

THE WALTER CRONKITE AWARD

for excellence in television political journalism

For Immediate Release

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WITH NEWS UNDER FIRE, 2017 WALTER CRONKITE AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN TV POLITICAL JOURNALISM CELEBRATE LEGITIMACY, URGENCY OF QUALITY REPORTING

LOS ANGELES, March 13, 2017 – With reporters, news media and even the truth under assault, the winners of the 2017 Walter Cronkite Award for Excellence in Television Political Journalism demonstrate that the legacy of the longtime CBS anchor is alive and well.

Given biennially since Cronkite first presented them in 2001, the prizes were announced today by the Norman Lear Center at the University of Southern California’s Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, which administers the award.

At the awards event in 2005, Cronkite [warned](#) that “it’s going to be, to a large degree, up to us in television and radio, in broadcasting” to equip Americans “to perform the act of intelligently selecting our leaders.... If we fail at that, our democracy, our republic is, I think, in serious danger.” Announcing the winners, USC Annenberg Professor and Lear Center Director Marty Kaplan said, “Today, at this seriously dangerous moment for our democracy, these Cronkite Awards honor journalists, stations and networks stepping up to their civic responsibility to tell Americans the truth.”

The trophies will be presented at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., on Friday, April 28 at an invitation-only ceremony. For more information, including the winning entry videos, visit www.cronkiteaward.org.

INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENT BY A NATIONAL JOURNALIST

The judges singled out three national network journalists for their exemplary coverage of the politics, issues and drama of the 2016 presidential election.

- **Jorge Ramos (Univision News and Fusion)** wins for advancing the conversation about what divides us as a country. Jurors highlighted his range and talents as an interviewer, including a chillingly candid encounter with an unmasked member of the Ku Klux Klan, two Muslim women describing a racist beating inside a Minnesota restaurant and a classroom full of young dreamers expressing fears their parents will be deported.
- **Jake Tapper (CNN)** wins for his fearless advocacy for the truth throughout the election cycle. Jurors said his interviewing “relentlessness” held officials to account and equipped voters with

valuable information about the candidates. Forceful when necessary, refusing to let candidates slip away from important questions, he was praised for “his tenacious commitment to sorting fact from fiction, a quality essential to journalism.”

- **Katy Tur (NBC News)**, who followed the Trump campaign for 17 months, wins for “courage under pressure,” a “complete fluency and mastery” of the subject matter and an ability to convey it “effortlessly” on live television, whether in the field, at a press conference or in the studio. Providing unique insight into Trump voters, she displayed “grit and perseverance demonstrating the honor of her profession.”

NATIONAL NETWORK NEWS PROGRAM

- Judges called CNN’s *Reliable Sources* a “one-man media literacy course,” praising host Brian Stelter for his “down-to-earth conversational commentary” at a time when the public needs to understand what the media does and how they do it. The jury highlighted the way Stelter faced criticism of the media head on, offering positive solutions to the question of what the media needs to do to gain, and regain, the public’s trust.

BROOKS JACKSON PRIZE FOR FACT-CHECKING POLITICAL MESSAGES

This is the third year that the competition included the Brooks Jackson Prize for Fact-Checking Political Messages, named for the founding director of FactCheck.org, Brooks Jackson, and selected by a jury convened by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania, home of FactCheck.org.

- **KUSA, Denver, CO**, wins the local Fact-Checking award. KUSA, the Tegna Inc. NBC affiliate, won the Cronkite/Jackson Prize in 2013 and 2015 as well. The jury said KUSA has set a “high standard for fact-checking on a local TV station.” The research, writing and presentation serve as a model for how to help viewers cut through the political spin. Political reporter **Brandon Rittiman**’s reports are “clear, concise, well-documented and well-delivered,” the jury said.
- **The E.W. Scripps Company** wins the national Fact-Checking award. The jury broke from past practice to recognize the work of a news organization that leveraged its local stations to have a national impact. Working with the national fact-checking website PolitiFact, Scripps “provides a template for doing fact-checking consistently well” across many TV affiliates, the jury said. It produced 70 fact-checks with PolitiFact and another 160 fact-checks from its state-level PolitiFact affiliates in Ohio, Colorado, Nevada, and Arizona. The reports were “accurate, informative and well-presented.”

ACHIEVEMENT BY A LOCAL STATION

- **KXAN-TV, Austin, TX**, an NBC affiliate owned by Nexstar Media Group, wins its second Cronkite Award for its “deeply resourced, deeply reported” coverage of the expensive and questionably successful effort by lawmakers and law enforcement to stop drug smugglers from entering the state from Mexico. Judges praised the station’s holding elected officials accountable and featuring people directly impacted by federal and state policies.
- **WXIA, Atlanta, GA**, an NBC affiliate owned by Tegna Inc., wins for its five-part investigation of a military policy stripping benefits and veteran status from service members suffering from

PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury and other mental health conditions, even after serving in war zones. Judges said the station team’s “phenomenal storytelling” is a case study for taking a deep look at one issue, understanding its impact on people and prompting legislative action.

INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENT BY A LOCAL JOURNALIST

Two winners were selected – one from a large market, and one from a small.

- **Brandon Rittiman, KUSA, Denver, CO**, wins his second Cronkite award for his steady efforts to “give voice to and be an advocate for real people,” which is at the core of “what investigative and political journalism is all about.” The jury praised his reporting on local judicial elections, an issue not usually covered on local broadcast news, which “set the bar extremely high” for political coverage.
- **Sabrina Ahmed, WOI, West Des Moines, IA**, a Nexstar Media Group-owned station, wins for her “extremely compelling” reporting on medical cannabis, “combining emotion with policy and medicine.” By telling one woman’s story so powerfully, the “incredible, character-driven coverage” of a hotly contested political issue provides a look at how lives could be changed by changes in policies.

STATION GROUP

- **Hearst Television**, with 32 stations, garners its ninth consecutive Cronkite award. It is joined by **The E.W. Scripps Company**, with 33 stations, which wins its first Cronkite award in this category. Judges were impressed by both groups’ “top-down commitment” to political coverage across all their stations. They praised both organizations’ “strong, clear, vocal leadership” which translated into quality political coverage across the country.

SPECIAL COMMENDATION FOR LOCAL INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

- **Marshall Zelinger and KMGH-TV, Denver, CO**, the Scripps-owned ABC affiliate, are recognized for breaking the story of a signature forgery scandal that rocked a U.S. Senate race. His dogged research tracking down voters whose signatures were forged, as well as finding the forgery suspect, triggered an official investigation and eventual policy change. Zelinger, now at KUSA, showed “the impact that journalism can have on politics.”

SPECIAL COMMENDATION FOR VOTER EDUCATION

- **KCETLink, Los Angeles, CA**, an independent public television station, receives a special commendation for its online and on-air initiative, “*Props in a Minute*.” Led by KCETLink news anchor **Val Zavala**, the project created 60-second video explainers of 17 propositions on California’s ballot, ranging from school bonds to criminal sentencing to prescription drug prices. Judges said it demonstrated “the public service a public station can provide.”