

January 14, 2022

To the judges of the Bart Richards Award:

As David Folkenflik's ultimate editor, I find him to be a deep thinker and rigorous reporter whose demeanor is tinged with an impish sense of humor.

While his humor periodically surfaces on the air, our listeners and readers greatly benefit from the breadth of Folkenflik's mastery of history, his insistence on context, and his hunger to understand how the institutions and forces that drive the news work.

As a consequence, Folkenflik's work routinely proves authoritative, defining the public record and setting the table for public discourse. And Folkenflik's earned reputation for fairness ensures key figures at the heart of stories speak with him on the record, even when the stakes are highest.

Last year offers classic examples of the form, with a focus on the pressures, tensions and forces shaping the industry and our understanding of the nation around us. In this submission, I am merely providing a representative taste - a sampling of his vital and compelling reporting.

Folkenflik's investigations of the Trump administration appointee over the Voice of America revealed a drive to politicize a news agency intended to serve as a beacon of democracy and free expression abroad. It led to Congressional hearings, new legislation, and federal inquiries. It was also cited by a federal judge in declaring his actions unconstitutional.

His work deepened the nation's understanding of the nation's ongoing racial reckoning. For instance, Folkenflik interviewed the *New York Times's* Nikole Hannah-Jones and the UNC donor who sought to block her hiring as a professor at the journalism school that bore his name. The ensuing story reflected the first time their dueling perspectives were presented at length in their own words and voices, yet his coverage included perceptive and sharp analysis.

In a separate story, Folkenflik interviewed three Latina journalists let go in less than a single year by Denver's dominant and respected local television news station; the station's news director also granted an interview to Folkenflik, the first time the station had done so. And he examined the record of the station and its parent company. Most recently, Folkenflik held our own network to account, providing a richly detailed story on the departure of a trio of prominent hosts of color from NPR.

And as is a hallmark of Folkenflik's coverage, he focused squarely on the question of fairness. One story explored an initiative by a growing number of major metro newspaper editors to consider whether to clean the slate for people covered in a negative light, given the permanence of news stories on the web. Another provided an in-depth look at the *Wall Street Journal's* unwillingness to right the wrong of its unfair coverage of a relatively anonymous Obama administration official. The subject of the story told Folkenflik he was gratified that his wife was able to read it before her untimely death just a few weeks after it aired.

And Folkenflik provided a definitive account of a key issue of our age: the repercussions of Fox News' extreme and often blatantly false rhetoric.

I cannot recommend Folkenflik's work highly enough. At the least, I hope you will read and listen to these representative stories for yourselves. Regardless of whether you recognize them in the way they deserve, I'm convinced you will enjoy them and appreciate the forceful intellect and journalistic impulse that willed them into being.

Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

Pallavi Gogoi  
Chief Business Editor  
NPR NEWS