

News Release

WHCA Names 2001 Award Winners

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Sandra Sobieraj of The Associated Press, Jim Angle of Fox News Channel and Steve Thomma of Knight-Ridder have won three of Washington's top journalism awards for their coverage of the 2000 presidential campaign and its tumultuous climax.

In addition, Elizabeth Marchak, Dave Davis and Joan Mazzolini of The Plain Dealer have won the Edgar A. Poe award for a five-part series on the inferior health care given minorities in America. The awards, administered by the White House Correspondents¹ Association, are to be presented at the group's annual dinner Saturday, April 28, 2001. President and Mrs. Bush and Vice President and Mrs. Cheney are expected to attend.

Sobieraj won the Merriman Smith Memorial Award in the print category, and Angle won in the broadcast category. The awards honor outstanding presidential coverage under deadline pressure and carry a \$1,000 prize. Smith, a veteran correspondent for United Press International, covered the White House for 30 years. Sobieraj was cited for her election night reporting including a dramatic, behind-the-scenes account of Al Gore's decision to retract his concession. A story about Gore's phone call to Bush featured the memorable quote, "You don't have to get snippy about this."² The judges said Sobieraj's work, long after other reporters had gone to bed, was "deadline reporting in the best tradition of Merriman Smith."²

Angle won for his coverage of the ensuing Florida recount. He was on the air live Dec. 12 a day Florida lawmakers certified the state's electors and Florida's Supreme Court threw out absentee ballots reporting the rapid-fire developments in a way the judges said put "breaking news into perspective."²

Thomma is receiving the Aldo Beckman Award, recognizing a correspondent who exemplifies the journalistic excellence and personal qualities of Aldo Beckman, a former White House Correspondents¹ Association president and Washington bureau chief of the Chicago Tribune. The Tribune Company and the association present a prize of \$1,000. The judges found Thomma's campaign coverage "far ahead of the curve. He wrote early, with apparent prescience, that Al Gore could beat George Bush in Florida, despite Bush's family ties there. His reporting was strong on changing demographics in America, and his stories on South Carolina and vanishing old coalitions illustrated this."²

The Poe award, for excellence on a story of national or regional significance, carries a \$2,500 prize. The Plain Dealer team was honored for a series that combined statistical analysis and personal examples to bring into sharp focus a persistent color line in American medicine. The judges called it a "disturbing and powerful package"² that made clear "how blacks and other minorities are receiving unequal health care."²

The Poe judges also awarded honorable mentions. One went to John Barry and Evan Thomas of Newsweek for their reporting on the ineffectiveness of high-altitude U.S. bombing against Serb tanks during the Kosovo campaign.

The other went to David Pace of The Associated Press for an analysis showing most Indians have benefited little from the billion-dollar casino gambling business.

The Beckman judges were Wes Pippert (chairman), director of Missouri Journalism Washington; Linda Killian, director of the Boston University Washington Journalism Center; and Adam Clayton Powell, vice president of the Freedom Forum.

The Smith judges were: Frank Starr (chairman), assistant professor, Medill News Service; Deborah Potter, executive director, Newslab; and Lee Thornton, University of Maryland.

Judging the Poe award were: Ellen Shearer, co-director, the Medill News Service; Walter Mears, former vice president, The Associated Press; John Mashek, former Washington bureau chief, the Boston Globe.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Contact awards committee chairman Mark Smith, AP Radio, at 202-736-9550, or Julie Whiston at the White House Correspondents' Association, 202-737-2934.