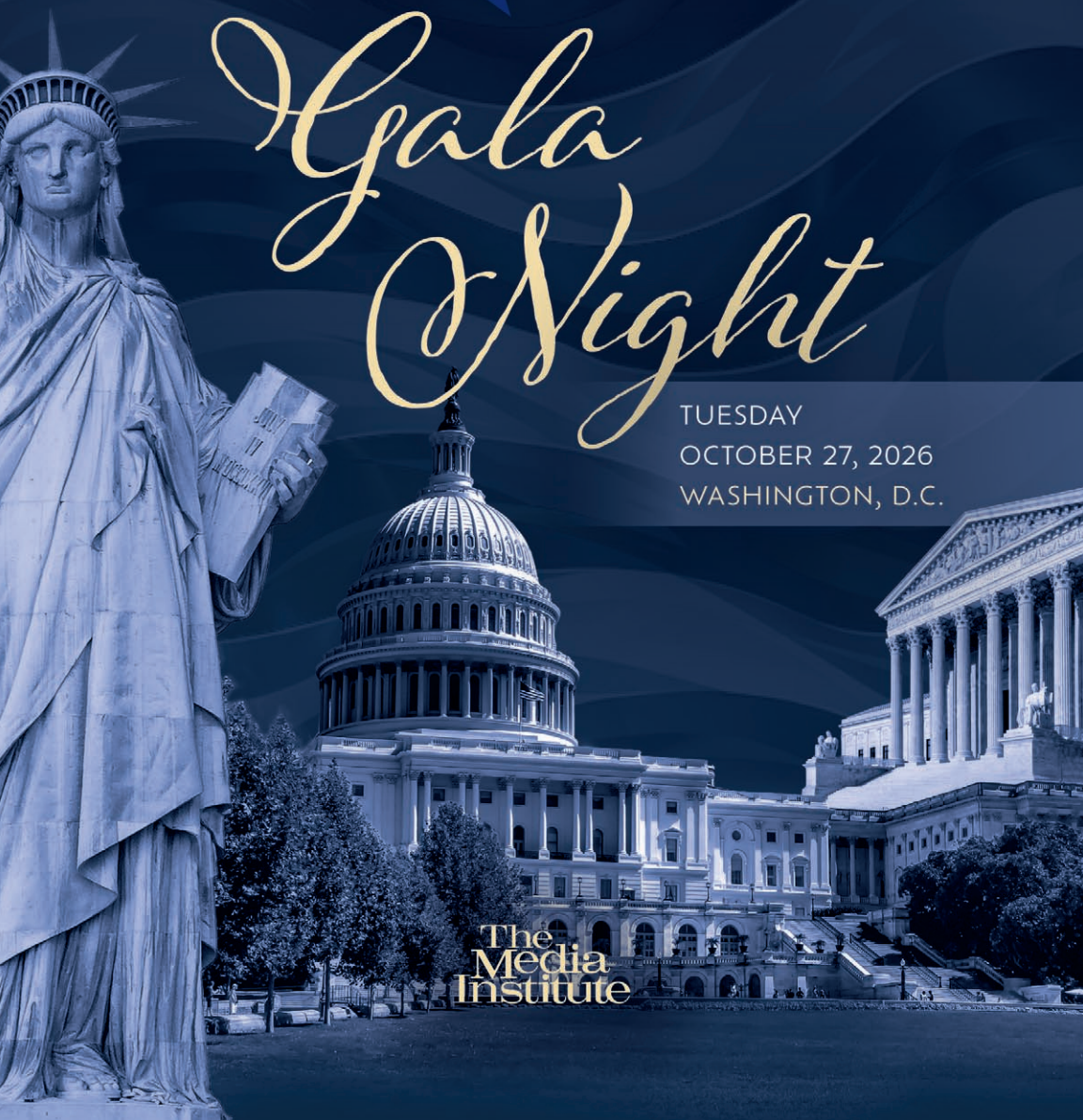
Free Speech America Gala

Gala Night

TUESDAY
OCTOBER 27, 2026
WASHINGTON, D.C.



The Media Institute

Free Speech America Gala

Gala Night

TUESDAY
OCTOBER 27, 2026
WASHINGTON, D.C.



