



## 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.

### *CMD Continues Reporting on Fake News*

Senior Researcher Diane Farsetta continued her extensive reporting on fake news, highlighting the judgment against pundit Armstrong Williams for acting as a paid shill and the fines levied against Sonshine Family Television and Sinclair Broadcast Group for their involvement. More on the Armstrong case is at [www.PRWatch.org/node/6579](http://www.PRWatch.org/node/6579). Farsetta also

parsed the TV news industry's response to the first-ever FCC fines levied against a network for broadcasting undisclosed video news releases (VNRs). Comcast is the first to be fined, but likely not the last — a situation that has the industry battling back. As Farsetta wrote, "The FCC fines are an important first step in ensuring news viewers' right to know. But rather than roll up its metaphoric sleeves and address the impact of VNRs on television news, RTNDA is lobbying against any FCC action." More on this story at [www.PRWatch.org/node/6647](http://www.PRWatch.org/node/6647).

### *A Preview of "Stop-Loss"*

Associate Director Judith Siers-Poisson attended a pre-screening of Kimberly Peirce's new film, "Stop-Loss," which will be released widely in the U.S. in March 2008. Based on extensive interviews with soldiers, and using footage shot by deployed military personnel, the narrative film focuses on the story of a young soldier who, instead of being discharged on the anticipated date of the end of his service, is retained by the military through the controversial "stop-loss" policy, often considered a back door draft. Read more at [www.PRWatch.org/node/6733](http://www.PRWatch.org/node/6733).

### *The Oregon Referendum Defeat Analyzed*

TobaccoWiki Editor Anne Landman assessed the defeat of a tobacco tax increase in Oregon, and looked to her own state of Colorado for a similar case with a different ending. As Landman explained, "Increasing cigarette taxes to fund health care is not a new idea, and

tobacco industry efforts to defeat such measures aren't new either. What was new in this case was that tobacco interests poured a record \$12 million into defeating Oregon's measure, making it the costliest election in Oregon's history." Read more at [www.PRWatch.org/node/6709](http://www.PRWatch.org/node/6709).

### *Saving the Shared Values Campaign*

CMD Research Director Sheldon Rampton responded to a request from a professor for more information on the U.S. government's TV ad propaganda campaign called Shared Values. This project targeted Muslim countries in the wake of September 11, 2001. Rampton realized that actual video from the campaign was difficult to find, so after locating it, he added it to internet archive sites to make sure it would be available to researchers and the general public. Rampton wrote, "Like most propaganda, they tell us a great deal about how the propagandists see themselves as well as how they want to be perceived by others." Read the article at [www.PRWatch.org/node/6465](http://www.PRWatch.org/node/6465).

### *Front Groups and Phony Claims*

Diane Farsetta detailed AT&T's successful efforts to ram a cable franchise bill through the Wisconsin legislature. The industry front group TV4US was very active and saturated the TV airwaves with issue ads aimed at consumers. The bill, which promises union jobs, competitive rates and consumer choice, will deliver none of these, and will give franchises out in perpetuity and will cost the state crucial revenue. The bill is on the governor's desk to sign. For more information, go to [www.PRWatch.org/node/6635](http://www.PRWatch.org/node/6635).

### *Celebrating a Victory for Press Freedom*

Journalist Sarah Olson, who was the impetus for the Defend the Press campaign that CMD spearheaded nearly a year ago, wrote an article detailing what has happened regarding her case and that of Lt. Ehren Watada, the Iraq War critic who faced a court martial as a result of his refusal to deploy to Iraq. The intimidation and threats leveled against Olson and Watada were two-fold — to cow journalists who might write critically about the war effort, but perhaps even more importantly, to silence military personnel who speak out against an illegal war. As Olson said, "Without actually hearing from these men and women, public debate is dominated by the Bush Administration. A vigorous and free debate cannot be had on any issue when one side has all the power and access, and the other is barred from even speaking to the media." Olson's entire article is available at [www.PRWatch.org/node/6740](http://www.PRWatch.org/node/6740).



