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Founder & Co-Chair



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## Constituting America Announces *We The People 9\*17* Contest Celebrity Judges

*Co-Chairs Janine Turner and Cathy Gillespie release the names of judges who will select winners from the hundreds of entries submitted in this year's contest*

COLLEYVILLE, TX – Constituting America, an organization founded by actress and activist Janine Turner, announces the names of celebrity judges who will select winners from the hundreds of Elementary, Middle and High School participants in the We The People 9.17 contest. We The People 9.17 challenged students to submit an entertaining short film, Public Service Announcement (PSA), cool song, informative essay, or for younger kids, poem or artwork about the Constitution and its relevance today.

Winners will be announced no later than September 1, and highlighted in special programs in Philadelphia, on September 17, Constitution Day.

“We are thrilled to have such a distinguished group of judges,” Turner said. “They are experts in their field who understand the Constitution and realize how an awareness of it is vital for our Nation’s youth and country. We are grateful they have generously given of their time and talent.”

### **Michael Flaherty, President and Co-founder of Walden Media – Judge for Constituting America’s Best Short Film**

The Short Film entries will be judged by **Michael Flaherty**. Flaherty is the president and co-founder of Walden Media. Walden’s mission is to rekindle curiosity and recapture imagination through the development and production of family films and literature. Walden has financed and produced a number of films, such as *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe, Prince Caspian, Charlotte’s Web, Bridge to Terabithia, Holes, Because of Winn-Dixie*, and *Journey to the Center of the Earth 3D*. As part of its mission, Walden creates innovative educational programs, lesson plans and events. Several hundred thousand students have participated in these events, including an international effort to read *Charlotte’s Web* aloud and to collect toys for Toys for Tots, both of which resulted in the breaking of world records. Flaherty is also on the board of Rachel’s Challenge, a program created in memory of Rachel Scott, the first victim of the Columbine

shootings. He is also a member of the Global Advisory Council of Vision360, an organization dedicated to supporting and founding churches across the country.

**John Rich, Country Music Star – Judge for Constituting America’s Best Song**

Original songs from middle and high school students will be judged by **John Rich**. John Rich is an American country music singer-songwriter. From 1992 to 1998, he was a member of the country music band Lonestar, in which he played bass guitar and alternated with Richie McDonald as lead vocalist. In 2003, he joined Big Kenny to form the duo Big & Rich, who released three albums as well as ten singles, including the Number One "Lost in This Moment." After Big & Rich went on hiatus in 2007, Rich began work on a second solo album, *Son of a Preacher Man*, which has produced two more chart singles. John Rich has also worked with the Republican Party, performing his hit song “Raisin’ McCain” at campaign rallies and at the 2008 Republican National Convention.

**Francis X. Flaherty, Jr., Publisher, Walden Pond Press - Judge for Constituting America’s Best High School Essay**

The High School essays will be judged by **Francis X. (“Chip”) Flaherty, Jr.** Flaherty heads up Walden Media’s publishing division, Walden Pond Press. As Publisher, Flaherty has the opportunity to read the literary submissions of some of the best children’s authors in the world, so he is well prepared for his service here. Under Flaherty’s stewardship, Walden Media has published many successful book titles, including *Savvy*, a New York Times Bestseller and 2009 Newbery Honor book, and *Cosmic*, the best reviewed children’s book of 2010. A former litigator, Flaherty looks forward to serving as a judge and reading essays from some of America’s next generation of leaders.

**Ron Hall, Bestselling author of *Same Kind of Different As Me* - Judge for Constituting America’s Best Middle School Essay**

The Middle School Essays will be judged by **Ron Hall**. Ron Hall grew up near Blooming Grove, Texas and graduated from TCU. After serving in the army as a nuclear weapons inspector in Colorado, Ron found himself back in Fort Worth, Texas working as a Campbell Soup salesman. In 1969, he married Deborah Short, his college sweetheart, received his MBA and became a municipal bond trader at the local bank. While volunteering at a local homeless shelter, Ron met Denver, a local homeless man. He and Denver developed a friendship and, after Ron’s wife’s death in 2000, they co-wrote ***Same Kind of Different as Me***, the story of their unlikely friendship and the lessons learned from it. Today, Ron Hall is an international art dealer whose long list of regular clients includes many celebrity personalities. Ron is a much requested inspirational speaker, and an advocate and fundraiser for the homeless all across America.

