

Freedom of Speech and Expression

On this, the tenth day of October 2017, the Franklin D. Roosevelt

Freedom of Speech and Expression Medal is awarded to:

Dan Rather

The ways in which we as Americans consume the news have changed profoundly over the course of your 67 years as an active journalist. New platforms have risen and fallen, government regulations of the media industry have shifted, and public attitudes toward the media and reporters have changed.

But all throughout, you have been a North Star for our First Amendment; an individual of unwavering integrity who never stopped believing in the ability of the free press to amplify the truth, hold the powerful to account, and aid the public in making the most informed decisions possible. "Ratings," you reminded us, "don't last. Good journalism does."

You were born in East Texas during the Great Depression. A student journalist who became editor of your college newspaper, you went on to cover some of the defining events of American life in the second half of the twentieth century.

The assassination of President Kennedy, the Challenger explosion, Watergate, the Iran-Contra scandals: When an event of national import took place, Americans could count on you to observe and relay the events with honesty, clarity, and verve.

Your refusal to be bullied into silence during the Watergate scandal made you into a household name. You courageously stood against the most powerful man in the country when he lied to the American public, proving that the free press can hold the powers that be accountable.

Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt understood that a democracy could only be real and vibrant if people were free to speak their minds and tell their own stories. They also appreciated the role the media could play in binding together our diverse and sprawling nation. In Eleanor's press conferences and columns, in Franklin's fireside chats, the Roosevelts used the newest

developments in media to speak directly to the people and build a national common ground, rooted in truth. Throughout your career, you have carried this torch.

Like all of us, you've encountered setbacks and mistakes in your career. Unlike most of ours, yours occurred in full view of the public. However, even when this happened, you were forthright, didn't try to hide, and remained unwavering in your commitment to using the protections and the promises of the First Amendment to deliver the truth to the American people.

In this new era, in which unfounded accusations of "fake news" and media bias are hurled wildly, you have shown your adaptive streak by stepping into social media to share your perspectives and observations with an often-perplexed public.

Without the ability to speak truth to power and call out injustice when we see it, we have no hope of confronting that injustice or imagining and realizing a better society. Thank you for using your career and life in service of this principle. It is our honor to award you the 2017 Franklin D. Roosevelt [Freedom of Speech and Expression Medal](#).

Citation read by Peter Kovler, Chairman of the Board, Blum-Kovler Foundation.