Editor's Note
The Brechner Freedom of Information Project

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Thank you, Jo Anne Smith, Bill Chamberlin, Sandra Chance, Frank LoMonte, and Clay Calvert.

All of you have done good for the world, as former leaders of the Brechner Center at the University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications. For nearly 50 years, the nonprofit organization has produced research, educated the public, and mentored dozens of students, many of whom have gone on to spread the importance of civic information. The center publishes this very journal, of which I have served as founding editor since 2019.

On July 3, I will step into the role of director of the Brechner Freedom of Information Project, honored to carry on the legacy, and responsibility, of research and education in government transparency. I will miss my colleagues at the University of Arizona School of Journalism, but it is an incredible opportunity to follow in the footsteps of Frank LoMonte.

I will work alongside the new Brechner Eminent Scholar and Marion B. Brechner First Amendment Project Director, Jane Bambauer, an outstanding legal scholar, coincidentally also hired away from the University of Arizona, who will carry on the work of Clay Calvert.

Jane and I, working side-by-side, will constitute the Brechner Center for Advancement of the First Amendment, much like the Wonder Twins – activating better governance through the form of education, and through the shape of practical leading-edge research.

The Brechner Center will be even more important than ever, given increased government secrecy in the United States, and fewer organizations and resources available to push back.

With the strong support of College of Journalism and Communications Dean Hub Brown, along with a nearly $5 million endowment, the Brechner Freedom of Information Project has the opportunity to make a difference.

But what, exactly, should it do?

In the transition between jobs, I have sought input from the FOI community through more than 50 interviews and a survey of 77 thought leaders, journalists, government records custodians, scholars, nonprofits, students, and others. Just what should Brechner focus on, given the changing dynamics of government, journalism, and the ability for citizens to acquire accurate information to better self-govern?

Here is what they said:

1. Focus on issues concerning access to civic information *throughout* the United States, not just Florida, particularly at the state and local level.
2. Address issues that affect not just journalists, but also everyday citizens. Access is for everyone.
3. Produce practical research to help policy makers improve laws, and track state legislation that affects access to government information. Continue to provide online resources, promote model laws, advocate for FOI, and educate the public and lawmakers.

During the next few months, we will hone the mission and get to work. I am indebted to Janet Coats, director of the University of Florida's Consortium on Trust in Media and Technology, who has kept the center running for the past year and a half, as well as the amazing staff, Diana Mitsu Klos, Lila Greenberg, and Sara Ganim, who have continued to produce research, the Brechner Report, and the Why Don't We Know podcast.

So much to do, and so many possibilities.

And we can't do it alone. I welcome feedback and thoughts, at cuillierd@ufl.edu, on what the Brechner Freedom of Information Project, as well as the Journal of Civic Information, should focus on.

Together, we can work toward a more informed electorate and open, accountable government.