



Institute
for
Education

Senator Franken Speaks at IFE INFO Forum

On December 9th, friends and supporters of the Institute for Education came together in the historic LBJ room of the U.S. Capitol to hear Senator Al Franken (D-MN) share his thoughts on a range of policy issues and the state of Capitol Hill in the wake of the 2014 mid-term elections.

Coach Kemper kicked off the event by introducing Norm Ornstein, a pundit and scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and an IFE Steward. Ornstein welcomed guests and set the stage for Franken to share his thoughts on the state of the internet before taking questions from guests.

Franken started his remarks by sharing the story of YouTube: a company started by three guys in an office over a strip mall in San Mateo, California. Describing a David and Goliath story of YouTube's challenge to Google's video service, he explained how an open, neutral internet enabled innovation and competition--which led to Google eventually purchasing YouTube for \$1.6 billion.



Left: H.E. Koukku-Ronde (Finland); H.E. Verbeke (Belgium); Senator Al Franken; Laura Perez Vazquez; H.E. Wolzfeld (Luxembourg); and H.E. Lyrvall (Sweden). Center: Senator Franken and Coach Kemper with Presidential Innovation Fellows. Right: James Valentine; William Edington; and David Fenstermaker.

"That's what net neutrality is all about," said Franken. "All content and applications on the internet should be treated equally by internet service providers, regardless of ownership."

Casting net neutrality as essential to ensuring a level playing ground for new businesses to innovate and to avoid stifling competition, Franken argued that in order to ensure we see the next Amazon - which was started in a garage - or the next Facebook - famously started in a dorm room - policy must ensure that consumers choice's on the internet are not driven by the interests of large internet service providers.

Franken also described net neutrality as vital to democracy, in addition to economic opportunity. "Because of net neutrality, an email from a constituent in rural Minnesota reaches me just as fast as an email from a big lobbyist. The quality of an idea matters more than the depth of one's pocket."

Opposing the proposed policy of creating internet "fast lanes" and "slow lanes" that companies would pay to access, Franken pointed out that net neutrality is not changing how the internet works, but enshrining the tradition of open and equal access to encourage and foster innovation.

Public opinion is on the side of net neutrality, argued Franken. Referencing recent public comment on proposed FCC regulations, Franken said that there were 4 million comments made - twice as much as any past FCC policy - with 99% supporting net neutrality. Franken argued that to ensure that net neutrality becomes policy, broadband internet should be reclassified as a public utility, like water or electricity.



Left: Bo Kemper, Senator Franken and RFFG Fellow Kent Elliott. Ctr: Counselor Hermann Nehls, Embassy of Germany; Coach Kathy Kemper and Mark Ginsburg. Right: Norm Ornstein and David Hawkings.

Asked about the mood on Capitol Hill following the midterm elections, Franken joked that it was very good on the Republican side. On a serious note, he said he looked forward to working with Republicans on common ground issues like early childhood education.

Attendees of Tuesday's INFO Public Policy Breakfast Forum included Ambassador Ritva Koukku-Ronde of the Embassy of Finland; Ambassador Björn Lyrvall of the Embassy of Sweden; Ambassador and IFE's Diplomatic Steward Johan Verbeke of the Embassy of Belgium; and Ambassador Jean-Louis Wolzfeld of the Embassy of Luxembourg.

IFE Leadership included: Jim Valentine, IFE Founder; David Fenstermaker, Raymond James & Associates; John Paul Farmer, IFE Emerging Markets Roundtable Co-Founder, Presidential Innovation Fellows Co-Founder, Microsoft; Timothy "Bo" Kemper, Robertson Foundation for Government; and Mark Schulte, IFE Chief Technology Officer and Fellow, Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting.

Contributed by IFE Fellow Nick Seaver. Photo credit to Kevin Allen.