

**Remarks by Patrick Maines at the
2011 Friends & Benefactors Awards Banquet
October 18, 2011**

Thank you. As most of you know, Dick Wiley is the long-time chairman of The Media Institute. I address him as “Maximum Leader,” or sometimes just “Maximum.”

I call him that because he likes hearing it, and because of his leadership abilities. Let me give you an example. Tonight, as at every Media Institute function he attends, Dick keeps close watch on the pace of things. And he lets me know about it too. Indeed, when it comes to time keeping he’s practically indefatigable. At regular intervals throughout the course of any luncheon or dinner program, he’ll lean over and say: “We’ve gotta seat these people,” or “we need to feed these folks,” or “we have to get this program going,” or “we’ve gotta get these people outta here.” And if I’m out of hearing distance, he’ll just hold his arm up and tap on his watch. So, you know, you have to appreciate something like that.

Kidding aside, I’m grateful every day that Dick Wiley is our chairman. He has extremely good judgment, and back in those days when nobody had even heard of us, he lent a very important hand to this organization. More than this, it means a lot to me personally to have as chairman someone who is even older than I am!

As we gather here tonight I’m happy to note that we’re doing so during this year’s celebration of Free Speech Week. Even now most people are unaware of the role The Media Institute has played in this national event. And even fewer will know 20 years from now. But I know. And as I look back on the scores of programs and activities that the Institute has undertaken since its inception, I am perhaps most proud, and most hopeful, about this particular program.

The Media Institute created and launched FSW, and then set it free (save for some modest promotional work we do for it), that it might be seen by partnering groups and individuals not as “our thing” but as “their thing.” Doing this sort of work is, of course, our job, but it’s also our honor.

As I’ve sometimes remarked, we think all of the things we do regarding communications policy and journalism are important in the here-and-now, but it does seem to me that, a hundred years in the future, most of these issues will be little more than a footnote in history. What happens to free speech and the First Amendment, on the other hand, will be of towering importance to people of that time, as it is to people today.

Simply put, I don’t believe, whatever the political regimes as may come and go, that tyranny could ever hold sway in this country so long as the people and the press have freedom of speech and a strong First Amendment.

Speaking of being honored to do what we do, I want to recognize another organization that is honored to do what it does. I speak of the Music Maker Relief Foundation, a small nonprofit headquartered in the South, whose mission, as they say, is “keeping the bluest of the blues alive.” Two weeks ago MMRF hosted its annual Capital Blues Night in Washington (dedicating it, I might add, to Free Speech Week), and tonight we are very pleased to share the wealth, so to speak, by giving to MMRF a small portion of tonight’s proceeds. You can read more about this wonderful organization in your banquet program.

In closing, let me add my own congratulations to tonight’s award recipients, Mr. Stephenson and Commissioner McDowell, and our sincere thanks to our guest speaker, Senator Warner ... and, of course, to all of you, without whose support The Media Institute would not exist.

And now, as I turn the podium back to our emcee, let me just say to you, Dick Wiley: “Let’s get this program going!”