



# The Regional Reporter

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FEBRUARY 2005

# BUDGETS

The key bites you  
can take in the  
year-long process

By SEAN REILLY  
Mobile Register

When it comes to covering the federal budget, regional reporters should be skeptical, focused and, above all, prepared. Such was the advice from a panel of experts during an RRA newsmaker at the National Press Club last month.

Nobody really understands what's in the budget from the first page to the last, summed up Alan Fram, a veteran Associated Press reporter on budget issues. It's just question of trying to be smart about it and picking your spots.

Here's a recap of the highlights. Besides Fram, participants in the newsmaker were House Appropriations Committee Staff Director Jim Dyer (who has since retired), Stan Collender, managing director of the Washington office of Financial Dynamics Business Communications and Steve Ellis, vice president for programs at the watchdog group, Taxpayers for Common Sense.

For regionals, Budget Day is always the same: mining an immense and unwieldy package of documents on

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## BUDGETS

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deadline for stories that spell out the potential impact on their states and communities.

Some hints always dribble out early. The Pentagon is proposing \$30 billion worth of cuts to specific weapons programs over six years, which might be of interest to reporters with a local employer who has a stake in those programs. The administration is also trying to clamp down on federal Medicaid spending, a prospect that is provoking bi-partisan jitters among governors around the country.

But in many cases, even the fine print in the president's budget doesn't contain the kind of depth that regionals are eager for. That's why it is essential to decide which programs matter most to your readers or viewers. Then, get to know the people who can tell you what's going on with them.

Check in with your members of Congress, along with the relevant agencies. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, for example, typically provides a briefing book that lists proposed funding for all of its projects on a state-by-state basis. Federal agencies also produce more detailed budget justifications for Congress. Dyer described them as public documents available from the appropriations subcommittees responsible for that agency.

Outside the federal government, organizations like the National Conference of State Legislatures and the National Governors Association track all major federal initiatives that affect states. If your state employs a Washington lobbyist, that person is hard at work deciphering the impact of the president's spending plan.

That plan, of course, is just a proposal that Congress will spend most of the year disposing of. First up are the House and Senate budget commit-

tees, which will have the lead in fashioning the outlines of a congressional spending blueprint that is in effect an answer to the president's proposal. That blueprint, in the form of a resolution, is typically due by April 15, Dyer said. Although non-binding, the resolution is worth noting for two reasons: (1) it contains a 302(a) number that sets a top spending line and (2) it signals whether lawmakers intend to try to spending on entitlement programs like Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security through what's known as a reconciliation bill.

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### **The process is complex to start with and don't expect it to work as advertised. Last year, the House and Senate couldn't even agree on a budget resolution.**

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Spending on those kinds of programs is on autopilot and now consumes almost two-thirds of the federal budget. So-called discretionary spending, which accounts for the remainder, is the province of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees. Once the leadership gives the word, those committees will go to work by laying out 302(b) numbers that set spending levels for 13 broad categories, such as defense, homeland security and transportation.

The process is complex to start with and don't expect it to work as advertised. Last year, the House and Senate couldn't even agree on a budget resolution. And while both chambers are supposed to wrap up work

on the 13 spending bills by the end of the fiscal year Sept. 30, they almost always go into overtime.

Furthermore, instead of producing 13 individual bills, lawmakers have lately been inclined to cobble many of them into sprawling omnibus measures rushed to final passage before most lawmakers have time to read them.

Don't forget that both the White House and Congress aren't above putting out misleading numbers. Remember those possible defense cuts? As Collender noted, the bulk of the savings from those reductions would not materialize until the sixth year, raising questions about how serious the Pentagon is about pursuing them.

And once Congress puts the fiscal 2006 budget to bed (probably late this year), take a hard look at the hometown earmarked appropriations that members of Congress delight in pointing out. The volume of earmarks has exploded in recent years, accompanied by a comparable increase in the ranks of lobbyists who make a living by persuading lawmakers to insert them, Ellis said.

