



Prestigious Arthur S. Fleming Awards Marks 75 Years of Recognizing Excellence in Government Service

Esteemed journalist Frank Sesno to Emcee November 13 ceremony in Washington, D.C.

October 3, 2024

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Twelve public servants from a number of federal agencies will be honored at the 75th annual [Arthur S. Fleming Awards](#) for their exceptional service across the disciplines of applied science, basic science, leadership, and social science. Joining the ranks of more than 700 past recipients including Dr. Anthony Fauci, Neil Armstrong, Dr. Robert Gates and Elizabeth Dole, the 2023 honorees have made groundbreaking contributions in their fields. The Arthur S. Fleming Awards are the nation’s oldest and most prestigious award for government service given from outside the government.

The 2023 awardees (recognized at the November 2024 ceremony) have made groundbreaking discoveries and advancements that include:

- Protecting livestock from endemic diseases to ensure healthy and economically viable food systems and food security.
- Reducing the cost and time for detecting a community’s exposure to pathogens.
- Creating a specialized human trafficking unit that has helped rescue more than 130 indentured servants and victims of forced labor.
- Ensuring precise timestamps for hundreds of billions of dollars of electronic financial transactions.
- Introducing new concepts in addiction treatment that could lead to the development of new therapies, among other accomplishments.

The 2023 Arthur S. Fleming Award recipients are:

Applied Science and Engineering

Dr. Aspen M. Workman – Agricultural Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Dr. Kenneth S. Obenberger – Air Force Research Laboratory, U.S. Department of Defense

Dr. Douglas Morton – National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Basic Science

Shannon Griffin – U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Dr. Charles Rotimi – National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Leadership and Management

TenaVel T. Thomas – Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Dr. Jeffrey A. Sherman – National Institute of Standards and Technology, U.S. Department of Commerce

Blair Pasalic – U.S. Department of Energy

Alison Fong – U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

CDR Nancy Tian – Food and Drug Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Dr. M. Khair ElZarrad – Food and Drug Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Social Science, Clinical Trials, and Translational Research

Dr. Lorenzo Leggio – National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Click [here](#) for a comprehensive press kit with more details about each of this year's Flemming Award recipients and their stellar government service as well as the history of this award.

“We couldn't be more honored to host the 75th anniversary of the Arthur S. Flemming Awards,” said Dr. Kathryn Newcomer, Professor, The Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration and President of the Arthur Flemming Awards Commission.

“From their achievements in space to zoonotic diseases to combating human trafficking, the dedication and contributions from this year's awardees will inspire current and prospective public servants. They are true heroes in our government.”

Established in 1948, the award is named after Arthur Sherwood Flemming, a distinguished government official who served seven presidential administrations of both parties, was president of three higher-ed institutions, received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, first from President Eisenhower in 1957 and then from President Bill Clinton in 1994, and was a fierce advocate for social and racial equity, among his many other accomplishments.

The Arthur S. Flemming Awards are coordinated and hosted by the George Washington University Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration in partnership with the National Academy of Public Administration.

The award ceremony for the 2023 Flemming Award recipients will take place on Nov. 13, 2024, at the 2024 Academy Fall Meeting.

About the Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration

The Trachtenberg School has a long reputation of excellence, offering two of the oldest public administration and public policy programs in the world. It leverages its location in the nation's capital and the vibrant Foggy Bottom community to enhance student, alumni, and faculty experiences. The Trachtenberg School's award-winning faculty are recognized for their research expertise and teaching excellence. We pride ourselves on our commitment to an inclusive, equitable, and collaborative learning environment. For more information visit <https://tspppa.gwu.edu/>.

About the National Academy of Public Administration

Chartered by Congress to provide nonpartisan expert advice, the Academy is an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan organization established in 1967 to assist government leaders in building more effective, efficient, accountable, and transparent organizations. Learn more at www.napawash.org.

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Notable Past Recipients of the Arthur S. Flemming Award

Recognized early in their careers, many of the Flemming Award recipients have continued to make significant contributions to this country. More than 707 individuals have received this award to date. Here are some notable past awardees and the year in which they were honored (listed alphabetically):

Neil Armstrong (1969) a NASA astronaut who became the first human to walk on the moon, a groundbreaking feat in the realm of science and technology. He later became a University Professor of Aerospace Engineering and made numerous contributions to aerospace engineering, scientific knowledge, and exploration of the universe through the rest of his life.

John W. Chancellor (1966) a pioneering journalist with *Voice of America* who later became the anchor of *NBC Nightly News*.

Dr. Francis Collins, MD, PhD (1998) a physician-geneticist noted for his landmark discoveries of disease genes, and his visionary leadership of the Human Genome Project - he later became the [Director of the National Institutes of Health](#).

