

Home » **Constitution Day Sept. 17 features rare appearance of appeals bench**

[< Previous](#) [Next >](#)



Constitution Day Sept. 17 features rare appearance of appeals bench

A rare occurrence will take place on the Fresno State campus Tuesday, Sept. 17, when nine justices of the [California Court of Appeal for the Fifth District](#) gather for a free, public event, 11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. in the Satellite Student Union.



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The justices are gathering in observation of Constitution Day, an annual event designed to educate American's about democracy on of the anniversary of the signing of the United States Constitution, Sept. 17, 1787.

The Hon. Brad R. Hill, presiding justice leads the slate of associate justices coming to campus: Rebecca A. Wiseman, Bert Levy, Gene M. Gomes, Stephen Kane, Charles S. Poochigian, Jennifer R.S. Detjen, Donald R. Franson, Jr., and Rosendo Peña, Jr. (Justice Dennis A. Cornell will not be attending the Fresno State event).

The court holds a strong connection to Fresno State. Justices Hill, Cornell, Poochigian, Pena and Wiseman are alumni of the university.

Justice Hill will open the event with a brief overview of the 5th District Court's responsibilities and its role in the court system. Each justice will discuss their own paths to appointment as well as constitutional issues that come before their respective benches and their approaches to deciding cases.

Justice Hill acknowledged that it is rare for the full court to appear together in public and he hopes it will provide a valuable educational opportunity.

"I believe it is important for citizens to have an understanding as to how each of our three branches of government works," Justice Hill said. "For many people, the courts of appeal are somewhat of a mystery in terms of how they operate and how decisions are made. We hope to demystify the process a bit and have a great dialogue with the students."

Fresno State has commemorated the day since 2004 with panel presentations featuring politicians, local leaders, professors and community members that illustrate the workings of the U.S. government and the significance of the Constitution, said Dr. Jeff Cummings, Political Science professor and event organizer.

The event is sponsored by the College of Social Sciences and the Division of Student Affairs.

"It is of enormous significance for students — particularly those participating in Mock Trial, Moot Court, prelaw and other academic programs with a focus on public service — to see the California's 5th District Court of Appeal come to life through the personal stories of how each justice came to choose a career in law," said Dr. Luz Gonzalez, dean of the College of Social Sciences.

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Following the discussion, the audience will be invited to ask questions.

For more information, contact Cummins at 559.278.6693 or jcummins@csufresno.edu.

University Communications news intern Juana Mosqueda contributed to this copy.

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CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY,
FRESNO
5241 N. Maple Ave.
Fresno, CA 93740
P: 559.278.4240

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