## CMD In the News

- Senior Researcher Diane Farsetta was interviewed on Democracy Now! to discuss FEMA's staging of a fake news conference about the California wildfires. The piece is available at [http://www.democracynow.org/2007/10/29/fema\\_admits\\_it\\_held\\_fake\\_press](http://www.democracynow.org/2007/10/29/fema_admits_it_held_fake_press)
- Executive Director John Stauber presented at the Labor & War conference in San Francisco in October. He participated on a panel titled "War and the Destruction of Civil Liberties."
- Research Director Sheldon Rampton spoke to a journalism class at the University of Wisconsin -Madison. on the topic of "The Propaganda Model and the War in Iraq."
- Diane Farsetta was interviewed on Ben Merens' show on Wisconsin Public Radio in December to talk about the 2007 Falsies awards. She also appeared on other programs, including KPSI in Palm Springs, FL, CFRO, Vancouver Cooperative Radio, and WBAI Radio in New York. The Falsies were also featured on AlterNet.
- TobaccoWiki Editor Anne Landman was interviewed on the national Air America radio show "Ring of Fire." She helped to explain why Philip Morris would pursue FDA regulations of the tobacco industry. Listen at <http://odeo.com/audio/16993713/view>.

"Whether it's PR Watch, SourceWatch, Congresspedia or the 'Weekly Spin,' the Center for Media and Democracy can always be counted on to provide researchers, social activists, and ordinary readers with up-to-date information and lucid analysis. Over the years, CMD has consistently held the corporate polluters, mainstream media misinformers, and government spinmeisters' feet to the fire."

— Bill Berkowitz, *Media Transparency*

## CMD Awards Fourth Annual Falsies!

Every day, the CMD staff wades through countless examples of spin, propaganda, and the pollution of our information environment. Yet at the end of each year, we pull ourselves out of the morass, take a look around, and compile a list of the flacks, fronts, sell jobs and shills that really stand out in the crowd. These (un)fortunate few are nominated for a Falsies award, and our readers help us decide on whom to bestow this dubious honor.



So, with no further ado, the winners of the coveted Falsies awards. (For a complete rundown, go to [www.PRWatch.org/falsies2007](http://www.PRWatch.org/falsies2007)) The prestigious Gold Falsie was given to two groups that are equally deserving for their efforts to continue, or lack of effort to stop, the War in Iraq. One winner of the Gold Falsie is Freedom's Watch, an influential Republican-associated lobbying group that advocates "peace through strength." Freedom's Watch started by supporting the troop "surge," but now is raising millions of dollars to push for war with Iran. Their fellow Gold Falsie winner is the Congressional Democrats, who while talking tough enough to take control of the House, have not lived up to even the lowest of expectations for showing leadership to end the War.

The Silver Falsie went to global warming skeptics, who despite overwhelming scientific evidence, still claim that there is cause to doubt. The Bronze Falsie goes to The International Formula Council for its successful efforts to downplay the importance and value of breastfeeding. This nominee brought out a large number of voters that felt strongly that they deserved to be recognized for their stunning "success." Dishonorable mentions went to Merck for its PR push to scare women and girls into getting their HPV vaccine; America Supports You, which uses questionable practices at best; and fake news practices in general, including FEMA's faux news conference.

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## Open Mouth, Insert Foot . . .



In a speech at the Conservative Leadership Conference, corporate-funded attack dog Rick Berman said that

"everybody should be afraid" of unions. He singled out educators because people tend to trust teachers. "We have to reposition these people in the minds of the public," Berman said. "If you don't, you will always be fighting Mother Teresa. ... We have to marginalize their unwarranted credibility." Berman is also behind print ads comparing union leaders to Fidel Castro and North Korean dictator Kim Jong-il.



To investigate high-powered lobbying firms' advocacy for "corrupt, dictatorial foreign regimes," Harper's Washington editor Ken Silverstein posed as "Kenneth Case" of "The Maldon Group," a fictitious firm which he said had "a financial stake in improving the public image" of Turkmenistan. Cassidy & Associates lobbyists, anxious to be hired, said their work for Equatorial Guinea was "a very similar sort of representation to what you're talking about," and boasted of getting President Teodoro Obiang off Parade Magazine's "worst dictator" list.

## Falsies, *continued*

Readers' Choice awards were given to several scoundrels, including "journalist" Alexis Debat, who fabricated interviews with a variety of high-profile politicians. The PR giant Edelman was nominated for a lifetime achievement award for its work for many dubious clients.