It's important to remind your readers that they didn't come out of nowhere.

### **The Regional Reporter**

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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By JESSICA WEHRMAN ■ Scripps Howard News Service

# Insightful newsmaker about covering budgets — a strong start to the year

**W**e've started off this new year on a high note. RRA Board member Sean Reilly organized an informative and well-attended Jan. 18 session on covering the budget. The session was informative because it gave attendees a new perspective on a perennial issue, but also because it got us organized: My guess is many of those who attended began calls within the week on their pork for the new year.

Here's another tip for those tracking federal funding. The census website tracks county-by-county federal funding. Go to [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov), then click on "government" under the business category and "consolidated federal funds" on that page. It's a font of data that becomes exceptionally useful in figuring out what exactly your county gets. I've used it to compare county by county as well as year-to-year data. The only catch: Like so many government reports, it's a little old. Still, the numbers are begging to be plugged into a database.

We hope our inaugural newsmaker of the year is the

first of many: RRA Board members are tirelessly working to get our new cabinet members lined up for RRA interviews. We'll keep you posted. We also hope to organize one on the BRAC (base realignment and closure) process — it's an issue for many regional reporters, and too many of us are parachuting into it this year for the first time.

We're also working to highlight some of your best work: We'd like to begin regularly posting notable regional work on our website ([www.rra.org](http://www.rra.org)).

If you have a story that you are proud of or that could spur the imagination of other regionals, please send it to [www.rra.org](http://www.rra.org) and we'll post it on our site. We may need you to get permission from your paper for us to use it, but your good work should be noticed.

Finally, yet another redundant reminder for those of you who have not paid your RRA dues: Send 'em in. We use this funding to pay for rooms for exclusive RRA newsmakers, for our newsletter expenses and for other vital RRA programming.



### RESTIVE REGIONS

**Amie Parnes** has joined Scripps Howard to cover Washington, D.C. for the company's Florida-based newspapers. She previously wrote freelance stories from Florida.

## Doyle wins Lynch reporting award

Michael Doyle of McClatchy Newspapers has won the David Lynch Memorial Regional Reporting Award for excellence in regional coverage of Congress during 2004.

Dana M. Wilkie of Copley News Service (a former RRA Board member) and Carl Weiser of Gannett News Service (a former RRA president) received honorable mentions.

The awards were presented Feb 9 at the 61st annual dinner of the Washington Press Club Foundation.

Doyle was recognized for his coverage of how California is affected by elec-

tions and congressional redistricting and by Congress' decisions on water policy and immigration.

Wilkie was recognized for coverage of how federal highway legislation affects California. Weiser was recognized for coverage of campaign fundraising and coverage of how congressional appropriations affect Cincinnati.

Colleagues established the award to honor the late David Lynch, who died in 1999 of cancer. Lynch was a longtime member of the U.S. House and Senate Press Galleries, who covered Congress for small and medi-

um-sized newspapers in Nebraska, Iowa, Alaska, New York and New England.

Contest judges were Adam Clymer of the Annenberg Public Policy Center, Judi Hasson of Federal Computer Week, Caitlin Hendel of Congressional Quarterly, Paul West of the Baltimore Sun and Kevin White of the National Journal.

The annual WPCF dinner, held this year at the J.W. Marriot Hotel in Washington DC, brings together members of Congress and the reporters who cover them. Proceeds of the dinner fund journalism education nationwide.

# A regional view on a national contest

Ever want to enter your stories -- or recommend someone else's — for an award? Here's information on the National Press Club Journalism Awards, some with a regional focus and others not. Deadline for all entries is April 1.