The Media Institute

Here's to voices that make a difference.

Congratulations to tonight's honorees.

Freedom of Speech Award

Jan Neuharth

Freedom Forum

American Horizon Award

Jack Abernethy

Fox Television Stations

Proud to support The Media Institute
2026 'Free Speech America' Gala



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WELCOME FROM THE MEDIA INSTITUTE

Good Evening from The Media Institute,

We are exceptionally grateful that you chose to join our annual "Free Speech America" Gala. This October night, we set aside the demands of our individual days to celebrate and acknowledge the freedoms of speech and press. TMI is exceptionally pleased to pay appropriate respect to leaders who have advanced America's communications industry and strengthened its culture of free expression.

This gathering occurs at a critical moment for the First Amendment and the protections it provides all Americans. Dialogue and actions to reshape public discourse and access to our government present new challenges for existing and new media, while the institutions and norms meant to safeguard these rights struggle to keep pace. The freedoms of speech and press face continual—and increasingly consequential—pressure. The stakes could not be clearer: These constitutional guarantees do not defend themselves, and delay carries a cost. They will persevere only if citizens and institutions act with timely vigilance, principle, and resolve.

Tonight, we gallantly honor two exceptional leaders: Jack Abernethy, whose direction and visionary industry leadership are recognized with our American Horizon Award; and Jan Neuharth, whose steadfast defense of the First Amendment embodies our Freedom of Speech Award.

We are also privileged to welcome Patrick Butler, TMI's own James Madison Fellow, as our Featured Speaker. Above all, we salute you, our generous supporters, for sustaining this mission and allowing TMI's work to persist.

Michael O'Rielly
President and CEO

Susanna Coto
Director of Public Events



FREE SPEECH AMERICA

CTA™

Consumer Technology Association, producer of CES®

FREE SPEECH FUELS INNOVATION

The Consumer Technology Association (CTA)® proudly congratulates this year's honorees of The Media Institute's *Free Speech America* Gala.

At CTA, we believe free speech, free markets and the open exchange of ideas are essential to innovation, entrepreneurship and American leadership. We applaud those who champion these principles and help ensure new ideas can thrive.

We hope everyone here will join us at CES® 2027 this January in Las Vegas—the world's most powerful tech event—where innovation and free speech meet. CES.tech

PROGRAM

2026

WELCOMING REMARKS

Michael P. O'Rielly
President and CEO
The Media Institute

Kathleen A. Kirby
Chair, Board of Trustees
The Media Institute

KEYNOTE REMARKS

Featured Speaker
Patrick Butler
James Madison Fellow
The Media Institute

AMERICAN HORIZON AWARD

Presenter
Mo Elleithee
Political Strategist
and Commentator

Honoree
Jack Abernethy
Chief Executive Officer
FOX Television Stations

FREEDOM OF SPEECH AWARD

Presenter
Barbara Wall
Trustee and Secretary
Freedom Forum

Honoree
Jan Neuharth
Chair and CEO
Freedom Forum

This evening's Master of Ceremonies is WTOP News Anchor Shawn Anderson



FREE SPEECH AMERICA



Verizon is proud to support The Media Institute.

Congratulations and thank you to the 2026 Free Speech America Gala featured speaker and honorees.

Patrick Butler
Inaugural James Madison Fellow of The Media Institute
Featured Speaker

Jan Neuharth
Chair and CEO of Freedom Forum
Freedom of Speech Award

Jack Abernethy
CEO of FOX Television Stations
American Horizon Award

verizon

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

2026



Shawn Anderson

Shawn Anderson is the Afternoon Anchor on WTOP News, the top-rated source for the latest local news, traffic, and weather information in the Washington, D.C., region across multiple platforms.

Mr. Anderson caught the radio bug early in life. While still in high school, he got his first job at WCVI Radio in Connellsville, Pa. He did everything from spinning records to reporting news and play-by-play sports.

From there, he went on to West Virginia University, but he is sure that his real radio education came at WCLG AM-FM in Morgantown, W.Va.

In 1987, Mr. Anderson finally made it to Washington, where he spent his first seven years as a sports and news anchor at the AP Radio Network. After taking some time off to begin writing a book, he found his place at WTOP, where he has remained since 1995.

