



United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit

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NEWS RELEASE

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Ninth Circuit Announces 2021 Civics Contest Winners

SAN FRANCISCO – High school students from Arizona, Northern California, Guam, Hawaii, Montana and Western Washington have been selected as the winners of the 2021 Ninth Circuit Civics Contest, an educational outreach effort sponsored by the United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit and the Public Information and Community Outreach (PICO) committee.

This year’s contest focused on important events in American history and global events that have challenged us to find a balance between inalienable rights and collective responsibilities to each other. Students were asked, “How should we as a society strike the appropriate balance within the framework of our Constitution between safeguarding our rights and fulfilling our responsibilities to each other?” The seventh annual essay and video contest “was a great success and continuation of the special work done by the circuit in its emphasis on civics education,” said District Judge Janis L. Sammartino, of the Southern District of California, who chairs the PICO committee.

Ninth Circuit Chief Judge Sidney R. Thomas noted, “The question of how we balance individual rights with our community responsibilities has been one of the most difficult and important issues in our history. I am pleased that this year’s Civics Contest focused on this topic, and that we received so many superb entries. Warm congratulations are due to the educators and students who participated. The Ninth Circuit remains committed to community outreach, and our annual Civics Contest is an important part of that effort.”

Judge Sammartino added, “This year’s contest topic focusing on community responsibility was particularly relevant as the entire nation was forced to adapt to an unprecedented worldwide pandemic. We received many outstanding, interesting and varied submissions from our entrants, and I was pleased to see that the concept of community contribution to our democracy has not been lost on our younger generation, even during this trying time. It is also gratifying that so many judges, judicial employees and attorneys continue to give generously of their time to contribute to the contest.”

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Winners of the essay competition are:

First place – Isabella Widrow of Olympia High School in Olympia, Washington;

Second place – Madeline Day of Amador Valley High School in Pleasanton, California; and

Third place – Jin Chung of St. John’s School in Tumon, Guam.

Winners of the video competition are:

First place – Brenden Bird of Fort Benton High School in Fort Benton, Montana;

Second place – Teah Simon of 'Iolani School School in Honolulu; and

Third place – The team of Marc Garba and Jiatian Yin of Desert Mountain High School in Scottsdale, Arizona.

The winning essays and videos will be posted on the contest website

<https://www.ca9.uscourts.gov/civicscontest/> in July.

The competition was open to students in grades 9-12 in public, private and parochial schools and home-schooled students of equivalent grade status in nine western states and two Pacific island jurisdictions. Despite challenges posed by school closures and distance learning due to the coronavirus pandemic, nearly 1,000 students entered the contest.

Federal courts in all 15 judicial districts in the Ninth Circuit held local contests with winners going on to compete in the circuit-wide competition. In all, 12 essays and 10 videos were selected for final consideration by judges, judicial staff, attorneys and PICO committee members which organized the contest. Blind judging was employed throughout the judging process.

At the circuit level, total prizes of \$3,000, \$1,700 and \$1,000 will be awarded to first, second and third-place winners in both the essay and video competition. Prizes for the winners are funded through attorney admission fees collected by the federal courts in the Ninth Circuit to fund educational programs for the bar and community.

The Ninth Circuit Public Information and Community Outreach Committee was established in 2000 by the Judicial Council of the Ninth Circuit, the governing body for federal courts in the West. The committee seeks to promote public understanding of and confidence in the judicial system through civics education and outreach to the community and media. The committee includes federal judges, court executives, attorneys and court staff.

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