Remarks by Barbara Wall
Presenting The Media Institute's
2026 Freedom of Speech Award
To Jan Neuharth
October 27, 2026

It's a privilege to have been asked to introduce Jan Neuharth tonight. Jan is a remarkable leader, a steadfast champion of the First Amendment and, for me, a dear friend.

My connection to Jan and the Neuharth family goes back many years, beginning with her father, Al Neuharth.

As founder of USA TODAY, Al believed deeply in a free press that served all Americans.

As founder of Freedom Forum, Al turned his belief in a free press into an institution devoted to protecting and promoting it.

Al – who always thought big – made the First Amendment central to the Neuharth legacy.

Jan has made that legacy her own.

A lawyer by training, Jan worked for Sen. Howard Baker, something she shares with our featured speaker tonight, Pat Butler. She later built a career that brought her to the leadership of Freedom Forum.

As Chair and CEO, Jan has broadened Freedom Forum's work, while keeping the First Amendment at its core.

She has worked to make all five freedoms meaningful to all Americans.

That means celebrating the First Amendment through music, honoring champions of free expression, and inspiring young journalists. Most of all, it means helping people see how these freedoms shape their everyday lives.

The idea behind that work is simple: We are more likely to defend our freedoms when we know them, value them, and understand what they make possible.

And Jan has been unwavering on another point. This work is nonpartisan. These freedoms belong to us all.

I've been fortunate to know Jan beyond the boardroom, too. She is thoughtful. She listens. And when she believes in something, she brings both conviction and grace to her beliefs.

As an aside, I'll share that Jan is also a very proud Florida Gator, which, depending on the season, presents challenges that may account for two of Jan's other defining traits: commitment and resilience!

I've known the Neuharth family across generations. Al helped define a vision for a free press central to our democracy. Jan has carried that vision forward and made it relevant to a whole new generation.

Jan, I'm so pleased to celebrate you, free speech, and the First Amendment tonight.