Mr. Anderson has received a number of awards including a 1998 Achievement in Radio award for Best Newscaster in Washington. He shared in another March of Dimes Achievement in Radio award for coverage of the 1998 U.S. Capitol shooting.

Mr. Anderson enjoys reading, whether it's fiction or non-fiction, and tries to write when he can. He lives in the Washington metro area with his wife, Sharon.

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BEASLEY
MEDIA GROUP, LLC

Celebrates

THE MEDIA INSTITUTE AND TONIGHT'S AWARD RECIPIENTS, JAN NEUHARTH AND JACK ABERNETHY, FOR THEIR OUTSTANDING WORK AND UNWAVERING DEDICATION TO PROTECTING FREE SPEECH.

Free Speech America Gala

The Media Institute

KEYNOTE REMARKS

FEATURED SPEAKER



Patrick Butler

Patrick Butler is the James Madison Fellow of The Media Institute.

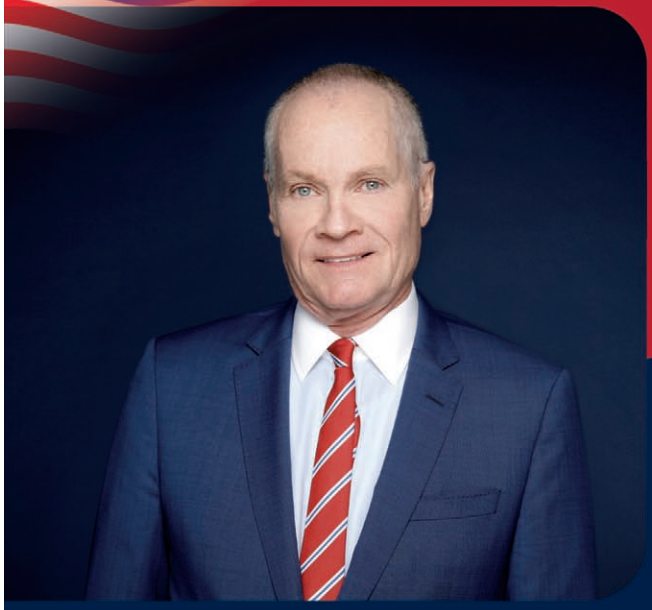
As President and CEO of America's Public Television Stations, he helped secure record levels of federal and state funding to support public media.

As Senior Vice President of The Washington Post Company, Mr. Butler founded the Emmy-winning Newsweek Productions, created Washington Post Live, and advocated for passage of the Free Flow of Information Act to protect the confidentiality of journalists' sources.

As Washington Vice President of Times Mirror, he was a founder of the Times Mirror Center for The People & The Press, which evolved into the Pew Research Center.

In government service, Mr. Butler was special assistant to U.S. Senate Majority Leader Howard H. Baker, Jr., and a speechwriter and associate editor of the White House Editorial Office for President Gerald R. Ford.

Appointed by President Reagan to the National Council on the Humanities, Mr. Butler recommended the grant that helped Ken Burns complete his landmark public television series "The Civil War."



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Congratulations to our Chief Executive Officer

Jack Abernethy

AMERICAN HORIZON AWARD 2026 HONOREE

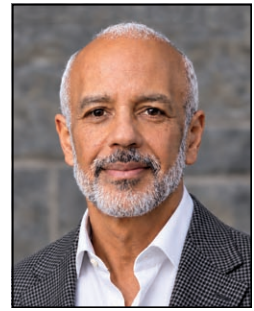
FOX TV STATIONS

LIVE NOW FOX

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AMERICAN HORIZON AWARD

PRESENTER



Mo Elleithee

Mo Elleithee is a political strategist, commentator, and founder of an innovative public policy institute.

Mr. Elleithee worked on four Democratic presidential campaigns, served as Traveling Press Secretary and Senior Spokesman for Hillary Clinton in 2008, and was Communications Director of the Democratic National Committee during the Obama years. He helped elect senators, governors, and statewide officials across the country for two decades, and co-founded two Washington consulting firms.

As founding Executive Director of the Institute of Politics and Public Service at Georgetown University, Mr. Elleithee has brought students face to face with political leaders and operatives from the MAGA right to the progressive left, helping them understand others with different views.

