

High School Oratorical Scholarship Program

"A Constitutional Speech Contest"

2025 – 2026

THE AMERICAN LEGION, Department of Ohio, during this school year, again sponsors an Oratorical Contest for high school students in Ohio. The purpose of the contest is to develop knowledge and appreciation of the United States Constitution, the ability to think and speak clearly and critically, and the acceptance of the duties, responsibilities, rights and privileges of American citizenship. The contest meets guidelines of the Ohio High School Activities Association. The Legion contest is a partner with the National Speech & Debate Association, the honor society for high-school students (formerly the National Forensic League).

AWARDS

The Department of Ohio awards the following medals and scholarships at State Finals:

DEPARTMENT

1st Place	Gold Medal	\$4,000.00
2nd Place	Silver Medal	\$2,000.00
Remainder	Divided	\$3,000.00

DISTRICT

1st Place	Silver Medal
2nd Place	Bronze Medal
Participants	Pin

The American Legion Department of Ohio Oratorical Contestants that participate in the Department Contest will be awarded scholarships to assist them with the ever-increasing costs associated with higher education.

Any accredited institution of higher learning with a program of education or a vocational objective qualifies. We are requesting that you advise us as soon as possible of your acceptance at the school of your choice so we may forward your Oratorical monetary award to the school for deposit in your behalf.

If a district contest is held, the sponsoring Post should award the winner a gold medal. The runner-up should receive a silver medal. All other contestants should receive an Oratorical pin.

Contestants in the National Finals receive scholarships of \$25,000, \$22,500, and \$20,000 for the top three places.

State winners who participate in first-round National contests receive \$2,000 scholarships.

Second-round National participants (who do not make the finals) receive additional \$2,000 scholarships.

SCHEDULE OF CONTESTS

High School	Determined by School
County	Determined by County
District	Before March 16 th , 2026
State Finals	On Sunday March 29 th , 2026

State winners need to be certified to National by April 6th, 2026.

2025 - 2026 NATIONAL CONTESTS

National contests are May 15-17, 2026, in Hillsdale Michigan at Hillsdale College. Ohio sends one contestant to the first of the three National rounds.

PREPARED ORATION

Each contestant shall deliver a prepared oration, which must be an original effort. Plagiarism may cause disqualification. The oration must address some aspect of the Constitution of the United States, which emphasizes the attendant duties and obligations of a citizen to our government. A student shall use the same subject for the oration throughout all contests. Possible subjects include:

- An American Citizens Rights and Responsibilities Under The Constitution
- Our Constitution - Worth Having, Worth Defending
- The Constitution in a Changing World
- The Constitution in Our Everyday Life
- The Bill of Rights - Reciprocal Rights and Duties
- The Constitution - Guardian of the People's Rights

The oration in all contests must last between eight and ten minutes. The same oration must be used by the state winner in the national contest. The orations need to go to the contest chair prior to the speech. The title of the oration is announced by the contest Chair before each oration.

Quotations must be clearly indicated. If quotations exceed ten words, the author's name shall be given both orally and in the manuscript. All speeches are delivered in English (except for short phrases from other languages). Singing is not permitted (although songs may be quoted).

ASSIGNED TOPIC DISCOURSE

Contestants in the district, county, and state contests give an Assigned Topic Discourse, in addition to a Prepared Oration. The discourse lasts between three and five minutes. The oration quotation rule must be observed. The discourse tests the speaker's knowledge of the subject, the extent of research, and the ability to relate the topic to the basic principles of the Constitution. All contestants speak on the same topic, drawn during the contest from the four listed in the section "Assigned Topics" below.

DELIVERY TIME

	<u>Prepared Oration</u>		<u>Assigned Topic</u>	
	Not Less Than	Not More Than	Not Less Than	Not More Than
School, County				
District & State	8 min.	10 min.	3 min.	5 min.
Finals				

If a contestant uses less than the minimum or more than the maximum time, a penalty of one point for each minute (or fraction thereof) is deducted from the contestant's total score.

Assigned Topics for 2026 Oratorical Contest

Amendment IV

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

Article III

Section 3. Treason against the United States, shall consist only in levying War against them, or in adhering to their Enemies, giving them Aid and Comfort. No Person shall be convicted of Treason unless on the Testimony of two Witnesses to the same overt Act, or on Confession in open Court.

The Congress shall have Power to declare the Punishment of Treason, but no Attainder of Treason shall work Corruption of Blood, or Forfeiture except during the Life of the Person attainted.

Article IV

Section 4. The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government, and shall protect each of them against Invasion; and on Application of the Legislature, or of the Executive (when the Legislature cannot be convened) against domestic Violence.

