

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 11, 2014



September 17, 2014 is “Constitution Day and Citizenship Day.” On this day, we recognize those who have become U.S. citizens and commemorate the adoption of the United States Constitution. It is observed on September 17 because that is the day in 1787 when the Constitution was signed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania by the members of the Constitutional Convention.

This commemoration had its origins in 1940, when Congress passed a joint resolution authorizing and requesting the President to issue annually a proclamation setting aside the third Sunday in May for the public recognition of all who had attained the status of American citizenship. The designation for this day was at that time “I Am An American Day.”

In 1952, Congress repealed this joint resolution and passed a new law moving the date to September 17 to commemorate “the formation and signing, on September 17, 1787, of the Constitution of the United States.” The day was still designated as “Citizenship Day” and retained its original purpose of recognizing all those who had attained American citizenship. This law urged civil and educational authorities of states, counties, cities and towns to make plans for the proper observance of the day and “for the complete instruction of citizens in their responsibilities and opportunities as citizens of the United States and the State and locality in which they reside.”

In 2004, Congress changed the designation of this day to “Constitution Day and Citizenship Day.”

To help celebrate Constitution Day and Citizenship Day, the public outreach committee of the United States District Court for the District of Connecticut is sponsoring an interactive Constitution Bowl contest with two high schools: The Law & Government Academy in Hartford (Jahmeelah Bai-Grandson, Principal) and Wilbur Cross High School in New Haven (Edith Johnson, Principal). Students from Grades 9 through 12 will have the opportunity to participate by answering 35 questions about the Supreme Court and various aspects of, and provisions in, the Constitution. There will be first, second and third place prizes for students from each of the high schools.

Members of the public who are interested in increasing their knowledge about our Constitution will find the 35 questions being used for the Constitution Bowl contest on the court’s public website (www.ctd.uscourts.gov/public-outreach). For those who wish to see how many questions they answered correctly, answers will be posted on the same website on September 18.

In addition, Constitution Day and Citizenship Day will be highlighted at special ceremonies to swear in new citizens in the New Haven, Hartford and Bridgeport seats of court. Special ceremonies will be held in the New Haven and Hartford seats of court on September 17, and in the Bridgeport seat of court on September 18, as part of the court's Constitution Day and Citizenship Day celebration.

This year's Constitution Day and Citizenship Day activities are part of a larger effort by the public outreach committee to educate young people and other members of the public about the important role that federal courts and the lawyers who practice there play in preserving the rule of law and promoting the freedoms some may be tempted to take for granted. Judge Alvin W. Thompson said, "One need only look at what is going on in other places around the world to see that the fact that we are a nation of laws has a major impact on the lives of our citizens on a daily basis. When I swear in new citizens, I explain to them that the Constitution not only sets forth how we govern ourselves, but also is the source of our rights and liberties. It is the cornerstone of our legal system and helps define the character of our society because it is our Constitution that protects them and their loved ones by giving them equal rights to pursue their dreams and aspirations without regard to their station in life or their beginnings. We wish to have this understood by all citizens, not just new ones, by promoting a broad understanding of our Constitution, the opportunities and responsibilities of citizens, and our civil and criminal justice systems."

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