

Q&A: Victor Pickard on the layoffs at NPR, and how to better support public and local media | Columbia Journalism Review

By Emily Russell

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Recently, NPR announced that it would lay off ten percent of its staff and eliminate vacant positions to compensate for an estimated thirty-million-dollar shortfall in revenue. John Lansing, the CEO, [blamed declining corporate sponsorships and advertising income](#). That same month, New York Public Radio [canceled one of its longest-running news shows, *The Takeaway*](#), citing audience decline and financial difficulties. With these announcements, NPR and NYPR joined the ranks of other media companies who have cut staff of late, including Vox Media, Gannett, and the *Washington Post*. And budget strains aren't just affecting national news giants. Recently, *Axios* [reported](#) furloughs at local papers owned by Lee Enterprises, including [the *Roanoke Times*](#) and the [Lincoln Journal Star](#).

Victor Pickard, a media policy expert at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication, envisions a clear fix for the funding crisis hamstringing public media and local news organizations: the injection of more tax dollars. Pickard has been unimpressed by recent attempts to prop up market-based journalism structures at the federal level, such as the failed Journalism Competition and Preservation Act of 2022, which would have allowed news organizations to collectively bargain publishing terms with online platforms like Facebook. Instead, he advocates increased government spending on local PBS and NPR affiliate stations. And he'd go a step further, [arguing](#) that municipalities should purchase dying local papers and that the federal government should fund locally-operated city papers.

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