Gene L. Dodaro (1989) a career comptroller who received the Flemming Lifetime Achievement Award and is currently Comptroller-General of the U.S. [Government Accountability Office](#).

Dr. Anthony Fauci (1979) a physician-scientist and immunologist from the National Institutes of Health who has presided over multiple scientific and public health challenges including HIV/AIDS, West Nile virus, the anthrax attacks, pandemic influenza, Ebola and Zika and, most recently, COVID- 19. Fauci also received the Katherine Gebbie Lifetime Achievement Award from the Flemming Awards Commission in 2017.

Dr. Robert Michael Gates, PhD (1978) an intelligence analyst recognized for outstanding accomplishments in the CIA; he later became director of the CIA and Secretary of Defense.

Najeeb E. Halaby (1953) a Syrian-American aviator, businessman, and government official who made the first transcontinental jet flight; he later became head of the FAA and chairman of Pan American airways.

Mary Elizabeth Hanford (now “**Elizabeth Dole**”) (1971) an attorney, author, and politician who later became Secretary of Transportation and Labor in the Reagan and Bush I administrations, [president](#) of the American Red Cross, and later a United States Senator.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1964) a young federal employee who worked as “an architect of the nation's program to eradicate poverty.” He later became a United States Senator.

Natalie Pekney (2022) an environmental engineer who was recognized for her work to reduce methane emissions from abandoned oil and gas wells.

Dr. William Daniel Phillips (1987) a physicist who later went on to become a Nobel Laureate.

Harrison Schmitt (1972) a former NASA astronaut and geologist, best known for being the first scientist to walk on the moon; he later became a United States Senator.

Paul Volcker Jr. (1964) an economist who later became chairman of the Federal Reserve.

Dr. Jacqueline Jia-Kang Whang-Peng (1971) a [physician-scientist](#) recognized for her work in the cytogenetics of cancer.

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FRANK SESNO

Emcee for 75th Anniversary of Arthur S. Flemming Awards

Frank Sesno serves as the Director of Strategic Initiatives and Professor at the School of Media and Public Affairs, and as the Executive Director of the George Washington University Alliance for a Sustainable Future. The Alliance is a broad pan-university initiative to amplify the university's teaching, research, convening and impact relating to global challenges around climate change, environmental justice, and sustainability.

An Emmy-award winning journalist, Sesno's journalism career spanning four decades has put him at the reporting forefront of major events including presidential campaigns and debates, superpower summits, and conflicts worldwide. He served as director of the School of Media and Public Affairs from 2009-2020 and has extensive experience and an abiding commitment to environmental journalism and stewardship. He teaches environmental reporting and founded Planet Forward, a platform for college students worldwide to research and publish stories about climate change, sustainability, and innovation. Sesno hosts programs on Public Broadcasting focusing on the health of the Chesapeake Bay, sea level rise, and community resilience.

Sesno's diverse journalistic career includes more than two decades at CNN as a White House correspondent, anchor, Sunday talk show host, Washington Bureau Chief, and Special Correspondent. While serving in those roles, he covered presidential campaigns and political conventions, superpower summits, arms negotiations, conflicts in the Middle East and Latin America, and major historical events such as the impeachment of Bill Clinton, the 9/11 terror attacks and Barack Obama's historic inauguration as America's first Black president in 2009.

Sesno has produced and reported multiple documentaries for CNN, including "*We Were Warned*," which examined America's energy supplies and vulnerabilities and "*Donald Rumsfeld: Man of War*," delving into Rumsfeld's controversial term as Secretary of Defense during the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. He reported and hosted "*Ronald Reagan: A Legacy Remembered*," spotlighting Reagan's presidency for The History Channel, and was co-executive producer of "*Avoiding Armageddon: Our Future, Our Choice*," a four-part prime time documentary that aired on PBS.

Author of "*Ask More: The Power of Questions to Open Doors, Uncover Solutions, and Spark Change*," Sesno shares his expertise and love of interviewing through his course, "*The Art of the Interview*." He hosts *The Sesno Series*, generously endowed by GW

alumni Ted and Meredith Segal, which brings together political experts and media to foster discussions on American democracy and civil discourse.

Sesno has had the privilege of interviewing five U.S. presidents and prominent global figures, including Bill Gates, Hillary Clinton, Anthony Fauci, Sandra Day O'Connor, Colin Powell, Margaret Thatcher, Walter Cronkite, Nancy Pelosi, Benjamin Netanyahu, and Cory Booker. He has moderated a diverse array of public conversations and collaborated with influential organizations such as the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Kavli Foundation, The White House Historical Association, the Posse Foundation, and the Hospice Foundation of America.

