



Public Information Office
United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit

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NEWS RELEASE

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Ninth Circuit Announces 2020 Civics Contest Winners

SAN FRANCISCO – Young people from California and Nevada have been selected the winners of the 2020 Ninth Circuit Civics Contest, an educational outreach effort to high school students sponsored by the United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit.

“The Right to Vote: Milestone Anniversaries” was the theme of the contest. Students in grades 9-12 in public, private and parochial schools and home-schooled students of equivalent grade status were challenged to write an essay or produce a short video with the questions presented: *“In the wake of the 15th and 19th Amendments, barriers remained to prevent United States citizens from voting. Do formal or informal barriers remain today? What additional changes would you make, if any, to Americans’ voting rights?”*

“The Ninth Circuit is strongly committed to educating young people about how the judiciary and the rule of law work in our society, and the Civics Contest has been an important part of our community outreach over the past five years,” said Chief Judge Sidney R. Thomas.

Winners in the essay competition are:

- 1st place – Elinor Amir-Lobel of La Jolla Country Day School in La Jolla, California;
- 2nd place – Olivia Chen of Arcadia High School in Arcadia, California; and
- 3rd place – Danielle Amir-Lobel also of La Jolla Country Day School.

Winners in the video competition are:

- 1st place – The team of Mandy Jiang, Cathleen Liang and Michelle Jiang of West Career & Technical Academy in Las Vegas;
- 2nd place – Divya Ganesan, of Castilleja School in Palo Alto, California; and
- 3rd place – The team of Sandar Aung, Amina Boulakhras and Nesrine Maida also of West Career & Technical Academy.

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

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

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“We typically receive around a thousand entries each year and, despite the coronavirus challenges, we received approximately the same number this year from all over the Circuit. The entries are always excellent, and congratulations are due to the educators and students who participated,” Chief Judge Thomas added.

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, 38 essays and 27 videos were selected for final consideration by judges, attorneys, court executives, law clerks, court and library staff, and the Public Information and Community Outreach (PICO) Committee, which organized the contest. Blind judging was employed in both the preliminary and final rounds.

“It is gratifying that so many people gave generously of their time to contribute to the civics education program and to help our youth become knowledgeable and informed citizens. The quality of the essays and videos were excellent,” said U.S. District Judge Janis L. Sammartino of San Diego, who chairs the PICO Committee.

At the circuit level, prizes of \$2,000, \$1,000 and \$500 will be awarded to 1st-, 2nd- and 3rd-place winners in both the essay and video competition. Prize money 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, lawyers, and court staff.

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