Article VI

Clause 3. The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the Members of the several State Legislatures, and all executive and judicial Officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution; but no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.

ORGANIZATION

The contest is supervised by the Oratorical Commission of up to fourteen members appointed by the Department Commander. The final authority on all aspects of the contest is the commission.

The state is divided into fourteen districts.

Each District Commander appoints County Chairs and a District Chair. Each Chair cooperates with the local schools and Legion Posts to promote the program; to supervise generally the contests in the area; and, in addition, to preside at the particular contest he or she chairs.

ELIGIBILITY

All contestants shall be citizens or lawful permanent residents of the United States, bona fide students under age 20, and presently enrolled in grades 9 through 12, in a Ohio high school or junior high school (public, parochial, military, home or private). Contestants must either be legally domiciled in, or attend school within, Ohio. Contestants may enter the contest in only one state. Students who graduate early may compete if not enrolled in a college, university, trade school, or other institution of higher learning on February 23, 2024. The three finalists in the National Finals cannot compete again at any level.

SPONSORSHIP

Contests are sponsored and financed by The American Legion Department of Ohio, and the Legion Posts throughout the State. Posts sponsor and assist the contestants from their local high schools. If no Post is near a high school, or if a contestant is not sponsored by a Post, then the Commission, upon request, will assist the contestant. Posts of each county unite to sponsor the county champion at the district contest. Posts in each district sponsor the district winner at the Department contest.

Contests are open to the public, with no admission charge. Schools and the public, generally, are invited to cooperate with the Legion in promoting this patriotic enterprise. Constructive criticisms and suggestions are considered by the Commission at its annual meeting.

CRITERIA FOR SPEECHES

Before the contest, each Judge should study the scoring of the Prepared Oration and Assigned Topic, as indicated by this scorecard:

Name of judge _____
 Date _____
 Number of Contestant _____ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

A. Content 1. Was the speech original, fresh, and direct, applying the student's knowledge? 2. Did the student skillfully select examples, descriptions, analogies, and specific data? 3. Was the speech logical, well organized, and developed? 4. Did the student show a comprehensiveness of knowledge of the subject matter?	Prepared Oration	12 pts.
	Assigned Topic	4 pts.
	Prepared Oration	12 pts.
	Assigned Topic	4 pts.
	Prepared Oration	12 pts.
	Assigned Topic	4 pts.
	Prepared Oration	16 pts.
	Assigned Topic	6 pts.
	Prepared Oration	6 pts.
	Assigned Topic	4 pts.
B. Speaking Skills 1. Did the student use volume, rate, pitch, and diction effectively? 2. Rate the speaker's style: language use, word arrangement and selection, and transitions. 3. Were body actions -- poise, eye contact, posture, gestures, facial expressions -- appropriate?	Prepared Oration	6 pts.
	Assigned Topic	4 pts.
	Prepared Oration	6 pts.
	Assigned Topic	4 pts.
	Prepared Oration	6 pts.
	Assigned Topic	4 pts.
Total Points:		

Penalties:

- 1 point for each minute (or fraction thereof) over or under allotted time
- 1-10 points for failure to speak on the Constitution

Rank each Contestant 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

METHODS OF JUDGING

District and state contests have five judges. School or County contests may have three or five judges. Judges should be trained or experienced in public speaking, and (preferably) previously judged speech contests. Judges should not have judged a prior contest including the contestant or be employed by a school represented by a contestant. Arrangements for judges are made by the Chair of each contest, who should brief the judges before the contest. A judge should not discuss anything about the contest with a contestant before the contest. During the contest, judges are seated in different locations. Each judge individually ranks the contestants without consulting anyone else. Judges must use and follow the scorecard in the section "Criteria for Speeches" above. If the prepared oration or assigned topic ignores the attendant duties and obligations of a citizen, the contestant may be penalized up to 10 points. Judges also downgrade contestants if parts of the assigned topic discourse appear memorized. The Judges, Timekeepers, Tabulators, and Chair, following the last speech, may proceed to a private room for final review and tabulation. Tabulators check each scorecard and then tally the rankings. The contestant receiving lowest total rankings (not total points) is the winner. (For example, if contestant #1 receives two firsts, two seconds, and a third on the judges' score cards, the total score is 9. If contestant #2 receives two firsts, two seconds, and a fourth, the total score is 10. Though contestant #2 receives two firsts, the total score of 10 places second.) In contests with five judges, if two contestants have the same rankings total, the tie is broken by the rankings of the five judges for the two contestants. One contestant wins by three judges' Record of Choice – comparing only the rankings of the two top contestants. Total points do not break a tie between two contestants. If three (or more) contestants receive the same rankings total, the tie is broken by the highest total points from all judges. Total points are used only when three (or more) contestants tie on total rankings. In the rare case of a tie on points as well as on rankings, the judges will meet, compare scores and arrive at consensus rankings, which are final. Judges must stay in the room until a winner is established.

