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Students Learn about the Supreme Court and Constitution – From the Experts Themselves

December 15, 2006 -- Forty-eight students from the Philadelphia and Los Angeles areas learned firsthand about the operations of the U.S. Supreme Court and the evolution and application of the 14th Amendment on Thursday, December 14. Their instructors were Chief Justice John G. Roberts and Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Seated in the ornate West Conference Room of the Supreme Court building, the students spent more than an hour asking questions of Chief Justice Roberts, who stood in front of them, often smiling and encouraging their interest. After a brief interlude, Justice Ginsburg took the podium and fielded student questions about equal protection under the law as guaranteed by the 14th Amendment.

The two sessions were videotaped and will become part of the Sunnylands Seminars on the court and constitution. Edited versions of the videos will be distributed to schools throughout the country for use on Constitution Day 2007. They will join two other videos filmed with students and Supreme Court justices: *Our Constitution: A Conversation*, filmed in 2005 with Justices Sandra Day O'Connor and Stephen Breyer, and *A Conversation on the Constitution: Judicial Independence*, filmed in 2006 with Justices O'Connor, Breyer and Anthony Kennedy. Earlier this year in advance of Constitution Day 2006, 83,400 DVDs, including *Our Constitution: A Conversation*, were mailed to educators, libraries and other institutions.

The constitution project is underwritten by the Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands. It is coordinated by the Annenberg Public Policy Center. APPC director Kathleen Hall Jamieson introduced Chief Justice Roberts and Justice Ginsburg to the students.

This was the first encounter with the Sunnylands DVD project for both Chief Justice Roberts and Justice Ginsburg. For their conversation with Chief Justice Roberts, the students came prepared with nearly 30 questions ranging from the importance of the judiciary to judicial salaries. The Q&A was lively, with the chief justice walking back and forth in front of his audience to speak directly to the high school juniors and seniors. During her hour, Justice Ginsburg occasionally turned the tables and asked the students questions, guiding them through the intricacies of the Constitution's definition of "equal protection under the law" and the court's role in interpreting it.

Participating students came from J.R. Masterman High School in Philadelphia, Cheltenham High School in suburban Philadelphia and from 10 Los Angeles area high schools. The California students were selected by the Constitution Rights Foundation.

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