

LOS ANGELES - Representative Xavier Becerra (CA - 30), announced the winners of this year's 30<sup>th</sup> congressional district art competition at a reception at the Southwest Museum last Saturday, May 18.

The first place winner was Lawrence Smith, 16, an 11<sup>th</sup> grader at Optimist Youth Homes and Family Services in Highland Park. He will join Rep. Becerra in Washington, D.C., on June 25 for the national congressional art competition awards ceremony. His artwork, "With This Torch," a painting on canvas coupled with an original poem, will hang in the U.S. Capitol for one year.

Smith was overjoyed when he learned that he was this year's winner. "I never expected to make it that far," Smith said. "It was like magic. I wasn't expecting to win, I was just expecting to be there [at the reception] to see who won."

The September 11 tragedy served as the inspiration for Smith's painting. Normally a writer of poetry, "With This Torch" was Smith's first painting, and the 30<sup>th</sup> congressional district art competition was the first contest he ever entered. Smith plans to keep fostering his artistic talents. "I'm working on a poetry book right now called 'The Eagle'," Smith said. "It will be a compilation of 150 of my poems, and I plan to feature 'With This Torch'."

Other winners last weekend included Michael Guerrero, an 11<sup>th</sup> grader from Optimist Youth Homes and Family Services, whose artwork, "Hold the Mustard," was awarded second place; Juan Carlos Comia, a 12<sup>th</sup> grader from Bravo Medical Magnet High School, whose painting, "Past, Present, Future!," was awarded third place; and Habiba Khanam, an 11<sup>th</sup>

grader from Bravo Medical Magnet High School, was awarded honorable mention for her painting, "Color Free." All four winners will attend the June 21 Dodgers-Red Sox game with Rep. Becerra, and will be recognized on the field before the game.

Rep. Becerra was impressed with all of this year's submissions. "Artistic creativity runs deep in our schools here in the 30<sup>th</sup> district," Rep. Becerra said. "Determining the winners of this year's competition was a difficult task for the judges, and I commend all the artists who took part in our competition."

The theme of this year's 30<sup>th</sup> congressional

district art competition was "An American Dream." Rep. Becerra received numerous submissions from high schools throughout his congressional district. The competition was co-sponsored by Southwest Airlines, the Southwest Museum, the Los Angeles Dodgers, Verizon, Art in the Park and Pacific Bell.