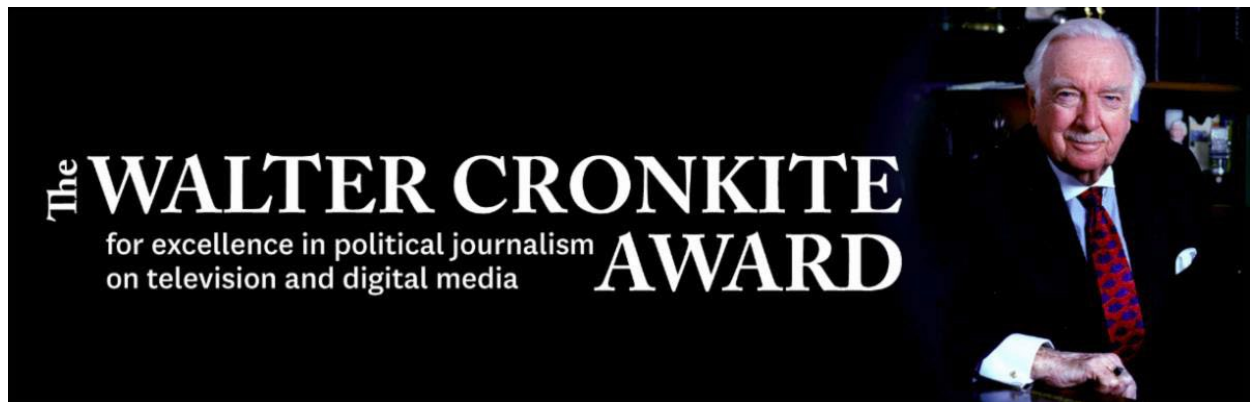




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A Free Press Can Defend Democracy. Winners of USC Annenberg’s Cronkite Award Show How.

Honors to Peter Alexander (NBC News); Scott Pelley & 60 Minutes “Rule of Law” producers (CBS News); The Rachel Maddow Show (MSNBC); PBS NewsHour “On Democracy” (Amna Nawaz & Geoff Bennett); John Dickerson Reporters Notebooks (CBS News Plus); “100 Días de Trump” (Noticias Telemundo); KFOR-TV (Oklahoma City ICE raids); Jon Stewart, host, The Daily Show (Comedy Central)

KSL-TV 5 Salt Lake City’s Truth Test wins Brooks Jackson Award from FactCheck.org

LOS ANGELES, November 4, 2025

At a time when multiple independent polls show that an overwhelming majority of Americans are deeply concerned about the future of democracy, the [2025 Walter Cronkite Awards for Excellence in Political Journalism](#) honor journalists whose work exemplifies the role of a free press in protecting constitutional principles, defending the rule of law, and holding power to account.

Established in 2001 and presented biennially by the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, the Walter Cronkite Awards for Excellence in Political Journalism recognize outstanding political journalism on television and digital media that meets the highest standards of reporting and analysis.

This year’s competition invited submissions that demonstrate how a free press defends democracy — a mission that reflects the legacy of Walter Cronkite. For 19 years, up to 30 million Americans tuned in nightly to watch Cronkite anchor the CBS Evening News. A national

poll once named him “the most trusted man in America.” When he went to Vietnam in 1968 to investigate if the U.S. government was telling the truth about winning the war, his conclusion — “no” — became an inflection point in the war, in politics and in the responsible use of the power of public discourse.

Cronkite anticipated the evolving challenges facing broadcast journalism. In testimony before the U.S. Senate, he warned of threats to press freedom, stating: “Broadcast news today is not free.....[I]ts freedom has been curtailed by fiat, by assumption, and by intimidation and harassment.” He cautioned that, “the power to make us conform is too great to forever lie dormant. The axe lies there temptingly for the use of any enraged administration.”

“The 2025 honorees reflect the courage and integrity that defined Walter Cronkite’s career,” said [Gordon Stables](#), director of USC Annenberg’s School of Journalism. “Judges selected each for demonstrating how a principled and trustworthy press confronts threats to democratic institutions through rigorous, impactful reporting—even when such work involves personal or professional risk.”

