



MINNESOTA COALITION
ON GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

ST. PAUL, MN

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**Freedom of information awards go to APM Reports' "In the Dark" team
and to First Amendment attorney John Borger (posthumously)**
*Public is invited to award ceremony featuring a panel discussion by "In the
Dark" team members*

**The Minnesota Coalition on Government Information (MNCOGI) is pleased to
announce:**

- **This year's John R. Finnegan Freedom of Information Award will honor the APM Reports "In the Dark" team** of host Madeleine Baran, producers Samara Freemark, Natalie Jablonski and Rehman Tungekar and reporters Parker Yesko and Will Craft for outstanding work on podcasts aired since 2016. The first series explored the kidnapping and killing of Jacob Wetterling, scrutinizing the law enforcement system that failed for decades to solve the case. The second series examined the case of Curtis Flowers who had been convicted in Mississippi for a 1996 quadruple murder but won six retrials and a favorable U.S. Supreme Court ruling due to flawed prosecution. The team arduously dug into public records, assembled sophisticated data analysis and creatively deployed the narrative podcast form to deliver powerful and compelling exposures of injustice. In nominating the team for the award, MNCOGI chair Gary Hill wrote: "In some instances, the records were dumped in warehouses where mice shredded them to make nests. Reporters had to wear masks and gloves to sort through the records." The team assembled data on the prosecution by obtaining records from 418 trials and scanning more than 115,000 pages of court documents. "All this work allowed APM to report that in these trials prosecutors struck black jurors at 4.5 times the rate white jurors were struck," Hill wrote. "U.S. Supreme Court observers say they think this was one of the reasons the court agreed to hear the case and why they threw out Mr. Flowers' conviction, allowing him to be released on bail while awaiting a decision whether he would be tried again."
- **This year's lifetime achievement award will honor First Amendment attorney John Borger** (posthumously) for a significant body of accomplishments that have helped to advance and preserve the public's right to government transparency. Borger, a long-time MNCOGI board member, worked for decades to protect Minnesota's sunshine laws. His dogged commitment to allowing facts to be uncovered and published has benefited all Minnesotans. He was one of the country's pre-eminent First Amendment lawyers, named in 2018 as "Champion of the First Amendment," the highest honor from the American Bar Association Forum on Communications Law (only the third to receive the prestigious award). In bestowing



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the award, the Forum noted Borger lifetime work “passionately and zealously fighting to hold public officials and institutions accountable through transparency.” In nominating Borger for this MNCOGI award, journalist Steve Brandt, cited his landmark public access battles – including a 1976 case that set ground rules for the attorney-client exception to the Open Meeting Law for succeeding generations, and the 2004 case in which the Supreme Court of Minnesota ruled that state open-government laws apply to the search for a University of Minnesota president. Further, Brandt listed everyday cases in which Borger fought to assure that public officials lived up to the demands of data practices law -- safeguarding public access to court hearings and files, to arrest information, to official phone records and much more. In closing, Brandt quoted Borger’s own words on the day he accepted the ABA award: “I have carried a torch for the First Amendment for more than 50 years. I hope I lit a few candles along the way. The First Amendment torch now burns with you, and you, and you. Hold it high. The road goes ever on and on. Many important battles lie ahead.” Borger died on Dec. 16, 2019.

- **MNCOGI’s future lifetime achievement awards will be named in John Borger’s honor.**

Award ceremony:

When: Monday, March 16th, 7 pm

Where: Pohl Hall, Minneapolis Central Library, 300 Nicollet Mall,
Minneapolis

The award ceremony will include a panel discussion by “In the Dark” team members, moderated by Professor Jane Kirtley.

The public is most welcome to attend.

About the Minnesota Coalition on Government Information (MNCOGI): MNCOGI is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization committed to the public’s right to know, the promotion of public access to government information and transparency of government operations. Online at <http://www.mncogi.org>.

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