

National Freedom of Information Council: Four state heroes to be inducted into National Freedom of Information Coalition's Open Government Hall of Fame

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Honorees represent Florida, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin

GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA, Sept. 16, 2021 — Four “Heroes of the 50 States,” representing Florida, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, will be inducted Sept. 30 into the National Freedom of Information Coalition’s State Open Government Hall of Fame, as the Class of 2021. The inductees have backgrounds in law, journalism and academia.

The 2021 inductees are:

[Barbara Petersen](#), of Florida

During her 25-year tenure as president of Florida’s First Amendment Foundation, through analysis and advocacy, collaboration and litigation, attorney Barbara Petersen helped to shape Florida’s open government guarantees as among the most effective and respected in the nation. She worked closely with Florida editors to create Sunshine Sunday, which became Sunshine Week. When she retired from the First Amendment Foundation in 2019, she started work on the creation of a new open government watchdog, the Florida Center for Government Accountability, which gives citizens the necessary tools and information to engage government officials more effectively by helping them better understand what is happening in

their local communities and the effect big money has on local politics.

"I could not possibly count the many times I emailed or called Barbara over the last 15 years, usually on an emergency basis for help," wrote attorney Kenneth L. Weiss, in endorsing Petersen for the Hall of Fame. "Very few, if any, people have distinguished themselves in the furtherance of open government in Florida than Barbara Petersen."

Jane Briggs-Bunting, of Michigan

Jane Briggs-Bunting was a lifetime advocate for the First Amendment and open government. She started her career as a reporter at The Detroit Free Press, then taught journalism and media law at Oakland University and Michigan State University. In 2012, Briggs-Bunting founded Michigan's statewide advocate for government transparency, the Michigan Coalition for Open Government. She received numerous awards throughout her career, including Journalist of the Year and later a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Society of Professional Journalists of Detroit; induction into the Michigan Journalism Hall of Fame; and the first recipient of the eponymous Jane Briggs-Bunting Transparency in Government Award from the Michigan Coalition for Open Government. Briggs-Bunting died of cancer March 23, 2021. She was 70.

"Jane was the epitome of a happy warrior," said Michael Reitz, president of the Michigan Coalition for Open Government. "She invested in future generations, built institutions, never backed down on the need for government transparency — doing it all with grace and deep affection for her colleagues."

Craig Staudenmaier, of Pennsylvania

Attorney Craig Staudenmaier has led the way for open government in Pennsylvania for decades. He helped spearhead media organizations' efforts as they worked with legislators to develop what became Pennsylvania's landmark Right to Know Law in 2008. Staudenmaier argued numerous precedent-setting open government cases, including three before the state Supreme Court. Thanks to Staudenmaier, Pennsylvanians won access to police files and court cases of civil disturbances and unsolved homicides, the Department of Education's emails about the Jerry Sandusky molestation scandal at Penn State University, and records surrounding a settlement between the Public Utility Commission and an electric company over a power outage that hit more than 388,000 customers. Staudenmaier has

volunteered as counsel for the Pennsylvania Freedom of Information Coalition since its founding in 2005.

“(The 2008 Right to Know Law) turned the state’s restrictive public records rules on their head,” said Susan Schwartz, president of the Pennsylvania Freedom of Information Coalition, in praising Staudenmaier’s work to shape the bill. “Before it passed, Pennsylvania was widely recognized as having one of the worst public access laws in the nation, closing almost all government records with only a few exceptions. Under the new law, government records are now presumed open.”

Bill Lueders, of Wisconsin

Bill Lueders is editor of The Progressive and author of “An Enemy of the State,” the biography of the late editor of The Progressive, Erwin Knoll. Lueders was news editor at Isthmus, Madison’s alternative weekly, for 25 years, and won dozens of state and national awards. In 2011, he moved to the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism, where he became one of Wisconsin’s leading investigative reporters. He joined the staff of The Progressive in 2015, and was named editor in September 2018. He has been the President of the Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council for two decades, and has been the driving force behind the Open Government Road Show and other efforts to educate the public in transparent governance.

“In our hyper-partisan environment, Bill is even-handed in his praise and scorn for public officials on matters of open government, regardless of political party and Bill’s personal orientation as editor of The Progressive,” said Christa O. Westerberg, co-vice president of the Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council. “Bill’s opinion matters, and politicians can count on Bill to publicly ‘call it as he sees it,’ no matter their views on other issues.”

The inductees will be honored during a ceremony at the [NFOIC’s 2021 FOI Summit](#), conducted online Sept. 28-30. The Hall of Fame Ceremony will be 1:30-2:30 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 30.

The [National Freedom of Information Coalition](#) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that promotes press freedom, litigation and legislative and administrative reforms that ensure open, transparent and accessible state and local governments. It was founded in 1989.

The State Open Government Hall of Fame recognizes long-term contributions of individuals to open government in their respective states. Induction recognizes the “long and steady effort to preserve and protect the free flow of information about state and local government that is vital to the public in a democracy.”

The Hall of Fame began in 2003. Since then, inductees from 20 states have been honored for their commitment to protecting citizens’ rights to public information.

[Click here](#) to learn more about past inductees.