

Lessig Calls for Freely Available Debate Footage

May 21 2007

Despite grave concerns about the current state of copyright and free speech on the democratic process, Stanford professor Lawrence Lessig says he has reason to be optimistic for the future.

Lessig spoke at the Personal Democracy Forum, a conference dedicated to how technology is changing the political process, Friday at Pace University in New York. At the most fundamental level, Lessig says that broadcasts of our political debates should be freely available to bloggers, comedians, and academics.

Lessig's multimedia presentation involved multiple clips of remixed political commentary, including several segments of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, which is ironic given Viacom's position on the show's clips on YouTube.

"We shouldn't be fighting in courts about the right to speak, and it would have been guaranteed in any sane time in history," Lessig said.

Although professionals have had this ability for years, Lessig says that the fact that anyone with a \$500 PC can make similar commentary is a good thing. "This is a radical change in the opportunity for people to participate in political debates," Lessig said.

Of course, in order for Jon Stewart to comment on video clips they have to be legally available, which is not always the case. Lessig says that many film makers and organizations have been denied access to footage

from political debates. He says, "When the world is such that the speech is presumptively illegal....you have a distorted the political process."

Lessig issued a call for candidates to say that copy has its limits. Several presidential candidates have called for free and open access to debates. Barack Obama put very eloquently in this statement released online, which was quoted by Lessig at the conference:

"I am a strong believer in the importance of copyright, especially in a digital age," Lessig quoted Obama as saying. "But there is no reason that this particular class of content needs the protection. We have incentive enough to debate. The networks have incentive enough to broadcast those debates. Rather than restricting the product of those debates, we should instead make sure that our democracy and citizens have the chance to benefit from them in all the ways that technology makes possible."

Interestingly, Lessig says presidential hopeful Hilary Clinton has not commented on open access to debate footage.

In the end, Lessig assured attendees that he is in favor of copyright as a concept, but he wants to define its limits. "Let's begin to think about where it is necessary and where it is harmful."

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