

The media freedom debate's new, powerful voice

By [Brooks Spector](#)

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For the first time, an incumbent US ambassador to South Africa has spoken out on a domestic controversy - the [contentious media freedom proposals](#) - and his words, while diplomatically couched, talk about the deep crisis this country is hurtling toward.



Speaking on Wednesday, 18 August 2010, at the SA Institute of International Affairs headquarters in Johannesburg, ambassador Donald Gips demonstrated his recognition that for American ambassadors, simply showing up (or just complaining) was insufficient to make a useful impact.

In his speech, Gips first rounded up the usual suspects that bring the two nations together or pose collective challenges. But, in what seems to have been a particularly well-timed intervention, Gips weighed in on what may well be the hottest of hot buttons in South Africa at the moment (except for a little matter of a spreading national public sector strike).

This would be the looming threat to freedom of expression and a collateral restriction on access to information being punted by the ruling African National Congress, and now opposed by a growing array of media organisations, business coalitions, NGOs and legal associations.

Read the [full analysis](#), as well as '[SA's Press Ombudsman speaks: Stop the madness](#)', at www.thedailymaverick.co.za.

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Brooks Spector, who is a regular contributor to [\[\[www.thedailymaverick.co.za\]\]](http://www.thedailymaverick.co.za), retired from the American Foreign Service after a 31-year stint. His postings included Japan, Indonesia, Swaziland and South Africa during some of the darkest days of Apartheid. In the early 90s he was in charge of negotiations around the end of the American cultural boycott of South Africa.

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