Readers also nominated candidates for genuine praise in our "Win Against Spin" category. These include Democracy Now!, the independent daily television and radio news program hosted by Amy Goodman. Its nominator wrote that it "is the best anti-spin ... news available in the media to a mass audience." Your humble servants at CMD were also nominated.

As always, Falsies Awards winners must come to CMD's office in Madison, Wisconsin, to collect their prizes. This year's winners will receive a pair of Groucho Marx glasses, to obscure their real identity; the Online Deception Kit, comprised of a sock, buttons and thread, to make their own puppet; and a five-gallon bucket of Mr. Flack's Special Greenwash Paint (warning: may not look green upon closer examination).

## About PR Watch

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## Profile: Diane Farsetta

Senior Researcher Diane Farsetta started working for CMD in the Fall of 2003. Diane coordinates CMD's No Fake News campaign, co-authoring CMD's three reports on video news releases (VNRs). Her impeccable research and analysis led to the first-ever fines leveled by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for the use of undisclosed VNRs. Diane has enjoyed seeing the results of her efforts. "Our fake news work has not only documented the extent to which news viewers are spun," she said, "but has also made the FCC get involved. Achieving that real world impact has been very gratifying."



Other topics that Diane has written on include nuclear industry spin and government PR. AlterNet, Common Dreams, CounterPunch and Guerrilla News Network have published Diane's writing, and she is a regular contributor to the WIMN's Voices blog.

Diane received her PhD from the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Cellular and Molecular Biology Program in 2000. Her non-academic accomplishments are just as impressive. Since 2000, she has been a reporter and program host for community radio WORT in Madison, Wisconsin. Due to this background in radio journalism, Diane urged CMD to re-start the Weekly Radio Spin, available at [www.PRWatch.org/audio](http://www.PRWatch.org/audio).

A long-time activist in international solidarity work, Diane has been a member of the East Timor and Indonesia Action Network/U.S. since 1994, and established the first official United States-East Timor sister city relationship, Madison-Ainaro.

Diane lives in Madison, Wisconsin with her husband, Eric, and their three-legged dog, Eileen.

## Show Your Support of CMD: Make an End of the Year Gift Today!

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.

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

Please consider a generous gift to CMD today. You can go to [www.PRWatch.org/donate](http://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 USA. **Thank you!**

# The Center for Media and Democracy Launches TobaccoWiki!



After a year of laying the groundwork, CMD launched TobaccoWiki in October as a project within SourceWatch, our on-line, collaborative encyclopedia of people, organizations and issues shaping the public agenda.

The idea for TobaccoWiki came in the spring of 2006, when Dr. Stanton Glantz saw a demonstration of the Congresspedia project, also housed within SourceWatch. Stan immediately saw the potential

of using the power of SourceWatch to make crucial tobacco industry documents available to an even larger pool of people, and to expand the material with analysis and links to other information in SourceWatch, as well as other internet sites.

Just months later, CMD received a three-year start-up grant from the American Legacy Foundation and hired one of the premier tobacco documents researchers, Anne Landman, to serve as the TobaccoWiki editor. She says, "I'm excited to be the editor of TobaccoWiki because I have long believed that

tobacco document information needs to come out of the realm of academic and medical journals and be made available to a wider global audience in a format that's easier to access, use and read. TobaccoWiki provides a way to share and build upon what we already know about the industry's behavior, so people don't have to constantly dig up the same information."

Since CMD's beginnings, we have critiqued tobacco industry spin. To understand the machinations of the PR industry, Big Tobacco's tactics serve as a Rosetta Stone for deciphering the "code." Luckily, because of the major lawsuits files and won by numerous states-attorneys general, there is a plethora of documents available, but navigating them is a different story. TobaccoWiki provides not just document information, but also links to the finest sources of additional material. A researcher at Curtin University in Perth, Australia recently wrote to say, "I have come across the TobaccoWiki site – it is very helpful. I have found some great documents to support the research I am working on. I will add my Australia findings to the database. It really is a wonderful resource."

To explore TobaccoWiki, go to [www.TobaccoWiki.org](http://www.TobaccoWiki.org), and feel free to contact TobaccoWiki Editor Anne Landman at [anne@sourcewatch.org](mailto:anne@sourcewatch.org).



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