

# **C<sup>the</sup>WALTER CRONKITE**



**for excellence in television  
political journalism** **AWARD**

**For Immediate Release**

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## **CRONKITE AWARD WINNERS PROVE FACTS MATTER**

*Guns, climate, hate, immigration, corruption among issues tackled*

LOS ANGELES, March 19, 2019 – Celebrating the indispensability of the free press to the health of American democracy, the winners of the 10th biennial Walter Cronkite Awards for Excellence in Television Political Journalism were announced today by the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism.

“If the press is the ‘enemy of the people,’” said Annenberg professor Marty Kaplan, director of USC’s Norman Lear Center, which administers the award, “then being on this ‘enemies’ list is a badge of honor for these exceptional journalists.”

Winners include reporters, anchors and producers working at CNN, MSNBC/NBC News and PBS/ProPublica; across the country at local affiliates of ABC, CBS, NBC and PBS; and at station groups owned by Hearst and Scripps. Award judges noted that “the winners injected fresh energy and impact into traditional formats,” including investigative reporting, debates, fact checks, documentary, town hall, panels, interviews and field pieces.

Awards will be presented on Friday, April 26 at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C.

### **INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENT BY A NATIONAL JOURNALIST**

The judges honored two national network journalists for their reality-based coverage of midterm election issues.

**Jacob Soboroff (MSNBC/NBC News)** was one of the first national reporters to break the story on conditions of children separated from their parents at the border under the Trump administration’s zero tolerance policy. Though cameras were not allowed into detention centers, Soboroff was able to explain

the situation “with clarity and descriptive analysis that was as powerful as any visual,” the judges said. His “old-fashioned reporting skills” kept the story on the nation’s agenda, and he stayed with the story “doggedly over time.” His coverage had an impact: it helped push the Trump administration into a rare policy reversal.

**A.C. Thompson (PBS Frontline)** covered the resurgent white supremacist movement in a two-part series by Frontline and ProPublica that the judges hailed as “exemplary journalism.” Combining “old-school gumshoe investigative reporting with high-tech detective work,” Thompson used video footage and chat room texts to unmask alt-right attackers from Charlottesville and other violent demonstrations. His work shows his commitment, and Frontline’s, to “chasing down the story and getting answers.... His deep-dive persistence is not something you usually see on national television.”

## **NATIONAL NETWORK NEWS PROGRAM**

Two news specials are being honored for the programs’ coverage of hot-button issues.

**CNN Parkland Town Hall**, a two-hour special, aired only seven days after 17 students and teachers were murdered by a gunman at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. In this “compelling and powerful” forum, moderator Jake Tapper deftly gave generous space to speak to gun control advocates, politicians, Parkland students, parents and a representative from the NRA. The program helped “advance the national conversation on gun control and violence,” the jury said.

In an extraordinary move for a Sunday show, **NBC’s Meet the Press** moderated by Chuck Todd devoted an entire hour to the reality of climate change, rather than giving airtime to a fake equivalence between science and science deniers. It provided a platform for climate experts and politicians from both sides of the aisle to discuss consequences and solutions. Judges called the “urgent and unprecedented” program a “breakthrough in issue coverage” that “got politicians off their talking points.”

## **SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT FOR NATIONAL IMPACT**

**WSOC-TV, Charlotte, NC**, the Cox Media-owned ABC affiliate, and reporter **Joe Bruno** were honored for their breaking news investigation that uncovered election fraud in North Carolina’s 9<sup>th</sup> Congressional District. “This was original reporting at its best that blew the lid off of election fraud in a small town,” the jury said. “It should give pause to all of us about the potential abuses of power in any election.” Bruno and a team at WSOC “stayed dedicated to the task of digging out the real story along with who was behind it. What they found led to a bigger change than any story we’ve seen recently.”

## **BROOKS JACKSON PRIZE FOR FACT-CHECKING POLITICAL MESSAGES**

The Brooks Jackson Prize for Fact-Checking Political Messages is named for the founding director of FactCheck.org. The winner is selected by a jury convened by the Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) of the University of Pennsylvania, home of FactCheck.org.

**KUSA 9News, Denver, CO**, the Tegna Inc. NBC affiliate, wins its fourth Brooks Jackson Prize in the local broadcast category for its “well researched and well written” presentation that was “lively and interesting.” The APPC jury singled out reporter Brandon Rittiman for his “straightforward, clear and easy to understand” segments and reporter Marshall Zelinger, who “set himself apart by taking a viewer-friendly approach” to fact-checking political ads.

## **LOCAL BROADCAST STATION**

**KXAN-TV, Austin, TX**, an NBC affiliate owned by Nexstar, wins its third Cronkite for a deep examination of the conflicts of interest of the chair of the Texas Railroad Commission and her politically prominent family. KXAN reporters sorted through hundreds of public records and travelled across the

state “in the service of making what could be a dry story compelling, understandable and necessary to the viewer.”

**WFAA, Dallas-Fort Worth, TX**, the Tegna-owned ABC affiliate, had its second Cronkite win. The jury cited WFAA’s overall commitment to political coverage that included prominent debates, roundtable discussions, truth tests and long-form reporting pieces on national security at the southern border. They were also hailed for dedicating the kinds of resources needed to produce in-depth political reporting. WFAA’s “creative, diverse, thought-provoking and entertaining” programming could be something aired on the national level, the jury said.

### **LOCAL INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENT**

**Noah Pransky, WTSP-TV, St. Petersburg, FL**, wins at this Tegna-owned CBS affiliate for his breaking coverage of “zombie campaigns” and his “extraordinary use of news formats to raise an issue that is probably not known by most.” Pransky, working with the data team at the *Tampa Bay Times*, took what began as the thread of a small story to uncover a pervasive problem within political campaign financing. “His presentation breaks new ground,” the jury said, “and his storytelling techniques are excellent.”

### **SPECIAL COMMENDATION FOR ENTERPRISE**

**Lilia Luciano, ABC10, Sacramento, CA**, the Tegna-owned ABC affiliate, is commended for her work in “Puerto Rico Rises,” a four-part special on the U.S. territory in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. The jury recognized her efforts to personalize the story of Puerto Rico’s rocky recovery and to tell it to viewers in a distant media market. “It is impossible not to watch this story,” the jury said, citing the pacing and immersive journalistic approach. “This piece takes viewers into the eye of two storms – one of nature, and one political,” they said.

### **LOCAL PUBLIC STATION**

**KCET, Los Angeles, CA**, part of the Public Media Group of Southern California, wins its second Cronkite for “Divide and Conquer,” an episode of the series *SoCal Connected*, which tackled the racist history of gerrymandering in Los Angeles and its current-day application in California’s Kern County. The jury said the program was “hugely engaging and riveting to watch – a surprising piece on an important topic.”

### **LOCAL STATION GROUP**

With 32 stations, **Hearst Television** garners its tenth consecutive Cronkite award for its “wide coverage of issues” and “reliable presence on the campaign trail.” Hearst’s recent launch of its national investigative unit focused on politics was also acknowledged by the jury as a “demonstrable and continued chain-wide commitment to politics.”

**The E.W. Scripps Company**, with 36 stations, wins its second Cronkite award in this category. Judges were impressed by the station group’s “comprehensive coverage” of controversial topics like the gun control debate. Their programming “brought new energy” to the issues and provided their audiences with “original reporting that went beyond the headlines.”