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## **Gerald R. Ford Journalism Prize Winners**

### ***Distinguished Reporting on National Defense and Distinguished Reporting on the Presidency***

**Grand Rapids, MI** — The Gerald R. Ford Presidential Foundation announced the winners of the 35<sup>th</sup> annual Gerald R. Ford Journalism Prize for Distinguished Reporting in 2021 at its annual meeting held virtually June 6. Winners are Matt Viser, White House reporter for *The Washington Post*, and Megan Eckstein, naval warfare reporter for *Defense News*. Viser received honors for “Distinguished Reporting on the Presidency,” while Eckstein was awarded for “Distinguished Reporting on National Defense.” Each year the two prizes are presented to the winners and include a \$5,000 award, one for each prize. The announcement was made by Michael Ford, son of President and Mrs. Gerald R. Ford and chairman of the Foundation.

Viser covers the inner workings of the Biden administration and focuses on the biographical details that help explain the current president’s actions and decision-making. Viser grew up in Tennessee and graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He went on to work for *The Boston Globe*, where he covered Boston City Hall, the Massachusetts State House, and several presidential campaigns. Viser has received a number of awards for his political coverage, including the White House Correspondents’ Association’s Merriman Smith Award, and the Everett McKinley Dirksen Award for Distinguished Reporting of Congress.

Viser was awarded the prize for producing balanced, well-sourced reporting of the president’s efforts to connect with fellow Americans in moments of grief. He was also the first journalist to detail White House efforts to address legal and ethical concerns surrounding the sale of artworks created by the president’s son. For his unique, broad, authoritative contribution to chronicling the Biden presidency, the committee recognized his work for this year’s Gerald R. Ford Journalism Prize for Distinguished Reporting on the Presidency.

Eckstein, who covers the Navy and Marine Corps for *Defense News*, was awarded for her coverage of naval warfare beyond the tedium of weekly beat reporting. Her insightful reporting reveals a keen analytic sense for the early identification of soon-to-emerge issues. Eckstein's extensive sourcing and research, sharpened by her desire to be on the scene, is a sterling example of reportorial values and excellence that the Gerald R. Ford Foundation seeks to recognize and reward.

Before joining *Defense News* in 2021, Eckstein worked for six years for *USNI News*, where she covered Navy and Marine Corps operations, concept development, acquisition, and personnel. She has earned several awards and citations, including the Military Reporters and Editors' 2021 MRE Journalism Contest winner, and Best Military Repair, Maintenance and Overhaul submission, Defence Media Award. Eckstein is a graduate of the Philip Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland.

Honorable mention was given to a team of reporters from *The Associated Press*. Led by Kristin M. Hall, James LaPorta, and Justin Pritchard, their series titled "AWOL Weapons" directed an uncomfortable spotlight on the U.S. military services' inability to accurately account for small arms and explosives that were lost or stolen from their inventories. Facing bureaucratic intransigence and stonewalling, against the backdrop of a lack of consistent data keeping across the Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force on missing weapons, the AP team doggedly pursued this public safety issue for a decade. Forced to create their own independent database of missing small arms—which also includes grenade-launchers and machine guns—the AP team's unflagging interest in this issue forced the military services to develop consistent standards of reporting on missing firearms and resulted in real changes in tracking service inventories. The AP team, which included Jeannie Ohm, Jason Dearen, Justin Myers, Raghu Vadarevu, Natalie Castaneda, Peter Hamlin, Jerry Schwartz, and Serginho Roosblad, was recognized for their steadfast determination to see this effort to fruition despite bureaucratic roadblocks and stymied Freedom of Information requests.

### **About the Awards**

Each year, the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Foundation awards two distinguished journalism prizes, one for reporting on the Presidency and the other for reporting on National Defense. These prizes, initiated in 1988, recognize reportorial excellence and the fostering of better public understanding of the presidency and national defense.

### **About the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Foundation**

The mission of the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Foundation is to enlarge President Ford's legacy in a world that desperately needs his example of leadership and service. As author James Cannon wrote, "From its beginning American democracy has had the good fortune to produce a leader, often from an unexpected quarter, whose character and actions fit the tide of history. So it was on August 9, 1974, when this good and honest man, this obscure and stolid workhorse of a Congressman from the heartland of the nation, came to the rescue of the American government. To Gerald Ford was given the responsibility to move America from untruth to truth, from darkness to light."

Visit the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Foundation: [www.geraldrfoundation.org](http://www.geraldrfoundation.org).

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