The work recognized this year includes what the judges described as investigations exposing attempts to intimidate law firms for defending due process; reporting on efforts to turn federal agencies into tools of political retribution; and coverage of a nationwide but under-reported protest movement fueled by local activism. The judges noted examples of journalistic excellence that included pursuing truth unflappably despite official intimidation and ridicule; demonstrating fairness without succumbing to false equivalence or bothsidesism; and reporting stories even when key players refused to go on camera for fear of retribution.

To recognize the growing impact of political information conveyed through comedy, satire and parody, the Cronkite judges this year added a new category, Comedic News and Commentary, whose inaugural winner is The Daily Show’s Jon Stewart. Also new is the eligibility of digital-original reporting, reflected in the award to CBS Evening News Plus anchor John Dickerson’s Reporters Notebooks.

USC Annenberg’s Cronkite Awards partners with the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania to present the Brooks Jackson Prize for Fact-Checking, named for the founding director of FactCheck.org. This year’s winner, also announced today, is KSL-TV 5 Salt Lake City, recognized for its Truth Test series of fact-checks during Utah’s 2024 legislative session.

The Walter Cronkite Awards for Excellence in Political Journalism are administered by USC Annenberg’s [Norman Lear Center](#) for the study of entertainment, media and society. The full roster of winners can be found below. For more information, including the winning entry videos, visit cronkiteawards.org, where information about the presentation of Awards will be posted.

NETWORK NEWS, ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY

PETER ALEXANDER “HOLDING THE POWERFUL ACCOUNTABLE”

Peter Alexander, Chief White House Correspondent, NBC News

Award judges said Alexander’s live reporting and interviewing “meets the challenge of fearlessly engaging” with the U.S. President and his staff in the Oval Office and White House Press Room. Noting his “deep commitment to the pursuit of truth,” they praised his “vital work to correct false narratives,” from the January 6 pardons to claims of Social Security fraud. “In the face of being personally bullied and the risk of exile... he remains composed under pressure, persevering and prepared with the facts.”

60 MINUTES “RULE OF LAW”

Correspondent Scott Pelley, executive producer Bill Owens and producer Maria Gavrilovic

Judges called this story about executive orders targeting law firms that the president treats as political enemies “an excellent and shocking look at the context and the breadth of the threat” of wielding power against the judicial system. Despite a pervasive fear of speaking out, “Just because someone won’t talk doesn’t mean you don’t do the story. That’s what 60 Minutes is known for—and has been experiencing.” The segment aired a week after the program’s executive producer resigned after 24 years with the show, prompted by increased corporate supervision of its news content in the face of a \$20 billion lawsuit from President Trump and the pending FCC approval required for CBS owner Paramount Global’s merger with Skydance Media. “This skillful examination stands up for the Fourth Estate’s responsibility to not fold under pressure.”

PBS NEWSHOUR “ON DEMOCRACY”

Amna Nawaz and Geoff Bennett, co-anchors

Judges called this “brilliant concept” for a series of interviews with experts, scholars and activists “the very best that news can do.” The embattled network’s evening newscast stepped back from the dizzying onslaught of daily news to offer an in-depth look at the impact on democracy of government actions. These “revealing and thought-provoking conversations are what we need now,” the judges remarked. “Thoughtfully produced,” with Nawaz and Bennett “excellently prepared with quality questions,” it delivered diverse viewpoints that “cut through the noise.”

THE RACHEL MADDOW SHOW “EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE, ALL AT ONCE”

Rachel Maddow, host/commentator

Judges lauded the host and team of the first and only national television program to cover the Hands Off protest movement on April 7 as “a valuable contribution to the historic record of this presidency,” hailing the “engaging and informative” episode reporting on 1,400 peaceful demonstrations as a “strong use of the medium” showing viewers they’re not alone in dissent. They praised Maddow’s “original style” and “consistent vivid storytelling,” reviving her nightly format to report on Trump’s first 100 days.