**Peter Flaherty, Co-founder and Principal of the Shawmut Group – Judge for Constituting America’s Best PSA**

The Public Service Announcements will be judged by **Peter Flaherty**. Flaherty is a co-founder and principal of The Shawmut Group, a public affairs and strategy consulting group based in Boston, Massachusetts. Mr. Flaherty is a former Assistant District Attorney in the Suffolk County District Attorney's Office in Boston where he investigated and prosecuted hundreds of criminal cases and was a prosecutor in the homicide unit. After leaving the District Attorney's office, Flaherty became Vice President of Walden Media, a film production studio, dedicated to the development of family friendly films. At Walden, Flaherty was director of partnerships and alliances and head of Walden's IMAX division. Notable Walden projects include ***The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, Prince Caspian, Holes, Charlotte's Web***, and James Cameron's ***Ghosts of the Abyss***. In 2003, Flaherty went to work for newly-elected Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, where he was Deputy Chief of Staff and Senior Adviser on constitutional issues, criminal justice, bioethics and judicial selection. On the Romney presidential campaign, Flaherty was Deputy Campaign Manager in charge of coalition building and the liaison to the faith community. Mr. Flaherty serves on the Board of Trustees at St. Elizabeth's Medical Center, The Ally Foundation, and The Suffolk County Children's Advocacy Center. He is a graduate of the College of the Holy Cross with a bachelor's degree in Economics, and received a Juris Doctorate from New England School of Law.

**Karla Morton, 2010 Texas Poet Laureate - Judge for Constituting America's Best Poem**

Poems submitted by elementary school children will be judged by the 2010 Texas Poet Laureate, **Karla K. Morton**. Morton is the first woman named as Texas State Poet Laureate in more than fifteen years. Described as a "celebrated poet" in the bill presented to the Texas State Legislature, she has been widely published in literary journals and serves as a founding member of the Greater Denton Arts Council and a founding member and officer of the Denton Poets' Assembly (part of the Poetry Society of Texas). She loves to promote poetry, and has read her work across Texas, performing at such venues as schools, universities, bookstores and festivals. Morton is also author of the book/CD titled Wee Cowrin' Timorous Beastie, a North Texas Book Festival Awards Finalist, Becoming Superman, Stirring Goldfish and Redefining Beauty -- a poetry collection written during her journey through cancer diagnosis, treatment and recovery that won the 2010 Next Generation Indie Award for women's issues. She also has two books of poetry that will be released soon -- Names We've Never Known (Texas Review Press) and Karla K. Morton: New and Selected Poems (part of the TCU Press Poet Laureate series). She holds a journalism degree from Texas A&M University and is currently featured on a nationally-aired episode of The Art of Living Gallery for her promotion of poetry as a healing tool for the soul.

**Sherry O. Watters, Artist and Owner of Something Special Boutique – Judge for Constituting America's Best Holiday Greeting Card Design**

**Sherry O. Watters** will judge the elementary school art submissions. Watters is an artist in Weatherford Texas who hand paints apparel. She began selling her artwork at the prompting of her husband Dennis in 1987. It began with five painted shirts and a few crafts, but quickly outgrew the little space in her husband's Insurance office. Over the years, her renown expanded and now, celebrities, entertainers, and special people from around the world make their way to her "one of a kind" boutique, where original works of art, of startling beauty, are painted upon wearing apparel. Sherry O', paints each piece by hand with great artistic care.

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**Phil Taylor, Artist and Founder of the American Fallen Soldier Project – Judge for Constituting America's Best Holiday Greeting Card Design**

**Phil Taylor** will judge the elementary school art submissions. Taylor moved to Texas with his parents and two siblings as a young child. His ability to draw and paint was recognized at an early age and, after completing high school, he began working with visual artist Brad Smith, graduate of The Art Institute of Chicago. Phil is the artist behind The American Fallen Soldiers Project, a 501(c)3 organization that provides, at no cost to armed forces family members, an exquisitely framed original portrait of their fallen loved one. Phil and The American Fallen Soldiers Project seek to honor, respect and forever memorialize those who have sacrificed their lives protecting our freedom while serving in our Armed Forces.

Constituting America's mission is to reach, educate and inform our nation's youth and citizens about the importance of the U.S. Constitution and the foundation it sets forth regarding our freedoms and rights. The **We The People 9.17** contest for kids is designed to rekindle and instill a passion and enthusiasm for learning about our United States Constitution and our country's founding principles.

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