

Report from Knight Essay Chairman, John R. Morgan, prepared for the February 20, 2021 CTSSAR BOM Meeting.

The CTSAR George S. & Stella M. Knight Essay Contest update is this:

- As a recap from the very short November 14, 2020 Report, on September 29th I sent mailers to 90 schools and had received three general inquiries by that time.
 - Since then I have responded to those three as well as receiving and responding to several more inquiries before the end of the submission period, which was February 1.
 - Five of the inquiries did not result in submissions, but between a few early submissions and some deadline-pushers, we wound up with a total of 10 submissions. Not too surprisingly, three were immediately disqualified, one for being about the Salem witch trials and the other two for a combination of both having no print references (the National requires three) and one also being 51 words shy of the 800 word minimum.
 - Eight of the ten submissions came from students who attend a school that had received a mailer, one came from a CTSSAR Eagle Scout Award recipient, and one came from a previous submitter who found us originally from a web search.
 - Five of the seven submissions we considered were written by students whose biographical sketches referenced taking AP courses; this year's winner specifically noted her AP course as having introduced her to the topic she developed here.

- The judges have already finished rating these submissions and have chosen a winner after a second-round reading of a pair that tied for first after tallying their place-ratings; there was also a clear third based on the number of solid second-place ratings it received. The other four lagged well behind the top three, yet were generally better developed and crafted than many we have received in previous years.
 - I have categorized these four as being in either the "honorable mention" or "submitter" categories and am crafting letters for each that will be postmarked on Washington's Birthday.
 - *As a reminder, every submitter always gets a letter of thanks that ideally makes them feel good about their participation, the Knight Essay Contest, and CTSSAR. To that end, I make sure to include the following sentence: "We encourage you to add the distinction of [earning an Honorable Mention in] or [being a Submitter to] this year's Contest on your list of accomplishments." In fact, one of our repeat submitters included her participation in our contest in her biography page.*

- The top essay treats the Vermont Constitution of 1777 and was submitted by a junior from Greenwich.
 - As in previous years, I will contact the student this weekend with a few light-edit suggestions that should be made—typos, minor clarifications, additional paragraph breaks, and shaving a few words to get it under the 1,200 word maximum length—before it is ready to submit to National as a smooth, creditable contender in the larger contest.

- This year's submissions present us with an unexpectedly pleasant turn: all three of our submitters from last year submitted again this year, and gave us overwhelmingly stronger papers.
 - When I looked at the submitter's name for our #1 choice, I was surprised that this year's winner earned an Honorable Mention last year.
 - What's more, our winner last year was the other contender for first this year.
 - Further, the essay that had gotten three votes for second place and one vote for third in our first round of voting, making it the third strongest contender in the pack, was submitted by our other Honorable Mention essayist in last year's contest.

- This unexpected 100% resubmission rate plus an additional seven submissions is a strong indicator that our State's Knight Essay Contest is becoming a significant and positive program that is gaining greater public

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respect. This puts us in a wonderful position to capitalize on this and strengthen the whole essay program by considering the following response to this year's situation:

- I propose that we award them First, Second, and Third Place awards for this year's State Contest.
 - The First Place essay will be tweaked a bit, submitted to National by the deadline of March 1st, and read at our April meeting.
 - Since our ceremony last April was cancelled, I have wanted to invite last year's winner to join us in April and read last year's essay to the membership and let us more formally present his award and medal. As runner-up this year, we can also manage an appropriate certificate for 2nd place this year.
 - Should we go with a 1st, 2nd, 3rd place set of acknowledgements, we can invite the third place winner to attend and receive an appropriate certificate.
- I propose inviting these three in order to both publicly acknowledge and specifically commend them for applying themselves to developing another Revolutionary topic for our consideration.
 - I submit that it would reinforce these commendable developments in our Contest for us to find room in the budget to provide the extra lunches for the additional essayists and their families.
 - I would also ask that we seriously consider providing the additional winners with a cash award, too--perhaps \$250 and \$150 respectively, for 2nd and 3rd place.
- The precedent set here with a 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place award should be seen as a precedent of accommodating an unusual opportunity rather than initiating a program change: it would be premature to institute a program shift to offering more than one award until we have had enough successive years of strong submissions to warrant it.
 - However, I am hopeful that we will receive multiple deserving submissions in coming years and should develop the flexibility to reward strong efforts in appropriate ways.
 - To that end, I would like to propose that Branches take some Branch meeting time this year to consider their respective interest in and ability to sponsor deserving subordinate Knight Essay awards and ancillary expenses, i.e., provide a cash award, lunches, and certificates or token gifts.
 - The February meeting would be the place to solicit sponsorships for additional awards beyond the State Winner. In exchange for sponsoring awards, Branches can be involved in the April presentation by having a Branch member make the presentation as well as having their Branch name on any Award Certificate.
- Once I've sent letters to all of this year's submitters, I intend to reach out to the teachers named by them with a letter thanking them for encouraging their students to participate in the Knight Essay Contest. I will suggest they consider holding their own class contest every fall to generate high caliber submissions to ours. I believe we've made some good inroads that should continue to produce for us if we cultivate them.

This ends my report for the February 20, 2021 BOM meeting.