CERTIFICATION OF CONTESTANTS

High school (or home school) may select, by any reasonable method, a contestant to represent the school. High school (or home school) contests are preferred in order to increase participation. Each contestant, to advance, must be certified the winner of each prior contest beginning with the high school (or home school). Certification must be made in writing to both the COMMISSION Chair and the CHAIR of the next contest. If a contest has only one contestant, that student advances to the next higher level. If a winner is disqualified, withdraws, or cannot compete, then the runner-up may advance. If a substitute contestant would delay the contest, the contest shall proceed among available

contestants. Certification forms, supplied by the Commission, assure proper, uniform certification of contestants. Other written certifications are acceptable if equivalent information is provided.

OTHER CONTEST RULES

- **Publicity** – The names of contestants may be released to the media for publicity purposes. Interviews or photographs of contestants are prohibited before the contest. No publicity shall be given to the judges before the contest, who are introduced only after announcement of their decision.
- **Broadcasts** – Television and radio recording is permitted if the normal speaking voice of the contestant is not interfered with or amplified within the auditorium, the lighting and other conditions are the same for all contestants, and provided the Legion is not obligated financially. Satisfactory arrangements for recording must be made in advance with the Chair of the contest and with the person in charge of the building. All contestants must consent to being recorded. Recording shall not change the contest schedule, nor distract the contestants. Any other electronic/digital data gathering, receiving and/or transmitting equipment shall not be used by contestants or audience members during the contest.
- **Copies of Prepared Oration** – Contestants in the district, county, and state contests shall give the Chair two printed copies of their prepared oration, which clearly show the title. Contestants may possess and consult a copy of their oration until exiting the holding room to speak, when they must leave the copy in the holding room.
- **Dress** – Contestants shall not wear uniforms, or awards and medals from previous competition. Business attire is recommended for all contestants.
- **Notes and Rostrums** – Contestants may not use notes, speaker's stands, or amplification systems while speaking. Prompting is not allowed, nor props of any kind.
- **Applause** – The Chair at each contest shall try to prevent applause until all contestants speak, so that speakers are judged on merit.
- **Order of Speaking** – Contestants speak in the order determined by a drawing conducted with the Chair, who will refer to the speakers only as Number 1, Number 2, Etc.
- **Announcement of Winner** – The Chair does not introduce the contestants by name until after the judges have finished all scoring. The Chair shall announce only the first-place winner and alternate, or only those contestants receiving actual awards.
- **Timekeeper** – The Chair names an official timer to keep an accurate time record of each contestant. The timer shall sit on the main floor in full view of the contestants. The timer has a stopwatch and timecards.
During the Assigned Topic, the timer uses cards with the figures 3, 4 and 5. (Timecards with the figures 8, 9 and 10 are used for the Oration.) The Chair announces the time immediately after each speech, for the benefit of the judges. The Chair also announces penalty points then, if any.

- **Escorts** – Immediately before the prepared orations, all contestants enter a separate room with an Escort appointed by the Chair, so the other orations cannot be heard. Contestant #1 then returns to the platform for delivery of the oration, following which he or she retires to the separate room. Each student in turn speaks and returns to the separate room, then all contestants return together to the platform
- **Assigned Topic** – Immediately before the last prepared oration, the Chair places in separate envelopes the actual words of the four Assigned Topics and asks someone in the audience to draw one. The Article or Amendment drawn is the topic for all contestants but is not then announced. The Chair reads the topic to the judges and audience after the last oration.
- **Assigned Topic Preparation** – Approximately five minutes before delivery of the assigned topic, contestant #1 is first shown the topic and taken to a private room, with an escort who ensures that the contestant does not consult anything except the actual words of the topic. Each contestant is called in order of previous appearance. Each, also in turn, is shown the topic and escorted to the private room for five minutes, just like contestant #1.
- **Tabulators** – The Chair appoints at least three Tabulators to compile and check the judges' scorecards before handing them to the Chair. The Chair and the Tabulators shall not divulge the judges' scorecards to anyone at the site of the contest. Persons interested in the scoring, for professional purposes, may request, from the commission Chair, copies of the scores of a contestant (with judges' names omitted).

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