



NEWS RELEASE

Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts

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Federal Judges Convene Civic Education Summit

Urged by Supreme Court Justice Anthony M. Kennedy, representatives of 22 national groups met last week to stress the need to make civic education a high priority in schools and communities and to explore possible relationships with the federal Judiciary.

“Some people think government is for experts. That does not accord with basic democratic theory,” Justice Kennedy told those attending the Civic Education Idea Exchange, hosted by a committee of federal judges. “The law lives in the consciousness of people. The same can be said of freedom.”

The justice earlier this year enlisted the American Bar Association and launched “Dialogue on Freedom,” an outreach initiative to teach high school students about democratic principles.

“We can help in a process that is every American’s mission and every American’s purpose,” Justice Kennedy said in his introductory remarks at the unprecedented gathering of federal judges and civic education groups.

The meeting was convened by the U.S. Judicial Conference Judicial Branch Committee after U.S. District Judge Frank C. Damrell Jr., of Sacramento and chair of the Civics Subcommittee, expressed interest in “a less fragmented, more cooperative effort” that would involve interested judges as resource persons available to educators and leaders concerned with social studies, civics, law-related education, and American history.

Civic education leaders commended the federal court system for its existing national initiatives and other courthouse programs initiated by local judges. Spokespersons from the organizations said that the appropriate involvement of federal judges can make civic education a higher priority in schools and communities. Representatives of the groups are drafting a resolution underscoring the importance and value of civic education. Judge Damrell raised the possibility of a national symposium on civics, in which scholars, students, educators, and judges would participate.

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Judge Deanell Tacha, chief judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit and Judicial Branch Committee chair, told the education experts, “There is work to be done and we need to be part of it. Judges can bring to the table a lot of experience in working with democracy.”

Judge Fern Smith, Director of the Federal Judicial Center, said her agency will conduct a survey to determine what types of judicial educational outreach programs are in place. That data will help the Judiciary determine how to move forward, she said.

Representing the White House at the meeting was John Bridgeland, a special assistant to the President and director of the USA Freedom Corps. He said the nation’s young people want information and meaningful, interactive learning experiences amid what he called a “civics revival” touched off by the tragic events of September 11, 2001. He said the Bush Administration is eager to help.

The Judicial Conference of the United States is the policy-making body for the federal courts. It is chaired by the Chief Justice of the United States and composed of the chief judges of the 13 courts of appeals, a district judge from each of the 12 geographic circuits, and the chief judge of the Court of International Trade. The Conference meets twice a year to consider administrative and policy issues affecting the court system.

The June 19 Civic Education meeting was hosted by the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, the support agency for the federal courts, which is charged with carrying out the policies of the Conference. Among its duties, the Administrative Office develops and implements community outreach programs that link courts to their communities through educational initiatives that bring teachers, students, lawyers, community leaders, the media and judges together in federal courthouses. More information on the Administrative Office’s Educational Outreach can be found at: <http://www.uscourts.gov/outreach/index.html>.

A list of participants in the June 19 meeting is attached.

**Organizations Represented at the June Civic Education Idea Exchange
with Federal Judges
June 19, 2002**

Administrative Office of U.S. Courts
American Bar Association
American Inns of Court Foundation
American Federation of Teachers
Center for Civic Education
Constitutional Rights Foundation
Constitutional Rights Foundation, Chicago
Corporation for National and Community Service
Council of the Chief State School Officers
Federal Bar Association
Federal Judicial Center
First Amendment Schools
International Education Association, Civic-Education Study, University of Maryland
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Council for the Social Studies
National Alliance for Civic Education
National Education Association
Street Law, Inc.
Student Achievement Institute, U.S. Department of Education
The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
The Close Up Foundation
The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
The Freedom Forum
USA Freedom Corps
Youth Service America

Participating Federal Judges

Justice Anthony Kennedy, Supreme Court of the United States
Chief Judge Deanell Tacha, Court of Appeals, Tenth Circuit of the United States
Judge Ann Williams, Court of Appeals, Seventh Circuit of the United States
Judge Frank Damrell, U.S. District Court, Eastern District of California
Judge Rodney Sippel, U.S. District Court, East/West District of Missouri
Judge Fern Smith, Director, Federal Judicial Center