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Civics Essay Contest Winners to be Honored by New Hampshire Supreme Court Chief Justice

CONCORD, NH- The New Hampshire Bar Foundation is pleased to announce the winners of its second annual High School Civics Essay Contest, who will be recognized at a special ceremony at the Merrimack Superior Court in Concord on Monday, April 6 at 2 pm. New Hampshire Supreme Court Chief Justice Gordon MacDonald will address the winners and present their awards at the event, which will be held in Courtroom 3. Vaibhav Rastogi, a senior receiving his education in person through Bishop Brady High School and virtually through Virtual Learning Academy Charter School, placed first in the competition, earning a \$5,000 cash award. Leah McFarland, a senior at Newfound Regional High School, placed second, and Lauren Damota, a junior at Londonderry High School, placed third. Both will receive a \$2,500 cash award.

The prompt for this year's contest asked, "...how should the freedoms and rights identified in the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution shape the way AI tools like ChatGPT are regulated? Should AI companies be required by law to pay the authors whose work they use?" New Hampshire students enrolled in grades 11 and 12 (or their equivalent) during the 2025-2026 academic year were invited to write 750 to 1,000 words presenting a clear position on the topic. A panel of attorneys and judges then evaluated each submission on criteria including the understanding of constitutional principles; originality, clarity, and depth of analysis; and grammar, spelling, composition, and citations.

Referencing Ronald Reagan's famous observation that "freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction," Bar Foundation Chair Scott Harris remarked, "Given the impressive analytic thought in this year's essays, I'd say that democracy has at least two more generations to go."

Chief Justice MacDonald will present each contest winner with an award certificate and cash prize at the ceremony. Members of the media are welcome to attend.

The New Hampshire Bar Foundation is a nonprofit, grant-making charitable foundation that promotes the role of lawyers in securing equal access to justice and supports the charitable and educational aims of the New Hampshire Bar and its members. The Foundation established the essay contest as part of its commitment to supporting civic-related and law-related educational initiatives in the Granite State. Next year's essay contest will be announced in the fall.