He spent six years (2016–2022) as a Democratic contributor on FOX News, and now appears regularly on CNN, MS NOW, *PBS NewsHour*, the BBC, and other outlets. He is also a weekly panelist on *Left, Right & Center*, a nationally syndicated radio program and podcast from KCRW.

Mr. Elleithee is a graduate of Georgetown's School of Foreign Service and holds an M.A. in Political Management from George Washington University. He lives in Washington, D.C., with his wife, two children, and two dogs.

WILKINSON BARKER KNAUER LLP

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THE MEDIA INSTITUTE

Congratulations to the
2026 Free Speech America Honorees

Freedom of Speech Award Recipient
Jan Neuharth
Chair & CEO of Freedom Forum

American Horizon Award Recipient
Jack Abernethy
CEO of FOX Television Stations

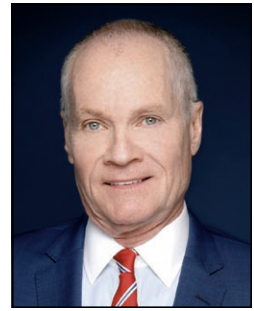
Featured Speaker
Patrick Butler
Media Institute Fellow

WASHINGTON, DC | DENVER, CO | AUSTIN, TX

WBKLAW.COM #NOTJUSTANOTHERLAWFIRM

AMERICAN HORIZON AWARD

HONOREE



Jack Abernethy

Jack Abernethy has served as Chief Executive Officer of FOX Television Stations (FTS) since 2004, overseeing Fox Corporation's 29 owned and operated stations in some of the nation's largest television markets.

The FOX stations are industry leaders based on the growth and success of locally produced programming, more than doubling under Mr. Abernethy's leadership, with over 1,500 hours of local news every week. He is directly responsible for the creation of the national network MyNetworkTV.

From August 2016 through May 2018, Mr. Abernethy served as Co-President of FOX News Channel and FOX Business Network. Mr. Abernethy served as Executive Vice President of FOX News from 1996 to 2004, where he was integral to the successful launch of the channel. Before joining FOX, Mr. Abernethy had a distinguished 15-year career with NBC.

In October 2018, Mr. Abernethy received *Broadcasting & Cable's* "Broadcaster of the Year" award and *TVNewsCheck* named FTS "TV Station Group of the Year." In both 2017 and 2018, he was named one of *The Hollywood Reporter's* "35 Most Powerful People in New York Media," and was inducted into the *Broadcasting & Cable* Hall of Fame in 2012. Mr. Abernethy currently is a board member of the National Association of Television Program Executives.



FREEDOM FORUM

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PROUDLY CONGRATULATES

Jan Neuharth

Chair and Chief Executive Officer, Freedom Forum
2026 Freedom of Speech Award recipient

AND

Jack Abernethy

Chief Executive Officer, FOX Television Stations
2026 American Horizon Award recipient

WE ARE PROUD TO JOIN
THE MEDIA INSTITUTE IN SALUTING
THE FOUNDATIONAL FREEDOMS
OF FREE SPEECH AND PRESS.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH AWARD

PRESENTER



Barbara Wall

Barbara Wall is a member of the Board of Trustees and Secretary of Freedom Forum. She is the former Chief Legal and Operating Officer of USA TODAY Co. (formerly Gannett Co., Inc.), and currently serves on the company's Board of Directors.

Ms. Wall also chairs the Board of Trustees of the American Press Institute, serves on the Board of Directors and Executive Committee of the News/Media Alliance, and serves on the Board of Trustees of Helen Keller International.

Ms. Wall has received numerous honors for her contributions to the legal profession, journalism, and freedom of the press, including the American Bar Association's Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Award (2024), the Media Law Resource Center's William J. Brennan Jr. Defense of Freedom Award (2021), the American Bar Association's Champion of Freedom Award (2020), and the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press First Amendment Award (2012).


ncta
THE INTERNET & TELEVISION ASSOCIATION
Proudly congratulates
The Media Institute & salutes
the honorees of the 2026
Free Speech America Gala

FREEDOM OF SPEECH AWARD

HONOREE



Jan Neuharth

Jan Neuharth is Chair and Chief Executive Officer of Freedom Forum, a nonpartisan, nonprofit foundation dedicated to fostering First Amendment freedoms for all. She has served as Chair since 2011 and CEO since 2015.

