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Fewer than a third of Americans know Supreme Court rulings are final, a new survey finds

Most Americans know little about the workings of the U.S. Supreme Court, including the fact that Supreme Court rulings are final, according to a national survey conducted for the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg Public Policy Center.

The findings are being released today in advance of Constitution Day, Monday, September 17.

When asked "if a person disagrees with a ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court can he or she appeal the ruling to the Federal Court of Appeals?" only 30 percent know that the high court rulings are final, 32 percent think rulings can be appealed and 38 percent are "not sure" or "don't know."

"These survey findings show just how important it is to educate all Americans about their government and the Constitution that created it," said Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center. "The health of a democracy depends on an enlightened and engaged citizenry."

Other findings include:

- A majority of Americans, 55 percent, do not know that when the Supreme Court rules five to four on a case the decision is the law and needs to be followed. Fourteen percent believe the decision is sent to Congress for reconsideration,

seven percent believe the decision is sent back to the lower courts and 34 percent simply “don’t know.”

- Only one in seven Americans (15 percent) can correctly name John Roberts as Chief Justice of the United States while two-thirds of Americans (66 percent) know at least one of the judges on the Fox television show *American Idol*.

As part of a national effort to enhance knowledge about the Constitution, the Annenberg Public Policy Center has recently distributed to 27,000 schools around the country learning materials from its Annenberg Classroom project for use in Constitution Day observances and throughout the school year. The materials were provided at no cost.

This is the third annual Annenberg Constitution Day initiative designed to help teachers and students explore the meaning and importance of our nation’s founding document. This year’s offerings – created with the help of five justices of the Supreme Court and top Constitutional scholars – include:

Films on DVD

A Conversation on the Constitution: Judicial Independence

Supreme Court Justices Stephen Breyer, Anthony Kennedy and Sandra Day O’Connor speak with high school students from California and Pennsylvania about the significance of the judiciary in the federal government and the ways in which independence is protected by the Constitution.

A Conversation with Chief Justice John G. Roberts, Jr. on the Origin, Nature, and Importance of the Supreme Court

Chief Justice of the United States John G. Roberts, Jr. and a group of high school students participate in a conversation about the high court – from its history and evolution to the methods Justices use in selecting and hearing cases to the role of an independent judiciary and other issues crucial to a healthy democracy today.

A Conversation on the Constitution with Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg on the Fourteenth Amendment

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and a group of students gather at the Supreme Court to discuss the importance of the Fourteenth Amendment and how it came to embody and protect the principle of “We the People.”

The Constitution Project: An Independent Judiciary

This film chronicles two key moments that defined our understanding of the role of the judiciary: the Cherokee Nation’s struggles before the Supreme Court in the 1830s to preserve its homeland, and *Cooper v. Aaron*, the 1958 Supreme Court

case that affirmed that states were bound to follow the Court's order to integrate their schools.

The films, in addition to previously available Constitution Day DVDs, are available on the Annenberg Classroom website at www.AnnenbergClassroom.org captioned in 14 different languages.

Radio Programs from *Justice Talking*

Justice Talking, an award-winning radio program from the Annenberg Public Policy Center and NPR, has selected two of its shows for use on Constitution Day. These shows, hosted by NPR's Margot Adler, are available on CD, online at www.justicetalking.org or can be downloaded for use on an MP3 player. They include:

Does Free Speech Stop at the Schoolhouse Door? examines the Supreme Court case *Morse v. Frederick*, which asked whether school administrators can limit student speech both in school buildings and outside at school-sponsored events.

The Death Penalty: Is Justice Being Served? addresses a variety of controversial issues surrounding the death penalty, including a botched execution in Florida that raised the question of whether lethal injection violates the Eighth Amendment's prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment.

Supplemental learning materials, including interactive timelines and related New York Times Learning Network articles, can be found online at www.justicelearning.org.

Lesson plans and other additional resources are available at www.AnnenbergClassroom.org for use on Constitution Day and throughout the school year.

About this survey:

The 2007 Annenberg Public Policy Center Judicial Survey obtained telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of 1,514 adults living in continental United States telephone households. The survey was conducted by Princeton Survey Research International. The interviews were conducted in English by Princeton Data Source, LLC from August 8 to September 2, 2007. Statistical results are weighted to correct known demographic discrepancies. The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is $\pm 2.9\%$.

Kathleen Hall Jamieson is available to answer questions about the implications of the survey's data. She can be reached at 215-898-9400.

About Constitution Day:

In December 2004, Sen. Robert C. Byrd, a West Virginia Democrat and the United States Congress's unofficial constitutional scholar, sponsored an amendment, approved by the House and Senate, which requires that all educational institutions receiving federal funds implement educational programs relating to the United States Constitution on September 17, the date the Constitution was signed in 1787. The legislation took effect in 2005.

*A project of the Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands in partnership with the Annenberg Public Policy Center, **Annenberg Classroom** is an online gateway to award-winning print, web and multimedia resources for teachers and students. For more information, visit www.annenbergclassroom.org*