

## 2021 Toner Prize Celebration

Lead:

During the 10th annual Toner Prize awards at the Newhouse School at Syracuse University, New Jersey Senator, Cory Booker, gave a speech virtually centering around the idea of faith.

The SU Toner Prize honors the Syracuse alumna and first woman to serve as a national paper's chief political correspondent for the New York Times, Robin Toner. Two prizes are awarded annually by the Newhouse school along with \$5,000. One Toner Prize is awarded for Excellence in National Political Reporting and the other for Excellence in Local Political Reporting.

Judges also gave an honorable mention this year to praise excellent and noteworthy national political reporting.

In Booker's speech, he talked about the faith of Robin Toner and how he believes that there is a spiritual crisis in the United States. He talked about recent historical events that portray the bravery and courage it takes to be a political journalist. For example, the protests that occurred last summer as a result of the killing of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor.

"We know that some journalists were actually injured. Some were arrested. Some were targeted just for doing their jobs," Booker said.

Robin Toner's daughter, Nora Toner Gosselin, awarded the local reporting prize to the staff of the *Lehigh Valley Live* for their "*Swing County, Swing State*" project, which studied the political complexities for Northampton County, Pennsylvania during the 2020 presidential election to show county residents how much their votes mattered.

*Lehigh Valley Live* editor Nicholas Falsone said most people watching the ceremony had probably never heard of *Lehigh Valley Live* because they have never tried to appeal to anyone other than those with ties to a few counties in eastern Pennsylvania and northwestern New Jersey. This gave the team a great sense of pride.

"We've never flown on Air Force One or traveled overseas on assignment. We don't get many calls to appear on the Sunday morning talk shows," Falsone said. "It's not always glamorous work, but I would argue it's every bit as important as the work that many of the previous winners of this award have done."

Robin Toner's son, Jacob Toner Gosselin, awarded an honorable mention for national political reporting to Jennifer Medina of the *New York Times*. She won for a piece about Latino voters

who support Trump. Medina said that she often describes her job as being a sociologist as she tries to explain people to each other.

The last Toner Prize winner for Excellence in National Political Reporting was awarded to David Graham, a reporter for *The Atlantic* for his story on who America is as a country and said he wanted to hone in on voters who are actually persuadable and voters who were changing their mind.

“Using the murky science of persuasion, something we don’t understand well, but it’s a powerful tool that can be harnessed,” Graham said.

Every Toner Prize winner was inspired by Robin Toner, but Booker, especially appreciated her. “I am just so grateful that there was a woman named Robin Toner who had a faith so deep and a love so great for this country that she exemplified it as a humble hero.”