AWARD	CATEGORIES	ENTRIES	PRIZE
<p><b>National Press Club Consumer Journalism Award</b></p> <p>These awards, sponsored by the National Press Club, recognize excellence in reporting on consumer topics. Judges will look more favorably on solution-oriented or strategic-oriented pieces that prompt action by consumers, the community, the government or an individual.</p>	<p><b>Newspapers</b></p> <p><b>Periodicals</b> (including magazines, journals, newsletters and online reporting)</p> <p><b>Television</b> (including network, syndicates, cable and broadcast stations)</p> <p><b>Radio</b> (including syndicated programs and broadcast stations)</p>	<p>Entrants may submit a single article or broadcast or a series of related articles or broadcasts that will be judged as a unit. If the entry is a continuing column, no more than five examples should be submitted. Entry should be accompanied by a letter detailing how the piece or series resulted in action by consumers, the government, the community or an individual.</p>	<p><b>\$500</b> for each category.</p>
<p><b>National Press Club Washington Correspondence Award</b></p> <p>These prizes, underwritten by the National Press Club, honor the work of reporters who cover Washington for the benefit of the hometown audience. The contest focuses on Washington reporting of events, issues and politics of importance to a city, state or region. The judges are looking for a single article or series of articles that examine one issue and explain its relevance to the hometown reader or viewer. This award is for a single report or series on one topic, not for national reporting, nor for a body of work. Entrants must demonstrate a clear knowledge of how Washington works and what it means to the folks back home.</p>	<p><b>Print/Online</b></p>	<p>Entrants may submit no more than 5 pieces on a single topic. The entry letter should include a brief explanation of the article's relevance to the hometown reader. Commentaries or analyses of Washington matters affecting local areas also may be submitted.</p>	<p><b>\$1,000</b></p>

**AWARD**

**Arthur Rowse Award for Press Criticism**

This award, sponsored by former U.S. News & World Report reporter Arthur Rowse, honors excellence in examining the role and work of the news media. All entries must focus on criticism of journalistic practices or reporting on the industry, and must encourage responsible media behavior.

**Robin Goldstein Award for Washington Regional Reporting**

The award, administered by the National Press Foundation, will go to a Washington correspondent who best exemplifies the standards set by the late Robin Goldstein, who established the Washington bureaus of the Asbury Park (NJ) Press and the Orange County (CA) Register. Working alone in each bureau, Goldstein proved that one dedicated reporter can do it all for the hometown readers-news, features, enterprise, analysis and columns. This contest honors reporters who demonstrate excellence and versatility in covering Washington from a local angle.

**CATEGORIES**

**Single entry**

**Newspapers, Magazines, Newsletters and Online**

**Television and Radio**

**Books**

**Body of work**

**Newspapers, Magazines, Newsletters and Online**

**Television and Radio**

**Print/Online**

**ENTRIES**

All articles must be published in daily newspapers, magazines, newsletters or online. It is not necessary that they all be published by the same publication. No more than 5 entries may be submitted. Television and radio pieces must have aired in 2003. If a book is entered, at least five copies must be submitted with the entry. All entries must point out a problem and also offer constructive suggestions as to how to fix the problem. All entries should be accompanied by a letter explaining the significance of the work and any subsequent actions resulting from the publishing or broadcasting of the story. Special attention will be paid to diversity of subject and style, and the effect of the story on journalism. (Book authors need not be professional journalists receiving 50 percent of their income from a journalistic activity.)

Entrants may submit up to 6 pieces that demonstrate a diverse body of work. Entrants must be full-time professional reporters, but may work for more than one newspaper. Articles must be printed in daily newspapers (or online versions of daily newspapers).

**PRIZE**

**\$1,000** for each category.

**\$1,000**

## AWARD

**Edwin M. Hood Award for Diplomatic Correspondence**

Named for Edwin M. Hood, a distinguished diplomatic correspondent for the Associated Press and a founding member of the National Press Club, these awards recognize excellence in reporting on diplomatic and foreign policy issues. Entrants must demonstrate an understanding of American foreign policy and how foreign affairs affect those policies.

