



**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT**  
**EASTERN DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE**  
Joel W. Solomon United States Courthouse  
900 Georgia Avenue  
Chattanooga, Tennessee 37402

### **THE CIVICS BOWL: CIVICS EDUCATION MADE FUN**

A sound knowledge of civics is essential for the functioning and continuation of our form of democracy. Many of our national leaders have expressed concern at the lack of civics knowledge by much of our population. One problem is, how do we make civics education more than just a drudgery for our younger generation? Here is one example of how civics education can be not only enlightening but also fun.

Some months back, Candy Johnson, Chief Executive Officer of the Urban League of Greater Chattanooga, had a conversation with Judge Collier about getting the National Achievers Society (NAS) involved in civics education and outreach efforts. The NAS is the local Urban League's signature academic and leadership development program for youth in grades nine through twelve. It prepares students for college, careers, and life post-graduation. Out of conversations with Ms. Johnson and her NAS staff—Sarah Concepcion and Olivia Webb—the concept of a civics bowl was born.

The students were given a list of questions to research and study for several weeks. Questions concerned the structure of the national government, the contents of the Constitution, important personages, and critical dates in our history, with a special focus on the function and role of the federal courts

On Thursday, April 14, the idea culminated in the local federal court and the Chattanooga Chapter of the Federal Bar Association hosting the first-ever Chattanooga Civics Bowl. Thirteen members of the NAS competed in two teams, the self-named "Justice League" and "Roaring Independents." A student from each team took turns fielding questions. Whichever student hit their buzzer first got ten seconds to answer the question. If the student was unable to answer the question correctly, the student from the other team had a chance to answer. The team with the highest score at the end of the thirty-minute competition won the game. The Roaring Independents pulled off a come-from-behind win. Each member of the team received a \$15 gift card from Starbucks, provided by the Chattanooga Federal Bar Association. All the students received a pocket-sized copy of the Constitution and a court gavel pencil.

After the Civics Bowl, the students heard from and asked questions of legal practitioners about what they do and how they got where they are. The panelists were Erin Rust of the Federal Defender Services, Assistant United States Attorney Perry Piper, civil practitioner Alexis

Crutchfield of the Miller & Martin law firm, federal law clerk Kristen Dupard, and Judge Collier. Judge Collier's comments included encouraging the students always to persevere in what they undertake, drawing on the example of Abraham Lincoln, who overcame many daunting failures and obstacles not only to become president, but also to conquer challenges that were critical to the survival and development of the nation we have today.

These students now have a richer knowledge of how their government operates and how important it is for average citizens to participate in government. The hope is that as adults, they will remember this and be better citizens as a result.

This civics education and outreach example can be replicated with any group with an interest in enhancing their students' civics knowledge. Judge Collier would be happy to discuss how to set up a civics bowl with anyone interested.

Curtis L. Collier  
United States District Judge  
Chair, Eastern District of Tennessee Civics and Outreach Committee

Carrie Brown Stefaniak  
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