



NEWS RELEASE July 12, 2018 Washington Coalition for Open Government 6351 Seaview Avenue NW
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Washington Coalition for Open Government Announces Annual Awards

Recipients include Transparency Activists, Journalists

Madison Anderson Breakfast Scheduled for Sept. 21, 2018

SEATTLE -- The Washington Coalition for Open Government is this year recognizing teams of activists and journalists promoting open government as part of its annual awards. This year, the Coalition is also acknowledging a large cast of participants who were responsible for preventing the passage of Senate Bill 6617, which would have exempted the state legislature from the Public Records Act.

Recipient of the James Andersen Award for service in furthering the work of the Coalition is Mike Fancher, former executive editor of The Seattle Times. A board member of WCOG since 2006, he retired from The Times in 2008 after 40 years in journalism, and served recently as interim chair of the George S. Turnbull/Agora Journalism Center in Portland, part of the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication.

Rachel La Corte, Associated Press correspondent in Olympia, will receive the Kenneth F. Bunting Award, which recognizes journalistic work that uses, advances or educates about the state's access laws. La Corte has written numerous articles about legislative attempts to exclude itself from the Public Records Act, notably April 2017 stories about how the 1995 legislature passed a law that it contends exempts the body from the PRA. She also covered SB 6617, passed in less than 48 hours with little floor debate and no public hearings, which was subsequently vetoed by Gov. Jay Inslee.

Sharing the 2018 Bunting Award for their part in urging the governor's veto are media organizations throughout the state. Thirteen daily newspapers ran front-page editorials on Feb. 27 urging Gov. Inslee to veto SB 6617, and encouraging Washingtonians to also contact the governor's office with their concern. Several television stations ran editorial commentary urging the same; and most of the state's weekly newspapers, including at least two college papers, plus online news sites ran opinion pieces opposing SB 6617.

As recognition of the estimated 20,000 calls and emails urging Gov. Inslee to veto the bill, WCOG is breaking from its past practice of selecting an individual to honor with the 2018 James Madison Award, and is recognizing the people of Washington for their advocacy of transparency. This honor goes annually to an individual or organization whose commitment to the cause of open government is demonstrated through exemplary words or deeds. This year, individuals from around the state will be selected from those who called or wrote to the governor opposing SB 6617, to receive the Madison Award as representatives of the people of Washington.

“We the people must be constantly vigilant, or risk government being taken over by special interests instead of focusing on broad public interests,” said Toby Nixon, WCOG president. “This year, we honor watchdogs in the media and the people of the state who spoke out and demanded legislative transparency. But none of us can rest on our laurels – the vigil must be kept!”

The unusual selection of awards acknowledges the multiple and ongoing efforts to raise awareness of legislative efforts to weaken Washington’s Public Records Act, which was enacted in 1972 by a ballot initiative.

“The thousands of people of the State of Washington who spoke out against the legislative records secrecy bill showed the governor and the legislators that open government matters,” said WCOG Vice President Michele Earl-Hubbard, who proposed the James Madison Award winners. “They showed that the PRA means what its declaration says: that ‘the people of this state do not yield their sovereignty to the agencies which serve them. The people, in delegating authority, do not give their public servants the right to decide what is good for the people to know and what is not good for them to know. The people insist on remaining informed so that they may retain control over the instruments they have created.’”

Awards will be presented at WCOG’s annual Madison-Andersen Breakfast, which will take place on Friday, Sept. 21 at the Washington Athletic Club in Seattle. The Coalition will recognize representatives of the numerous organizations, as well as residents from across the state, who participated in the effort to veto SB 6617 and urge the legislature to recognize its accountability under Washington’s existing transparency laws.

The James Andersen Award recognizes the former chief justice of the Washington State Supreme Court, and a founder of WCOG; the Kenneth F. Bunting Award honors the longtime Seattle journalist, former editor of the Post-Intelligencer and executive director of the National Freedom of Information Coalition; and the James Madison Award is named for the fourth president of the U.S., who wrote the First Amendment.

Information about the Madison-Andersen Breakfast is available on the WCOG website, WashingtonCOG.org. The Washington Coalition for Open Government is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring transparency and openness in government.

WCOG was founded in 2002 by a group of individuals representing organizations with a broad spectrum of opinions and interests but all dedicated to the principles of strengthening the state's open government laws and protecting the public's access to government at all levels.

WCOG stands for the principle that transparency and public participation are essential building blocks of good government.

Membership is open to the public. For more information, contact WCOG at 6351 Seaview Ave. N.W., Seattle, Wash. 98107-2664, on the web at www.washingtoncog.org, or call (206) 782-0393.