



Mock Trials Give Glimpse of Government

They have had a history of battling *on* the court, but on Monday, Sandy Creek and Sutton High School students were battling *in* court.

After a hiatus, Clay County Government Day returned on Monday. Students from Harvard High School also took part in the day's events, but were not involved in the afternoon mock trials.

The schools spent the morning touring all of the offices within the county courthouse, learning what each office is for and what the employees do.

County officials like Judge Michael Burns, Court Magistrate Julie Bergen and a few Clay County Supervisors helped with the day's schedule.

Bergen helped organize a Jeopardy!-style game for the students to test their knowledge in the morning. Sandy Creek students came out the victors in that game.

Headlining the day, however, were a pair of mock trials in the afternoon. Students had prepared, as much as they were able to, in their classes leading

up to County Government Day, learning about court procedure, courtroom roles and strategies for prosecution and defense.

The first of the mock trials on

Monday was the case of the State of Nebraska vs. the fictitious Dakota Thundercloud.

Thundercloud, a teacher, was accused of using his position to force students to vote against the construction of a pipeline.

Sutton students served as the prosecution for the first case, with Alexa and Alyssa Stripe, Sara Nelson, Maria Griess, Cole Wiseman, Ashton Griess, Cole Schelkopf and Stephanie Sorsen serving as counsel, and Alejandra Alarcon, Charles Renfrow and Brittney Copley acting as witnesses.

Sandy Creek was the defense for the case, with Lindsey Hinrichs, Kylie Heaton, Bailey Stapleman, Morgan Dickson and Emily Blome acting as counsel, with Ashton Garcia, Sarah Haack and Dawson Messenger as wit-



Sutton seniors Alexa Stripe, Cole Wiseman, Alyssa Stripe, Steph Sorsen and Maria Griess confer before presenting their closing argument as the prosecution in a mock trial. -CCN Photo

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witnesses.

Sutton's approach, as the prosecution, was to prove that Mr. Thundercloud forced students to vote the way he believed, under threats of consequences to their grades, and that he transported students to a voting center to vote against the pipeline using a school vehicle.

Sandy Creek's defense was to show that Thundercloud was just passionate about his beliefs and simply educating his students about the issue, while trying to make the prosecution's witnesses seem as though they had a bias of their own, either for the pipeline or against Thundercloud.

The second case was that of the fictitious Phoenix Predonte vs. Dalton Academy, where Predonte had lost a scholarship due to a perceived violation of a morality requirement, because he was accused of cheating during a mock trial.

This time, Sandy Creek served as the prosecution, led by Tony Francis, Trevor Gordanier, Kenny Kuykendall and Kyle Sanders.



Sandy Creek students Kylie Heaton, Lindsey Hinrichs, Emily Blome, Morgan Dickson and Bailey Stapleman review a mock trial case before offering their closing statement. -CCN Photo

Sutton's defense team consisted of Riley Lewis, Megan Simonsen, Matthew Miller and Andrew Pawlowski.

Sandy Creek's prosecution attempted to show that the accusations against Predonte were libel and there was no proof of him acting immorally, and that he deserved the scholarship he was initially awarded.

Sutton's defense set out to show that actual malice, on behalf of Dalton Academy, could not be proven and that Predonte

did, in fact, break the rules by having a cell phone during the mock trial competition.

Judge Mike Burns told the students that he appreciated them being respectful during the trials and that they approached them seriously. He told them that preparation is crucial in court, but also in all aspects of life, and encouraged the students to be prepared no matter what they do.

He scored both trials in favor of Sutton.