## CATEGORIES

Print/Online  
Broadcast

## ENTRIES

Entries must consist of a single article or broadcast or a series of related articles or broadcasts that will be judged as a unit. If the entry is a continuing column or series, no more than 5 examples should be submitted. The entry should be accompanied by a letter detailing how and why the series or piece broke fresh ground or how it brought clarity and understanding of foreign policy issues to the American audience.

## PRIZE

**\$500**  
for each category.

**National Press Club Newsletter Journalism Award**

This competition, sponsored by the National Press Club, acknowledges excellence in newsletter journalism.

- **Best analytical or interpretive reporting piece.** Given for the single story or series of no more than 5 related stories that best explain a situation in a way that makes it most understandable or useful to the reader.
- **Best exclusive story.** Given for the story that exemplifies the tradition of hard news or investigative reporting, with consideration given to the scope and detail of coverage in the work, deadline constraints and exclusivity. Evidence of exclusivity must be demonstrated.

Entries must be published by an independent newsletter and serve the audience and mission of the newsletter. A mission statement of the newsletter should be included by the publisher in the form of a letter to the judges.

**\$2,000**  
for each category.

**Robert L. Kozik Award for Environmental Reporting**

This award is administered by the National Press Foundation. The late Franklin E. Kozik of LaJolla, Calif., established this award to honor his son, an outdoor enthusiast, amateur photographer, conservationist and world traveler who died of cancer in 1989 at age 35. It recognizes excellence in environmental reporting at the local, national or international level. Entries must demonstrate a clear understanding of the environment and show how their series had an impact or prompted action to remedy an environmental problem.

Print/Online  
Broadcast

Entries must consist of a single article or broadcast or a series of no more than 5 related articles or broadcasts which will be judged as a unit. Special attention will be given to any supporting materials which document the impact of the work in helping to expose or correct environmental threats. If the entry is a continuing column, as many as five examples may be submitted.

**\$500**  
and  
Kozik  
medal  
for each  
category

**AWARD****John Aubuchon  
Freedom of the Press Award**

The National Press Club wishes to recognize members of the news media who have, through the publishing or broadcasting of news, promoted or helped to protect the freedom of the press during 2003. The winners will be chosen by the Freedom of the Press Committee and are not limited to official entries.

Judges will look at whether the nominee(s) - particularly for foreign entries - risked loss of life, bodily harm, loss of job, imprisonment, loss of reputation or harm to family; and whether the nominee(s) exercised commitment to free press principles, professionalism, ethical news-gathering practices, perseverance, ingenuity and personal integrity. Judges will seek evidence that the nominated works resulted in action, such as reform, grand jury investigations, resignation of public officials, imprisonment of story subject(s), passage of legislation or a change in public awareness of a situation due to the reporting work.

**CATEGORIES**

**A U.S. journalist or team** that had work published or broadcast in this country.

**A foreign journalist or team** that had work published or broadcast in his/her/their home country.

**ENTRIES**

Entrants may be either national or international journalists. Persons other than the journalists may nominate journalists. In addition to the entry form, evidence of publications or broadcast, the nomination must include a letter detailing the importance of the nominee's work on behalf of the freedom of the press, it can include other supporting documents such as court briefs or arrest warrants.

**PRIZE**

**\$1,000**  
for each category.

**National Press Club Online Journalism Award**

These awards, sponsored by the National Press Club, are designed to recognize the most significant contributions to journalism by online media.

- **Best Journalism Site:** This award honors the best journalistic use of online technology to contribute to public awareness of a significant problem. This site must be developed, created or maintained by a working journalist or a journalism organization and should demonstrate the best use of the online media to educate and inform the public.
- **Distinguished Online Contribution:** This award goes to the best individual contribution to public service using online technology. This award is not restricted to journalists, but the site should be useful to journalists in their reporting. Any individual whose web site enlightens the viewer on issues of general interest, improves the public debate or provides solutions to complex problems is eligible.