Under Ms. Neuharth's leadership, Freedom Forum has built on its longstanding leadership in press freedom and First Amendment education, expanding its work to make the five freedoms meaningful in the lives of all Americans.

Ms. Neuharth has championed new ways to bring the First Amendment to life and meet people where they are—from supporting dedicated First Amendment reporters in communities across the country to launching Freely Fest, a music festival celebrating the power of music and the freedoms protected by the First Amendment.

Today, Freedom Forum is working toward an America where everyone knows, values, and defends the freedoms of religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition.

Ms. Neuharth earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Florida, a Juris Doctor from Vanderbilt University School of Law, and is admitted as an Attorney and Counselor of the United States Supreme Court.



FREE SPEECH AMERICA



FOX IS PROUD TO SUPPORT THE MEDIA INSTITUTE'S 2026 FREE SPEECH GALA

Congratulations to

Our friend and colleague
Jack Abernethy
AMERICAN HORIZON AWARD HONOREE

and
Jan Neuharth
FREEDOM OF SPEECH AWARD HONOREE

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FREE SPEECH AMERICA

Life's Good.

LG

HERE'S TO TONIGHT'S HONOREES

We proudly salute Jack Abernethy and Jan Neuharth, and we applaud The Media Institute for promoting free speech, a competitive media environment and excellence in journalism.

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Kate Riley, Michelle Shanahan



FREE SPEECH AMERICA

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We thank **The Media Institute** for defending freedom of speech, shaping communications policy, and supporting excellence in journalism.

We applaud this year's honorees:

Jan Neuharth, Chair and CEO, Freedom Forum

Jack Abernethy, CEO, Fox Television Stations

Patrick Butler, The Media Institute's James Madison Fellow



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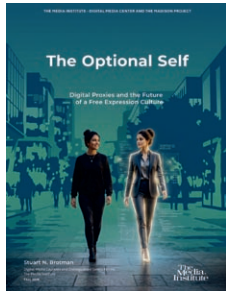
DIGITAL MEDIA CENTER

The Digital Media Center (DMC) is a program of The Media Institute that brings clarity to key issues at the heart of today's digital revolution.

Coordinating the DMC's program activities is Media Institute Digital Media Laureate and Distinguished Senior Fellow **Stuart N. Brotman**. He is the author of *Free Expression Under Fire: Defending Free Speech and Free Press Across the Political Spectrum* (2026).

Stuart's latest White Paper is being released this month under the auspices of two Institute programs: the Digital Media Center and The Madison Project. ***The Optional Self: Digital Proxies and the Future of Free Expression*** examines the rapid rise of three artificial intelligence stand-ins — avatars, recommendation engines, and artificial companions — and their escalating consequences for individual agency, democratic discourse, and free expression culture.

The paper examines not only cultural effects but reaches into the law, and specifically into a free expression culture based on speakers being actual persons. The paper concludes with five foundational principles to guide policymakers, platform designers, and ultimately Congress in determining which human functions cannot be delegated to machines. ***The Optional Self*** can be previewed by scanning the QR code below.







Congratulations to the 2026 Free Speech America Gala Honorees

NAB is proud to celebrate this year's honorees, including former NAB board member Jack Abernethy.

Every day, local broadcasters exercise the freedoms protected by the First Amendment to report the facts, provide lifesaving information and keep their communities informed and connected.

NAB applauds The Media Institute for its longstanding commitment to defending free speech and a free and independent press.

NAB®
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BROADCASTERS

FREE SPEECH WEEK

OCTOBER 19–25, 2026

Free Speech Week is a nationwide annual event celebrating America's constitutional rights of free speech and a free press. The only event of its kind, Free Speech Week is a pure celebration of these precious freedoms with no political, partisan, or ideological agenda.

Free Speech Week takes place every year during the third week of October. During the past week, media organizations, schools and universities, civic groups, and other organizations around the country focused on free speech and press issues in a variety of ways. Social media platforms provided an opportunity for all Americans who value free speech to be heard.

