

Woodstock high schoolers deliver SCOTUS-style arguments before Superior Court judge

By Justin Bigos
Staff Writer

On Monday, 44 juniors and seniors from Woodstock Union High School (WUHS) bused to the Windsor County Superior Courthouse in Woodstock to present arguments in two mock cases recently heard by the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS). According to Hon. Judge Alison Johannensen, assistant judge for Windsor County, she and the Hon. Judge Michael A. Ricci, the other assistant judge for Windsor County, conceived the educational field trip, and she reached out to WUHS with the idea, centered around the U.S.'s semiquincentennial.

"Judge Ricci and I were thinking, for Windsor County we'd love to do something [for the 250th] to include the community, and so we reached out to [WUHS social studies teacher Steve] Smith and said that we were interested in doing something with his AP government students and his history students for the 250th," Johannensen told the Standard before the event.

Smith quickly agreed to the proposal, she said, and then Hon. Judge H. Dickson Corbett, superior judge for Windsor County, offered to present a talk on the U.S. Declaration of Independence. The Vermont Bar Association got wind of the developing event and offered to donate pocket-sized copies of the U.S. Constitution to all the students.

The first-debated SCOTUS case revolved around the constitutional rights of transgender athletes to perform in sporting events, and the second case considered the legality of gun bans for marijuana



From left: Mock justices Adelle Danilchick, Jake Blackburn, Elvis Lavallee, and Ukiah Jones-Welker listen to the instructions given about the court session.

Pamela R. White Photo

users. "I just finished class where we were talking about the two cases, and one [transgender sports participation] is especially sensitive. The students are working hard to be diplomatic and thoughtful in their statements about it," Smith told the Standard.

"We're trying to base our arguments on the national arguments, so I printed out what the National Constitution Center said about this case [Little v. Hecox], and we are looking at the briefs filed on behalf of both the state of Idaho, which is looking to restrict transgender participation, and this student, Lindsay Hecox, who is looking to play on the track and field team [at Boise St. University]," said Smith. "Some students have firsthand experience with the 'transgender participation in sports' issue," he added.

"The other topic is whether a habitual user of marijuana, which is still illegal in New Hampshire, has to give up his handgun because he's using illegal drugs," said Smith, who cited a federal statute enforced by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives

(ATF). "I believe it's the statute that got Hunter Biden a felony," said Smith.

According to 11th-grader Khloi Brusco, the exercise in presenting mock arguments for actual SCOTUS cases before real-life Vermont judges was a rewarding experience. In the Little v. Hecox case, Brusco was on the side of Little. "The case revolved around a trans female college athlete playing on a sports team, and my side was [arguing] that the Equal Protection Clause [in the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution] was getting violated for biological females. The other side was arguing for the athlete," said Brusco.

"It was a great experience. I think, firsthand, it's definitely hard to argue for a side that you don't actually fully agree with, but you have to be able to. I think doing that definitely helps my perspective," Brusco added.

Brusco's teacher echoed that sentiment. "A goal of my classes is for students to understand that they can be passionate about their views, but ideally, we practice speaking with others who hold different views,

and we practice disagreeing with each other without disliking them. It's possible to disagree about the issue, but still respect each other as humans," said Smith.

Judge Corbett's talk on the Declaration of Independence dug deep into our nation's history and offered profound questions to the students about America's legacy and future. "I talked about the as-

sumptions that we would have had 250 years ago, in that we would have understood that we were being ruled by a monarch. I talked about some of the American colonial experiences that led us to question that assumption, but pointed out that what really motivated the American colonists to declare independence above all was a new foundational idea, which was that all men are created equal," Corbett told the Standard. "I talked about the language of the Declaration, and about how successive generations have understood that promise." Corbett's talk included Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as canonical interpreters of the Declaration, as well as "the ways in which they asked in what ways the Declaration in their times remained unfulfilled."

"I invited the students to think about, for their genera-

tion, what will the Declaration mean to them, and what will the promise of equality mean for them," added Corbett.

"I found Judge Corbett's speech inspiring, and was pleased to see students reference the Judge's ideas in later arguments. I also greatly appreciated the attention of [all] the judges to the students' Constitutional arguments. The judges' presence and attention certainly made it more prestigious and memorable for us all," said Smith.

"Other schools have come and used the courthouse, and it's always a huge success. The kids just being in that space to do their arguments — it's just different for them than doing it in the high school classroom," said Johannensen. "I hope they learn that you can disagree and still be respectful. Maybe you'll hear things that you didn't really think about, and it causes you to shift your mentality and learn from it."

Woodstock Selectboard application process explained

So far, one candidate has filed for the Aug. election

By Emma Stanton
Staff Writer

Next week, on Thursday, May 28, the Woodstock Selectboard will hold a public meeting to interview applicants for two vacant selectboard seats. Following the recent resignations of former selectboard chair Ray Bourgeois and former vice chair Laura Powell, the board now has just three members, barely enough for a quorum.

After Powell's resignation

on May 5, the remaining selectboard members decided to appoint two interim board members until an official election can be held on Aug. 11. The process to be considered for the interim role differs from the process to be considered for election, Stephanie Appelfeller, Chief of Staff for the Town of Woodstock, told the Standard.

"The application for the interim board member will be due May 26 for anyone in-

terested in being considered during the May 28 hearing," Appelfeller said. "Applications can be submitted to myself or administrative assistant Kitty Mears Koar."

The board will announce its interim appointments shortly after the hearing.

An election is then scheduled for Aug. 11 for both seats. All those who want to run, including those who were ap-

See WOODSTOCK SELECTBOARD - Page 7A



Students' day in court

As part of the observance of the United States' 250th anniversary, Woodstock Union High School (WUHS) students from Steve Smith's social studies class participated in a mock Supreme Court session at the Windsor County Courthouse in Woodstock on Monday afternoon. After a presentation from Windsor Superior Court judge H. Dickson Corbett, the students — as mock lawyers and justices — explored the civic process by presenting arguments related to two cases recently heard by the U.S. Supreme Court. Above, Smith outlines the upcoming mock court session. Below, Judge Corbett, left, speaks to WUHS students in the courtroom.

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