

To the judges:

For the first time really ever, Arizona was a full-blown swing state in the 2020 presidential race. It also had one of the nation's few truly competitive Senate races, with control of that chamber hanging in the balance.

Throughout 2020, our national political reporters, Yvonne Wingett Sanchez and Ronald J. Hansen, tirelessly examined the demographic and political changes that converged to make Arizona one of the most hotly-contested battleground states in the nation.

Together, the Arizona Republic reporters chronicled in print, audio, and video, the forces that led to Joe Biden winning the state by the narrowest margin in the country, and Democrats' successful bid to flip a U.S. Senate seat. It gave Arizona its first pair of Democratic senators since 1953.

Arizona's status as a swing state held the nation's attention as the cycle barreled toward the November election. Afterward, the state remained central to the nation's evolving political equation as some members of Arizona's congressional delegation played starring roles in President Donald Trump's failed attempt to overturn the electoral results.

The work of Wingett Sanchez and Hansen consistently delved into the demographic shifts, key constituencies and issues central to Arizona voters that gave the state outsized importance in 2020.

The reporters laid the groundwork for their coverage with a January 2020 story that analyzed precinct-level voting results and registration trends that showed how Democrats had turned GOP red precincts purple in 2018, while their blue precincts turned deeper blue. The story correctly foreshadowed the geographic areas that proved central to the 2020 fight for the state.

The newspaper's podcast team, along with Wingett Sanchez and Hansen, also co-hosts of the newspaper's weekly political podcast, The Gaggles, traced the rise of Trump -- and this pivotal political moment -- to a decade-old debate over the enforcement of immigration laws in the state. The five-part series, "Rediscovering: S.B. 1070," documented how the 2010 law, and the people affected by it, reshaped Arizona's politics and made the state a battleground in 2020.

Throughout the year, the reporters also detailed how people of faith and older voters in the suburbs of metro Phoenix were on pace to doom Republicans' stronghold on the state amid a deadly pandemic. And, they delved deeply into public records and their Rolodexes to examine the fortunes of retired astronaut Mark Kelly, the Democrat who flipped Arizona's Senate seat blue.

After the election, the reporters quickly pivoted to a storyline that is already set to dominate 2021: the battle engulfing Republicans for the soul of their party in a post-Trump era.

Their coverage helped readers in Arizona and nationally understand the complexities of Arizona's electorate.

For their substantial contribution to the public understanding of "Battleground Arizona" we are proud to nominate Yvonne Wingett Sanchez and Ronald J. Hansen for the Best of the West's explanatory reporting category.

Thank you for your consideration.