



United States District Court
District of Nevada

Chambers of
Miranda M. Du
Chief Judge

Bruce R. Thompson U.S.
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PRESS RELEASE

Civics Contest Finalists Announced

LAS VEGAS – Preliminary judging has been completed in the 2020 Ninth Circuit Civics Contest for high school students in the western United States, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands. All told nearly 1,000 young people entered the contest despite challenges with school closure and distance learning due to COVID. The District of Nevada entered 278 essays and 21 videos!

“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 following 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?”*

Fifteen federal courts in the Ninth Circuit held local contests, selecting winners who will advance to the final round to compete in the circuit-wide competition. Among the finalists selected for the local contest sponsored by the U.S. District Court for the District of Nevada are:

Essay category - 1st, Sophia Socha; 2nd, Kate Wong; and 3rd, Alyssa Marie Laguna. All students are from West Career & Technical Academy in Las Vegas.

Video category - 1st, Sandar Aung, Amina Boulakhras, and Nesrine Maida of West Career & Technical Academy in Las Vegas; 2nd, Mandy Jiang, Cathleen Liang, and Michelle Jiang, of West Career & Technical Academy in Las Vegas; and 3rd, Trevor Smerz and Austin Phelps of Faith Lutheran High School in Las Vegas.

District-level prizes consist of \$1,000, \$750, and \$500 for the top three essays and videos.

In all, there are 38 essays and 27 videos for the Ninth Circuit's consideration by judges, attorneys, court executives, law clerks, court and library staff, and the Public Information and Community Outreach (PICO) Committee, which will announce the Circuit-level winners in late June. At the circuit level, prizes of \$2,000, \$1,000, and \$500 will be awarded to first-, second- and third place winners in both the essay and video competition.