

RESOLUTION NO. 32, NATIONAL CONVENTION 2018

SUBJECT: PROPOSED CHANGE TO THE ORATORICAL CONTEST NATIONAL FINALS

ORIGIN: MISSISSIPPI

WHEREAS, Contestants participate from all Departments of The American Legion in the National Finals of "The American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program -- A Constitutional Speech Contest," the final series of contests held at Indianapolis, Indiana, in which these contests are divided into three rounds: a Quarter Final round consisting of nine contests with six contestants in each contest, a second round, known as the Semi Finals which is made up of the winners from the Quarter Final round, a total of three contests of three contestants each, and the National Final contest made up of the winners from the Semi Final contests, a total of three contestants; and

WHEREAS, By using the current format, 83% of the contestants are eliminated in the first round, depleting the program of some very talented contestants; and

WHEREAS, The Quarter Final pairing bracket is a random drawing, in which it has happened, who knows how many times, that two of the very best contestants were put in the same Quarter Final Contest, ensuring under the current format one of them to be eliminated; and

WHEREAS, The Oratorical Contest is an intellectual activity, not a sport or athletic activity in which there are objective, physical criteria for scoring, such as making a goal or crossing a finish line, but subjective in nature based primarily on the opinions of the judges; and

WHEREAS, National Speech and Debate Tournaments have multiple rounds of eliminations and multiple supplementary options, including consolation rounds engendering a spirit of inclusion rather than only elimination; and

WHEREAS, The contest structure of The American Legion Department of Mississippi with nine District contests, three Area contests, and one State Final contest mirrors the contest structure of the National Finals with nine Quarter Final contests, three Semi Final contests, and one National Final contest; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion Department of Mississippi has been advocating, practicing, and demonstrating double-promotion successfully in its Oratorical Program for many years; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the National Organization of The American Legion consider changing the aforementioned format of the National Oratorical Contest at an appropriate time to include the First and Second Place winners of the Quarter Final contests to be separated and advanced to different contests of the Semi Final round, which would consist of three contests of six contestants each, and to advance the First and Second Place winners of the Semi Final contests to the Final Contest which would consist of six contestants.

**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION FOR
RESOLUTION NO. 32 *Proposed Change To The Oratorical Contest National Finals***

Department of Mississippi

July 6, 2018

Brief in Support of Change in National Oratorical Contest Format

MS1

We shall have the opportunity in coming years to improve contest procedures at the National Oratorical Finals to facilitate promoting the very best of all of the contestants to the final round, not just the lucky ones. As it is, the Quarter Final pairing bracket is populated by a random drawing, placing some of the very best contestants in the nation together in the same Quarter Final Contest, resulting in the elimination of half of them. Promoting the top two winners from the Quarter Finals to the Semi Finals would remedy this, and following through with double-promotion from the Semi Finals to the Final Contest would also favor getting the best contestants to the Final round, mitigating further the effects of the original draw.

To favor objectivity and avoid repeating any possible judging dilemma between the top two winners of each Quarter Final round, they should go to different Semi Final rounds, and the movement of the judges between Quarter and Semi Final rounds should also be coordinated as well, to ensure fairness and impartiality. I have attached a flow chart to demonstrate how no contestants or judges would be in a Semi Final with anyone from their Quarter Final in this tournament. If this did not get the best of all contestants to the Final Contest, it would not be because we did not try.

The Oratorical Contest is an intellectual activity, not a sport or athletic activity in which there are objective, physical criteria for scoring, such as making a goal or crossing a finish line. Even the spectators can see that. No one would call a spelling bee a sport, even though it does have objectivity, i.e., whether the words are spelled correctly or not. But unlike the spelling bee, the Oratorical Contest has no objective criteria that everyone can see to declare one clear winner, such as the last one standing. When the audience can see the outcome of a contest for themselves, we usually call those in charge: referees, umpires, or moderators--not judges. The judges in the Oratorical Contest are given the authority to make mental decisions and render their opinions about the contestants and their speeches. Even though our judging forms and tabulation procedures are excellent tools for ranking the contestants objectively, the judging itself is still subjective, due to the intellectual nature of the subject matter.

Let us be mindful of the nature of the Oratorical Contest--it is unique and unlike anything else we do in The American Legion! The contestants are unique, too, just entering the toughest speech contest in the nation for high school students. Limiting the options limits the outcome. National Speech and Debate Tournaments have multiple rounds of eliminations, supplementary options, and consolation rounds, engendering a spirit of inclusion rather than elimination only. Those contestants who excel in our National Finals are extraordinary, to say the least. We say all the time that they are all winners. These are all Champions! If we show them the same respect as The National Speech and Debate Association, we will get more respect. It's been 20 years plus since the current format was set, and many feel it's time for a change.

