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TRANSCRIPT

Debating the Debates

The presidential debates are over, and party lines are drawn. But there's at least one thing that some members of both parties can agree on: The debate format isn't working for the American people.

The Open Debate Coalition was started by Stanford Professor Lawrence Lessig and includes organizations like Media Matters for America, Color of Change and Free Press, along with RedState, the Next Right, and Newt Gingrich's American Solutions.

The group was formed during the primary season to ensure video footage of the debates could be shared without fear of breaking copyright law. All of the networks agreed to release their footage except Fox. Adam Green, director of Strategic Campaigns for MoveOn.org, said it was a big win which fueled the push to open the presidential debates.

Adam Green – We got back together and asked that video rights be freed up and also, that for the town hall debate, Internet questions supposedly asked by the people were actually chosen by the people, as opposed to being chosen by TV producers and put in the mouths of real people.

The coalition wrote a letter to both candidates, asking that these two principles be adopted. The answers were somewhat surprising.

Green – Both presidential campaigns said they agreed with them, which marks a huge precedent that we now can carry with us forward. We're still going to be asking that video rights of the debates be released by the Commission on Presidential Debates and by the networks. But overall, we are going to have an agenda on reforming the Commission on Presidential Debates so that they are truly accountable to the people and transparent.

It's shocking that both presidential campaigns can agree on anything, let alone this, and have a broad coalition agree on this, and that they still would be completely non-responsive. That shows that there's a fundamental breakdown in our democracy, and this entity needs to be reformed so debates represent the will of the people.

And we're going to take this precedent of both major party candidates agreeing to these principles and bring it with us into 2009, 2010, congressional races, state and local races, and essentially try to reshuffle the norms, so that openness is the new norm. So that video rights are freely put into the public domain by those who organize debates; so that questions "from the public" actually are from the public; and so that in general,

there is not this high and mighty Debate Commission attitude, and instead, people really have ownership of debates.

For more information about the Open Debate Coalition, go to opendebatecoalition.org.

The Cost of Reading Online Privacy Policies

Do you know if your Internet Service Provider sells your personal information to other companies? How about the Web sites that you visit? Are they keeping your information private? Or are they selling information on your clicks and purchases to advertisers? Or saving it in case the government wants to take a look?

To find out, you have to read their privacy policies. But be ready to spend some time. If everyone read the privacy policies of every Web site they visited for a year, it would cost in lost time about \$3,000 – or \$365 billion for the entire country.

That's according to a new study by Aleecia McDonald and Professor Lorrie Faith Cranor of Carnegie Mellon University. McDonald says even skimming a policy takes time.

Aleecia McDonald – For skimming policies and answering comprehension questions, we measured that as about six minutes per policy. And that's across about 1,200 unique Web sites per person visited each year. So that works out to being over about 100 hours – about 112 hours per person to skim online privacy policies.

McDonald decided to do the study because of an industry leader's concept of privacy practices.

McDonald – Well, I got a little frustrated. Last May I read comments from a CEO that suggested his company should be able to do anything they want to with customer data because they disclose all of their practices and people don't read their privacy policies. And so his take on this is, since people don't read the policies, that means they don't care. And I looked at and said, "Well, people don't read the policies because they're really annoying to read and maybe we need to do a better job. Maybe we need an entirely different approach to online privacy protections.

Congress has already held a series of hearings about privacy, and some companies are beginning to do a better job of disclosure. McDonald thinks mandating more information might just lead to policies that are even more difficult to read. Instead, she says, we might get more benefit from better privacy practices.

McDonald – And if companies cannot do a better job on protecting privacy for their consumers, then the call for regulation will only grow louder.

McDonald says consumers need to be more aware of privacy policies and how they are leaving information on the Web.

McDonald – Consumers need to think about their privacy footprint in general. What information are they giving out and how could it be used in a different context. They can also just think about what information they're leaving like a breadcrumb trail across the Internet.