All entries must be submitted via the web using our online entry form. Please provide specific URLs where appropriate or note a designated area for the award material on the site. Entrants must electronically submit a body of work that substantially represents the way it looked during the award year. The entries should educate and inform the public, demonstrate multi-media interactivity and should go beyond what could be found in the print, magazine and television media. Judges are looking for quality of content, good use of media, visual impact, and ease of navigation. Entrants must submit a cover letter explaining why their entry deserves the award. Entrants must also submit passwords if they are needed to access the material online. Entrants must be either independent web sites or sites affiliated with a media organization that are aimed at general public consumption. Sites must have original journalism content.

**\$1,000**  
for each category.

AWARD	CATEGORIES	ENTRIES	PRIZE
<p><b>National Press Club Sandy Hume Memorial Award for Excellence in Political Journalism</b></p> <p>This award honors excellence and objectivity in political coverage by reporters 34 years old or younger. Named in memory of Sandy Hume, the reporter for The Hill who broke the story of the aborted 1997 coup against House Speaker Newt Gingrich, this prize can be awarded for a single story of great distinction or for continuing coverage of one political topic.</p>	<p><b>Print/Online</b></p>	<p>Entrants may submit one article or a series of no more than 5 articles on a single topic. Entrants must demonstrate analytical excellence and a clear knowledge of political issues and personalities. Entrants must be under 35 years old when the entry was published. Entrant's date of birth must be included.</p>	<p><b>\$1,000</b></p>
<p><b>7th Annual National Press Club Joseph D. Ryle Award for Excellence in Writing on the Problems of Geriatrics</b></p> <p>This award will emphasize excellence and objectivity in coverage of the problems faced by the elderly. It is named in honor of Joseph D. Ryle, a longtime National Press Club member who left an endowment for the award.</p>	<p><b>Print/Online</b></p>	<p>Entrants may submit one article or a series of no more than 5 articles on a consistent topic. Entrants must demonstrate a clear knowledge of geriatric issues and the health care industry.</p>	<p><b>\$2,000</b></p>
<p><b>2st Annual Angele Gingras Humor Award</b></p> <p>These awards honor excellence in humor writing. They are named for Angele Gingras, a longtime National Press Club member who specialized in writing amusing stories for magazines and newspapers. The late Gingras, who authored two humorous non-fiction books, made a bequest to the Press Club asking that an award be established recognizing great humor writing.</p>		<p><b>Single entry:</b> Entrants must submit a single humorous feature, column or story, that appeared in a general circulation newspaper or online journalism site. Judges are looking for lighthearted observations that make the reader chuckle or laugh out loud.</p> <p><b>Body of work:</b> Entrants must submit three examples of a regular humor feature or column that appears in a general circulation newspaper or online journalism site.</p>	<p><b>\$1,000</b> for each category.</p>



## MEETING MINUTES

### DECEMBER

Present: Jessica Wehrman, Samantha Young, Suzanne Struglinski, Andy Sher, Shawn Reilly, Todd Gillman, Kevin Goldberg, Kevin Freking, Paul Krawzak. Meeting called to order and the board approved the minutes of the November meeting taken by Young.

There were no expenses during November and the board approved the treasurer's report.

Brett Lieberman, the web master recapped a meeting with Jessica and other board members on the web page status.

Lieberman explained that the point of the Web site was not to "be everything to everyone" because there are a lot of other resources for journalists out there. Links to stories can get outdated and may require permission from the paper.

Freking offered to draft a letter to get editors to allow reporters to post their stories on the web site. Lieberman said reporters can't give permission on their own for reprints.

It was agreed to put links to awards for regionals and links to at least the newspapers of members.

Lieberman said it would be hard to put a passcode on the RRA's Guide to covering Washington on the page, so it was agreed not to put the whole PDF up there.