Sesno currently serves as a member of the Poynter Institute's National Advisory Board. He holds membership in the Council on Foreign Relations and serves as an emeritus trustee of his alma mater, Middlebury College, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in American History. In recognition of his contributions to journalism and civil discourse, he has been awarded three honorary degrees and, in 2023, the President's Medal at the George Washington University.

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2023 Arthur S. Flemming Award Winners

Dr. Aspen M. Workman

Agricultural Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture

- Dr. Aspen Workman led a team that produced the first gene-edited calf with resistance to bovine viral diarrhea virus (BVDV), a disease that costs the U.S. cattle industry over \$2 billion each year. Dr. Workman's research represents a key advance in protecting livestock from endemic diseases and ensuring healthy and economically viable food systems and food security.

Dr. Kenneth S. Obenberger

Air Force Research Laboratory, U.S. Department of Defense

- Dr. Kenneth S. Obenberger made groundbreaking strides in radio wave propagation and plasma physics, helping to reduce the impact of space plasma disturbances on \$4 billion worth of military communication, navigation, and surveillance systems. His leadership in overcoming technical challenges has led to nine ground demonstrations and three space experiments, significantly improving the Department of Defense's space environment sensing capabilities.

Dr. Douglas Morton

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

- Dr. Douglas Morton developed and launched the Amazon Dashboard, which uses NASA satellite data to track fire activity and to provide real-time information about deforestation fires and forest fires to regional fire managers, firefighters, scientists, and the general public. His efforts directly support NASA's mission to understand our changing planet, including hotter, faster, and longer fires in a warmer, more flammable world.

Shannon Griffin

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

- Shannon Griffin pioneered an approach that uses saliva as a non-invasive alternative to blood for detecting human exposure to microbial contaminants. Her innovative method reduces the cost and time for detecting a community's exposure to pathogens, contributing to EPA's mission and, more broadly, to global public health.

Dr. Charles Rotimi

National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

- Dr. Charles Rotimi’s vision for engaging the US and global communities in genomic science has had a transformative impact on the democratization and development of genomic medicine. He has facilitated the establishment of state-of-the-art infrastructure and databases that are enabling genomic discoveries with insights into biological mechanisms of diseases and new therapeutic targets. He spearheaded the formation of the successful Human Heredity and Health in Africa (H3Africa) and is now a member of the team of scientists leading the next African genomics “moonshot” – the Genomic Centers of Excellence project (GenCoE), which aims to reduce global health inequities by establishing 8-10 genomic research centers across Africa.

TenaVel T. Thomas

Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

- TenaVel Thomas’ steadfast passion for national security and social equity, coupled with her extraordinary accomplishments, led to her historical appointment after just 14 years of government service. Ms. Thomas spearheaded the creation of John F. Kennedy International Airport’s first Repatriation Processing Center, a multi-million-dollar facility equipped with the capability of processing thousands of migrants seeking refuge in the United States. Ms. Thomas also created and led a specialized human trafficking unit who under her leadership, helped to rescue over 130 indentured servants and victims of forced labor. Her exemplary and innovative leadership has led to the successful facilitation of over \$250 billion dollars of import goods and 6.5 million passengers per year, and her impact has resonated nationally across the entire CBP enterprise.

Dr. Jeffrey A. Sherman

National Institute of Standards and Technology, U.S. Department of Commerce

- Dr. Jeffrey A. Sherman leads the atomic clock ensemble at NIST, providing the nation’s official time with nanosecond-level accuracy. His work supports billions of daily uses, from setting clocks and computers to ensuring precise timestamps for hundreds of billions of dollars of electronic financial transactions.

Blair Pasalic

U.S. Department of Energy

- Blair Pasalic strengthened energy security for European allies amid Russia’s war in Ukraine, managing \$30 million in emergency funds and delivering critical electrical equipment to Ukraine. She also spearheaded the re-launch of the Secretary of Energy’s 24-country Partnership for Transatlantic Energy and Climate Cooperation, promoting U.S. collaboration with Eastern Europe to enhance energy security and achieve climate goals.

Alison Fong

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

- Alison Fong leads a team to oversee environmental cleanups at over 2,800 hazardous waste, PCB, and underground storage tank cleanup sites in the

Pacific Southwest, protecting hundreds of disadvantaged communities. During a catastrophic fuel spill that contaminated an aquifer used by 93,000 people, she quickly created a multi-disciplinary team to respond and oversee defueling, closure, and environmental cleanup of the facility, and ran contentious public meetings to build vital relationships with stakeholders.

