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Education critical to maintaining fair and impartial courts

Video featuring former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor is centerpiece of national campaign

Washington, D.C. - A groundbreaking civics education campaign led by the National Association of Women Judges (NAWJ) addresses what organizers see as a growing gap in civic literacy in our nation. The "Informed Voters – Fair Judges" project launched Wednesday highlights the role of courts in American society with a goal of helping voters understand their role in ensuring fairness and justice for all who enter the legal system.

The voter information campaign debuted with a live-streamed premiere showing of "Fair and Free" a film featuring former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. The film is the focal point for community presentations to be scheduled across the nation over the coming year, with shorter versions developed for television, radio and online public service announcements.

"In America, courts exist to protect people, resolve disputes and ensure fairness and justice for those who enter the legal system," Justice O'Connor explains in the video. "When voters support candidates based solely on the popularity of their past decisions, or how they might decide cases in the future, they create an atmosphere that undermines fairness, equality, and impartiality."

Justice O'Connor was the first woman appointed to our nation's high court. Since leaving the bench she has been a leading advocate for restoring civics education in our nations schools.

The preservation of a fair and impartial legal system is a major focus of the NAWJ, the nation's primary professional organization for female jurists in state, federal and appellate courts in all 50 states. Founded in 1979, the NAWJ counts more than 1,200 members. What sets the Informed Voters project apart from other fair courts initiatives across the country is that it is the first to be developed and implemented by judges.

"Each day in American courts, thousands of judges preside over cases ranging from traffic offenses to tax and land disputes, child abuse and murder. The judicial system reflects the fabric of life in this country. And unlike legislators, a judge must stand apart from political and partisan ideas, and ensure each litigant's case receives a fair and impartial hearing, with a resolution based on the law. That is the foundation of the public's trust and confidence in the courts," said Anna Blackburne-Rigsby, a judge on the District of Columbia Court of Appeals in Washington, DC and NAWJ President.

The 'Informed Voters – Fair Judges' project is a non-partisan voter education project developed to increase public awareness about the judicial system, to inform voters that politics and special

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interest attacks have no place in the courts, and to give voters the tools they need to exercise an informed vote in favor of fair and impartial courts.

Eight states are being targeted for the more intensive efforts during the pilot year of the campaign. Coordinating committees are leading placement of PSAs, scheduling of community presentations, engagement via social media and fundraising to support all of the campaign activities in Alaska, California, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Tennessee and Washington.

To learn more about the campaign, view the educational tools that are available and find out how you can get involved, log on to ivp.nawj.org.

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