



NEW ENGLAND NEWS FORUM

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**UP TO 200 JOURNALIST, BLOGGERS, PLANNERS, CITIZENS, TEACHERS
CONVENING APRIL 7 TO STUDY FUTURE OF NEW ENGLAND
AMID TECH-DRIVEN MEDIA CHANGES;
VERMONT GOVERNOR KEYNOTES ONE-DAY FORUM IN LOWELL, MASS.**

LOWELL, Mass. -- Registration is open to journalists, bloggers, planners, teachers and citizens who will gather at a one-day forum in Lowell on April 7 to consider the future of New England, the effect of “shield laws,” and how technology-driven changes in media are affecting participatory democracy.

“The New(s) England Revolution: From Politics to Courtroom to Classroom,” is expected to draw up to 200 participants to a University of Massachusetts conference facility in a converted Lowell mill building. It’s the kickoff event launching the New England News Forum (NENF), a new journalism initiative based on the university’s Amherst campus.

Keynote luncheon speaker for the all-day Saturday event is Vermont Gov. James Douglas. He will discuss his state’s efforts to guarantee broadband Internet access to all its citizens by 2010 and his role as chairman of the New England Governors’ Conference. Online registration at www.newenglandnews.org/conference/ is \$28 for the day, including lunch, until March 17, when registration rises to \$40.

“The forum is a pioneering effort to create an online meeting place for citizens, media professionals, educators and news bloggers who care about the future of New England, an accountable press, accountable government and active citizenry,” said Bill Densmore, director of the forum. “At Lowell, we’re seeding the discussion among up to 200 participants on some specific topics — and other ideas will emerge from informal networking.”

The news forum promotes a conversation among journalists, educators and the public to inspire active citizenship. The forum is launching a member-supported Web site, and it plans periodic seminars around the region as well as other services to both media organizations and the public. Its launch is funded by a startup grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Among supporters of the April 7 event is VillageSoup.com of Camden, Maine.

Conveners and panelists include leading journalists, authors, educators and media researchers as well as attorneys and political consultants focusing on blogs and the New Hampshire presidential primary. One panel will debate the pros and cons of so-called “shield laws” for journalists. A shield law is under consideration in the Massachusetts Legislature.

Other topics will include the rise of bloggers and citizen journalists, a briefing on the adoption of the “public-insight journalism” – pioneered in Minnesota -- by New Hampshire Public Radio and a session on how teachers and journalists can work more closely to foster youth civic engagement. New topics may be added and the latest details are available online at www.newenglandnews.org/conference/