CDR Nancy Tian

Food and Drug Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

- CDR Nancy Tian has led the modernization of the Center for Drug Evaluation and Research Informatics platform, overseeing teams to streamline data management and regulatory reviews, greatly improving efficiency and transparency. As a U.S. Public Health Service officer, her leadership in 18 emergency deployments, including key roles in COVID-19 missions, highlights her dedication to protecting public health and national security.

Dr. M. Khair ElZarrad

Food and Drug Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

- Dr. Khair ElZarrad has dedicated his federal career to advancing national and global medical research policies that enhance patient access, promote diversity in clinical trials, and encourage the responsible use of innovative technologies. As the Rapporteur for the International Council for Harmonisation (ICH) Good Clinical Practice expert working group, he successfully modernized the Good Clinical Practice Guideline, endorsed in May 2023, which will inform the conduct of all global clinical trials intended to provide evidence to support regulatory decision-making

Dr. Lorenzo Leggio

National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

- Dr. Lorenzo Leggio, a physician-scientist, has made groundbreaking contributions to addiction science through basic and human translational clinical studies, large population-based studies and community-based outreach, and education. His leadership in studying gut-brain and neuroendocrine pathways has introduced new concepts in addiction treatment, identifying peripheral neuroendocrine systems as potential targets for developing new therapies.

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Who Was Arthur Flemming?

Arthur Flemming was the quintessential civil servant. He served more presidents in an official capacity than any other person, before or since. President Bill Clinton said Flemming "transcended party, generation and race in search of consensus on some of the great issues of our day."

In 1939 President Franklin Roosevelt appointed Flemming, then 34, to the US Civil Service Commission - - the youngest person ever to have been appointed to such an office. Flemming's career was non-partisan – presidents of both parties retained his services – and he served in a significant capacity under every president from Roosevelt to Clinton, except for Reagan, who dismissed him from his chairmanship of the US Commission for Civil Rights for being too outspoken in his views.

He was Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare in the second Eisenhower administration 1958-61. President Clinton awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1994. Flemming was president of three colleges (Macalester College, Ohio Wesleyan University and the University of Oregon) and was chairman of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission from 1972 to 1981. He was still working at the age of 91, as a member of the Commission on Aging and as co-chair of the S.O.S. (Save Our Security) Coalition, when he died in September 1996.

According to his obituary in *The Washington Post*, Flemming was a "role model to generations of government officials and social activists" and was known for "his commitment to education and to civil rights. As depicted by those who knew and worked with him both in public life and in his many private roles, Mr. Flemming possessed a rare and perhaps unequaled combination of bureaucratic competence, compassion for the needy and ability to inspire that endured from the New Deal into the '90s."

History of Arthur S. Flemming Award

In 1948, Dr. Arthur Sherwood Flemming was a guest speaker at a meeting of the Downtown Jaycees in Washington, D.C. His remarks focused on recognizing excellence in the federal service because he felt federal employees did not receive the public recognition they deserved. The Jaycees were so impressed with Dr. Flemming's speech that they proposed an annual awards program named after Flemming with the goals of recognizing outstanding service; attracting and recruiting outstanding talent to the public service; and helping retain the "best of the best" in government service, for the benefit of the nation at large.

All award recipients must have three to fifteen years of federal service. 707 individuals have received the award to date.

Initially no distinction was made between the various types of work which the award would recognize. But as the government expanded, the Awards commission felt compelled to recognize the wide array of government professions and created five award categories.

- Applied Science and engineering
- Basic science
- Clinical trials
- Leadership and management
- Social science
- Translational research

In its first 24 years, the Flemming Award honorees were all men. In 1971, the glass ceiling was shattered by two women: Mary Elizabeth Hanford (later “Elizabeth Dole”) and Dr. Jacqueline Jia-Kang Whang-Peng.

In 1997, the Awards program transitioned from the Jaycees to The George Washington University’s Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration (TSPPPA) who now coordinates and hosts the annual award ceremony in partnership with the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA).

In 2024, the Arthur S. Flemming Awards celebrates its 75th anniversary and embodies the vision of its namesake by recognizing sterling government employees to inspire and attract current and future exemplary public servants.

The Arthur S. Flemming Awards remains the oldest and most prestigious awards program for government service given outside the government. It is run entirely by the private sector, and apart from nominating candidates for the award, government agencies have no involvement.

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Photo Caption Sheet: 2023 Arthur S. Flemming Award Winners



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Food and Drug Administration,
U.S. Department of Health and
Human Services



Alison Fong

U.S. Environmental Protection
Agency



Shannon Griffin

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For higher-res downloadable images for all the winners, images of Arthur Flemming and emcee Frank Sesno, click [here](#).

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