REPORTERS NOTEBOOKS BY JOHN DICKERSON

John Dickerson, CBS Evening News Plus anchor

These “exceptional” essays, carried by the streaming companion to the CBS Evening News, which Dickerson also co-anchors, address an “incredible range of topics,” judges said, from defending civil service and risks to healthcare, to the DOJ, DOGE and DEI. Dickerson does a journalist’s job of “bravely” calling out false narratives “with humanizing detail and precision.” His “clear explanations” tell us how and why it matters that democratic values are under assault, and his “historical grounding” presents facts with “calm and rational delivery,” making his writing even more “powerful and effective.”

100 DÍAS DE TRUMP (100 DAYS OF TRUMP) - NOTICIAS TELEMUNDO

Julio Vaqueiro, anchor, and Noticias Telemundo

This Spanish-language primetime special “excels at documenting” the timeline of this critical period, judges said, exploring the massive changes enacted, from immigration to tariffs. Anchor Vaqueiro, with contributions by a team of correspondents and editorial producers, mix reporting segments with live discussions with lawmakers and real-life examples of citizens impacted by Trump policies, including a wrongfully detained Trump supporter. Its “excellent storytelling comprehensively represents the viewpoint of an audience that goes unheard... that the media and politicians talk about yet rarely talk to... in a meaningful way.”

LOCAL NEWS

KFOR-TV OKLAHOMA CITY “WE’RE CITIZENS” (NBC AFFILIATE/NEXSTAR)

Spencer Humphrey, investigative reporter

Judges commended this “stunning” three-part series about a U.S. citizen and her daughters detained and humiliated by Homeland Security agents “a poignant example of finding an important local story that illustrates a national one and digging deep into it and not letting go.” KFOR exposed the raid and DHS’s false press release about it, which some media outlets repeated without question. Their reporting made national and international headlines, resulting in congressional hearings. “This entry shows why local news is important and exemplifies the power of a free press to reveal injustice and correct the public record.”

COMEDIC NEWS AND COMMENTARY

JON STEWART

Host, The Daily Show

Notwithstanding his insistence on calling himself an entertainer, not a journalist, Cronkite judges call Jon Stewart a “pioneer” and “vital voice” in political news and commentary on TV, continuing a comedic tradition in American journalism from Thomas Nast and Herblock to Art Buchwald and Molly Ivins. “Jon Stewart redefined satire as astute insights based on solid research,” they said. He returned to The Daily Show last year to take on the presidential election, extending his Monday run to skewer the Trump administration’s first year. “A master of his class,” as shown in the entry’s analysis of DOGE, Stewart exposes how its chainsaw approach eroded safeguards that protect democracy instead of actually cutting fat. Stewart “remains relevant, bringing

valuable facts to light, advancing public discourse, urging civic action.” An executive producer of The Daily Show, during his initial tenure (1999–2015) he served as incubator for talents including Stephen Colbert, John Oliver, Samantha Bee, Trevor Noah, Jordan Klepper and Larry Wilmore.



2025 BROOKS JACKSON PRIZE FOR FACT-CHECKING

The Brooks Jackson Prize for Fact-Checking is named for the veteran journalist who covered Washington, D.C., and national politics for news organizations including the Associated Press, Wall Street Journal and CNN. At CNN, he pioneered the “ad watch” and “fact check” form of stories debunking false and misleading political statements. In 2003, he co-founded FactCheck.org at the Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) of the University of Pennsylvania with Kathleen Hall Jamieson. Jackson Prize entries are reviewed by a separate APPC jury.

KSL-TV INVESTIGATES: TRUTH TEST (KSL-TV 5 Salt Lake City, Utah)

This year’s Brooks Jackson Prize for Fact-Checking goes to KSL-TV 5, an NBC affiliate owned by Bonneville International. For the 2024 legislative session, the newscast launched a fact-checking series called Truth Test as a public service. KSL-TV made a commitment to holding politicians from Utah accountable and providing its viewers with regular Truth Test segments that served as mini-investigations into the truth behind political claims. The Truth Test series was clear, informative, even-handed and well researched. The station fact-checked claims on popular issues and provided post-debate coverage of statements made during primary and general election debates for statewide races. KSL-TV said its efforts were “met with gratitude and requests for more of this type of public service journalism.”