

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Bloggers Look for "Sunshine" on Public Access to Government Documents

FreeCulture.org announces Blogshine Sunday

March 8, 2005 – On March 13, news organizations across the United States will participate in "Sunshine Sunday" by running stories and editorials in support of public access to government information. Simultaneously, bloggers throughout the U.S. and beyond will spotlight their own experiences with obtaining access to government documents. This "Blogshine Sunday" has been organized by FreeCulture.org, an international group of student activists, to ensure that government remains accessible to tomorrow's journalists.

Are bloggers really journalists? While the debate continues to rage, it is indisputable that this grassroots media is already playing an important role in uncovering and disseminating information. Indeed, the very characteristics that set bloggers apart from traditional journalists – amateur status, a near-fanatical dedication to following particular stories – are powerful tools for pursuing the kinds of buried malfeasance that open-access laws are meant to uncover. Recent incidents – the CBS Evening News and "Rathergate" in 2004, Sen. Trent Lott's comments at Strom Thurmond's 100th birthday in 2002 – make it clear: bloggers unearth stories that would otherwise go untold.

Blogshine Sunday, at <http://blogshine.org>, is about preserving the right of all citizens, not just credentialed journalists, to observe the workings of their government. Whether local council meetings or federal advisory committees, the activity of public officials should be clear and visible to ordinary people.

Blogshine Sunday also focuses on digital access to records, a topic relevant to traditional journalists as well as bloggers and other citizen journalists. Blogshine Sunday emphasizes the importance of open access, asserting that government documents need to be digital and online, not buried in archives.

As part of mainstream journalism, the American Society of Newspaper Editors' Sunshine Sunday is an important effort. FreeCulture.org supports the need for freedom of information and open government. But the strong, disinfectant power of sunshine can come from many corners. On Blogshine Sunday, look for some rays from unexpected sources.

Related stories

On Feb. 2, the Society of Professional Journalists announced it had donated \$1,000 to the legal fund of the senior editor of Oklahoma State University's student newspaper, who was denied access to university records in a digital format.

On Feb. 16, Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas) and Sen. Pat Leahy (D-Vt.) introduced legislation which would extend Freedom of Information Act fee waivers to journalists, regardless of

institutional association, including bloggers and other Internet-based journalists.

In 2003, the Florida Supreme Court banned court clerks from making most court records available online until guidelines for the process had been created. A court committee is expected to vote on those guidelines later this month.

About Blogshine Sunday

Blogshine Sunday, on March 13, 2005, is being organized by FreeCulture.org to ensure that government remains accessible to tomorrow's journalists. Authors of Web logs around the United States will be encouraged to write on their blog about their experiences obtaining access to government and the need for freedom of information in the digital age.

On the Web at <http://blogshine.org/>

About FreeCulture.org

Launched in April 2004 at Swarthmore College in Swarthmore, Pa., FreeCulture.org is non-partisan, not for profit group of student activists dedicated to promoting the power of technology to enable cultural participation. Named for the book by Stanford Law professor Lawrence Lessig, FC.o was founded by two Swarthmore students after suing voting-machine manufacturer Diebold, Inc. for abusing copyright law in 2003. Today, Free Culture groups exist at nine colleges, from Maine to California. Groups with which FC.o has collaborated include the Electronic Frontier Foundation, Public Knowledge, Creative Commons and Downhill Battle.

On the Web at <http://freeculture.org/>

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