Better Government Association Names Steve Warmbir as Investigations Editor

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Steve Warmbir, former interim editor in chief of the Chicago Sun-Times, is joining the Better Government Association as its investigations editor, the BGA announced today. Warmbir has more than two decades of experience reporting and editing some of the most high-impact investigations in the storied history of Chicago journalism.

Warmbir and reporting partner Tim Novak produced the Hired Truck series, a legendary case of insider dealing and corruption in Chicago city government. The series won a national George Polk Award, among others, for local reporting. Warmbir also produced numerous exclusives about the federal government’s Family Secrets investigation into murder, loan sharking and gambling by the Chicago mob.

As an editor, Warmbir oversaw Sun-Times investigations including a series that detailed the federal probes of former Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan and Chicago Alderman Ed Burke. He also led the Sun-Times through its 2022 merger with Chicago Public Media, parent of public radio station WBEZ.
At the BGA, Warmbir will help lead the newsroom of a 99-year-old organization that is expanding its investigative staff and making a substantial commitment to solutions-focused journalism. The BGA this year won its first Pulitzer Prize, for local reporting, in partnership with the Chicago Tribune. The BGA and Tribune investigation revealed that dozens of Chicago residents died in fires at buildings where the city failed to address known fire-safety dangers. A solutions story on the package focused on fire-safety policies in nine cities that could be relevant to Chicago.

The BGA’s growth and solutions focus is funded in part by a five-year, $10 million commitment from the Robert R. McCormick Foundation announced earlier this year.

“We are thrilled Steve Warmbir is joining us. His proven track record leading investigations and a leadership style that motivates and develops the talents of journalists will be game changers for the BGA,” said Reinaldo “Ronnie” Ramos, the BGA’s editor in chief. Ramos joined the BGA in early 2022 from the Daily Memphian, a leading digital startup.

“Steve’s deep knowledge of Chicago, strategic vision and strong management skills will strengthen the BGA. He joins us as we accelerate our growth at this historic period of reinvention in the Chicago news ecosystem,” said David Greising, president and chief executive of the BGA.

“I’m thrilled to be joining the BGA and working with their talented crew of reporters and editors to build on a track record of excellence in uncovering wrongdoing, spotlighting inequities and exposing flaws in the system — all with a focus on finding solutions for Chicago and the state of Illinois,” Warmbir said.

Warmbir served as interim editor in chief of the Sun-Times for nearly two years, beginning in September 2020. He previously had served as managing editor. During Warmbir’s tenure as interim editor, the Sun-Times won three National Headliner Awards, 17 Peter Lisagor Awards from the Chicago Headline Club and other honors. The Sun-Times also shared national awards with the BGA for a recent series about dead-end drug arrests in the Cook County courts.

In the Sun-Times’ Polk Award-winning Hired Truck reporting, Warmbir and Novak exposed how the city of Chicago rented out private dump trucks — many owned by people with political clout or ties to organized crime — that were paid to sit
idle at city job sites. Fallout from the Chicago Sun-Times series led the city to shut down the program, which had cost taxpayers $40 million a year, and federal prosecutors criminally charged more than 40 people in the ensuing scandal.

Warmbir earned a master’s degree from Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism and is a graduate of Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism.

Warmbir lives on the Northwest Side of Chicago with his family. He plays piano and ukulele and habituates many of Chicago’s great restaurants.

ABOUT THE BGA:

Founded in 1923, the Better Government Association is a nonprofit news and government-accountability organization based in Chicago. It uncovers waste and wrongdoing in government, holds elected officials accountable, litigates for open records and meetings, advocates for good government and empowers residents to engage and act.

CONTACT:

Ronnie Ramos: rramos@bettergov.org and (312)-873-1115

David Greising: dgreising@bettergov.org and (312) 404-8678