The Media Institute continue to salute freedom of speech and a free press tonight with our "Free Speech America" Gala.

The Institute created Free Speech Week in 2005 and continues to maintain the FSW website, freespeechweek.org, which features free speech themes, resources, and activities. Next year's Free Speech Week will take place Oct. 18–24, 2027.



FREE SPEECH AMERICA

Spectrum



We Are Proud to Support The Media Institute

Congratulations to Tonight's Honorees:

- Freedom of Speech Award recipient Jan Neuharth
- American Horizon Award recipient Jack Abernethy
- Featured speaker Patrick Butler

THE MADISON PROJECT

The Madison Project: Free Speech and Press in American Democracy is a major initiative of The Media Institute that assesses the impact of free speech and press on the future of democracy.

The Madison Project's latest effort is a White Paper by Media Institute Digital Media Laureate and Distinguished Senior Fellow **Stuart N. Brotman** released jointly with the Institute's Digital Media Center. Titled ***The Optional Self: Digital Proxies and the Future of Free Expression***, it looks at the profound impacts of AI avatars, recommendation engines, and artificial companions on the individual, society, and our concept of free expression.

Meanwhile, the Institute's James Madison Fellow, **Patrick Butler**, is undertaking a new initiative for The Madison Project called **"The First Amendment in the 21st Century."** Through a series of podcasts, Pat will explore with experts from multiple disciplines issues of media credibility and authenticity in the age of AI, how media of all kinds influence public perceptions and opinions, what the public values in a free press, and related topics.

As The Madison Project marks its third anniversary tonight, it boasts an impressive body of work that includes white papers, essays, policy papers, a videocast with Michael O'Rielly interviewing Floyd Abrams, a luncheon address by Stuart Brotman, and a voter media literacy guide.

Initial support for The Madison Project was provided by **Verizon**, **LG Electronics**, and **Wiley Rein LLP**. Contact Michael O'Rielly for sponsorship information.



FREE SPEECH AMERICA

The News/Media Alliance proudly supports The Media Institute

Free Speech America Gala 2026

and celebrates tonight's honorees:

Jan Neuharth

recipient of the Institute's Freedom of Speech Award

Jack Abernethy

recipient of the American Horizon Award

NEWS · MEDIA ALLIANCE

The Alliance thanks you for your dedication to free speech and excellence in journalism!

COMMUNICATIONS FORUM LUNCHEON SERIES

The Communications Forum Luncheon Series is a Washington institution and one of The Media Institute's most popular programs. Communications Forum speakers include government officials, industry executives, and prominent media analysts. Luncheons take place eight times per year in downtown Washington.

With two dozen corporate and organizational sponsors, the luncheons offer Washington media and telecom policy executives a collegial atmosphere and a wide range of speaker viewpoints to spark lively discussion. Speakers in 2026 have included:

Arielle Roth
National Telecommunications and Information Administration
Senator Cory Gardner
NCTA — The Internet & Television Association
Arpan Sura
Federal Communications Commission
Kate Riley
America's Public Television Stations
Paul Gallant
TD Cowen
Robert Folliard
Gray Media
Edward "Smitty" Smith (November)
T-Mobile
Scott Blake Harris (December)
Crest Hill Advisors

We thank our Communications Forum sponsors for their support. For information about 2027 sponsorships, please contact Susanna Coto at The Media Institute.



FREE SPEECH AMERICA


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**Chair*



FREE SPEECH AMERICA

ATSC is proud to support the Free Speech Gala and The Media Institute.

Together, we celebrate a future built on free speech, open dialogue, and technological progress.

Congratulations to American Horizon Award honoree **Jack Abernethy**, from ATSC member FOX Television Stations.



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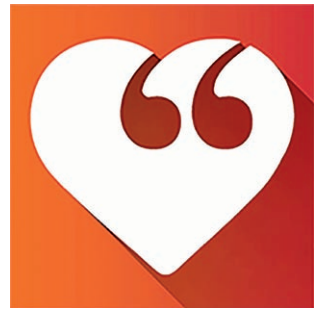
FREE SPEECH AMERICA

FREE SPEECH WEEK

Free Speech: The Language of America®



October 18–24, 2027



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