Regarding Paypal, Lieberman said it costs 88 cents to process a payment made through the electronic payment service Pay Pal. A link could be made off the RRA site for member to use the service to pay their \$20 dues.

The board approved using Paypal. The treasurer's report would incorporate the money brought in through Paypal and the treasurer and president would each have access to the account.

Wehrman passed out due reminders letter to be sent to members by the beginning of the year.

Young agreed to print return address labels and Struglinski will make letter hard for the letter.

It was agreed there would be an envelope stuffing night at Wehrman's office.

Regarding future newsmakers, board members volunteered to try to get current or new cabinet secretaries, once confirmed, or meetings.

**Young:** Interior Department

**Wehrman:** Education

**Crowley:** Health and Human Services

**Sher:** Environmental Protection Agency

**Gillman:** Housing and Urban Development

**Reilly:** Veteran's Affairs

The board agreed it would be best to have a How to Cover the Budget panel before the Fiscal Year 2006 Budget is released. Reilly said he would work on it.

Regarding Inauguration, Wehrman said she had scheduled a meeting with the congressional committee on the inaugural for details on the event and how to get passes.

Reilly raised the issue of the security procedure of finger printing reporters who will need to be in the Capitol during the ceremony. The board agreed to keep an eye on the issue.

Finally, Wehrman said she would write letters for those seeking offices in the Standing Committee of Correspondent, the National Press Club or other organizations stating the person is a member of RRA.

**The next meeting was scheduled for Jan. 10.**

### JANUARY

Board members present: Kevin Freking, Todd Gillman, Andy Sher, Paul Krawzak, Marc Heller, Jessica Wehrman, Sean Reilly, and Suzanne Struglinski

The minutes from the Dec. 13 meeting were not available, but will be sent to board members at a later date.

The treasurer's report showed three dues deposited, but Wehrman said more are coming in based on the renewal notices.

The Web site has been updated and the PayPal online payment option is available, but no one has used it so far.

Freking said he sent letters to bureau chiefs about posting stories to the Web site.

The board approved Wehrman to get \$50 out of the budget to print up a few more Guide to Covering Washington books for new members. It was last updated three years ago. Sher was assured he would get his very own copy.

The board discussed inauguration issues and figured the best way it seems to get information is from state parties.

Gillman said he had not heard back from

OMB Director Josh Bolton's office yet

Board brainstormed about having a social security forum on how to cover the issues or explaining the basics of it. Reilly said an idea would be to see how many people in the state live only on their social security check. Freking said he would work on putting something together, even though he swore he would never write about social security again.

Reilly said he would write a story for the newsletter on the budget.

**The next meeting was set for Feb. 14.**

# Week illuminates need for open records

By ANDY ALEXANDER  
Cox Newspapers

As many of you already know, next month the news industry will mark "Sunshine Week" to highlight the danger of growing government secrecy and the importance of freedom of information.

Beginning on Sunday, March 13 and continuing throughout the week, news organizations across the country will print or broadcast stories about this public policy issue that is so critical to preserving a free and open society.

Here in Washington, many bureaus and correspondents

are preparing stories. Some are focusing on the growing problem of over-classification. Others are looking at legislative efforts to bolster the Freedom of Information Act, which was weakened under former Attorney General

Ashcroft. Still others are scrutinizing the difficulty of balancing the public's right to know against the disclosure of information that might aid terrorists.

There are many coverage opportunities for regional reporters, starting with examining where your lawmakers stand on issues affecting openness in government.

The Sunshine Week Web site — [sunshineweek.org](http://sunshineweek.org) — is loaded with background material and "how to" information on pursuing stories.



## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Please fill in the following information and return it with your \$20 dues payment to:  
The Regional Reporters Association, Ben Franklin Station, P.O. Box 254 Washington, DC 20054-0254

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

New applicant     Renewal

Please list the publications or stations that you work for, including city and state:

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