections between media manipulators. We also highlight “Wins Against Spin.” And of course, all the usual muck-raking information you expect from CMD.

The Weekly Radio Spin is free and available for both personal and broadcast use. Podcasters can subscribe to the XML feed on www.prwatch.org/audio or via iTunes. Radio stations have several sources from which they can download WRS.

About a dozen radio stations are currently airing the Weekly Radio Spin, and hundreds of individuals download it weekly. We would love to have more community, college, public, and low power stations airing the Weekly Radio Spin.

If you'd like to hear it on your favorite station, consider contacting the news director and letting them know. If you'd like some talking points, call CMD at 608-260-9713, or email us at editor@prwatch.org. And please let us know that you've approached them. Thanks!

CMD is turning 15 this year!
Please use the enclosed envelope, or go to www.PRWatch.org/donate today to keep us making trouble for at least another 15 years!



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