I heard the following at the Boys State Directors' Conference: "The resources we have dictate the program we will get, but the program we want dictates the resources we must provide." I have left any discussion of money out of this resolution in hopes that the idea of double-promotion could stand alone for consideration. However, as I have offered in the past, the National Oratorical Finals should be deemed worthy of an increase in prizes at the appropriate time. I would propose a net increase of \$33,000 in annual scholarship awards, about a 24% increase over the current annual \$138,000, to include \$1,500 prizes for all 18 semi-finalists in the proposed contest format change, an increase of twelve of these, and three \$5,000 consolation prizes for the three additional contestants in the National Final Contest receiving Honorable Mention and possibly the right to

return to compete again. This would show that we care about this--our very own program--and it would enhance its advertising appeal with the top three National Finalists getting totals of \$21,000, \$19,000, and \$17,000--nice, round, thousand-dollar figures, and the Honorable Mentions would each be getting totals of \$8,000! (And no more quirk of the lack of Semi Final prizes for those advancing to the Final Contest: currently it looks like a penalty or we are being cheap, and even without changing the top three Final prize amounts, each will be \$1,500 more than they were before.)

I got a fortune cookie one time that read "when the purse is emptied, the heart is filled," and I still get that feeling today when I present an award or donation from The American Legion. I hope the "powers that be" in our Organization will be kind and charitable to our Oratorical Program.

Thank you for your consideration of upgrading and enhancing the National Oratorical Finals at an appropriate time, as a change of this magnitude would take appropriate amounts of forethought, planning and preparation, and the will and wherewithal to do so. (This has a companion resolution MS2.)

Joseph D. Kersh
Oratorical Chairman
Past Department Commander

Department of Mississippi

Addendum:

"The National Tournament of Champions"

Following this chart prevents contestants from competing against each other again in the Semi Finals and prevents judges from seeing any contestant twice in this tournament, but ultimately, care must be taken to prevent judges from judging returning contestants whom they have seen in prior years. National Final judges must all be new.

Quarter Final to Semi Final Contestant/Judge Flow Chart

<u>Quarter Finals 1, 2, & 3</u>	1st Place Winners to Semi Final 1 2nd Place Winners to Semi Final 2 Judges to Semi Final 3
<u>Quarter Finals 4, 5, & 6</u>	1st Place Winners to Semi Final 2 2nd Place Winners to Semi Final 3 Judges to Semi Final 1
<u>Quarter Finals 7, 8, & 9</u>	1st Place Winners to Semi Final 3 2nd Place Winners to Semi Final 1 Judges to Semi Final 2

RESOLUTION NO. 82, NATIONAL CONVENTION 2018

**SUBJECT: PROPOSED CHANGE TO THE ORATORICAL CONTEST NATIONAL
FINALS**

ORIGIN: NEW YORK

WHEREAS, The American Legion has been conducting a program known as “The American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program – A Constitutional Speech Contest” which has provided over \$3,000,000 in scholarships; and

WHEREAS, contestants participate from all the Departments of The American Legion in the final series of contests held in Indianapolis, Indiana; and

WHEREAS, these contests are divided into three rounds, a Quarter final round consisting of nine contests with six contestants in each contest. A second round, known as the Semi-Finals, which is made up of the winners from the Quarter Final round, a total of three contests of three contestants each, and the National Finals contest made up of the winners from the Semi-Final Rounds, a total of three contestants; and

WHEREAS, by using current format 83% of the contestants are eliminated in the first round depleting the program of some very talented contestants; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the National Organization of The American Legion consider changing the aforementioned format to include the First and Second Place winners of the Quarter final contests to advance to the Semi-Final contest which then would consist of three contests of six contestants each, and the First Place winners of these contestants would advance onto the National Finals contest; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That if this resolution is approved by the National Organization that one of two proposals attached to this resolution be used for the scholarship awards; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That it encourage the National Organization to institute this format change for the betterment of the Oratorical Program and the youth of our Country.

**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION FOR
RESOLUTION NO. 82 Proposed Change To The Oratorical Contest National Finals**

Department of New York

Quarter Final Round

9 Contests of 6 Contestants each, Total of 54 Contestants
1 from each contest moves on to Semi-Final round

54 contestants at \$1,500.00 each	Total	\$81,000.00
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Semi-Final Round

3 Contests of 3 Contestants each, Total of 9 Contestants
1 from each contest moves onto the National Finals Contest

6 contestants at \$1,500.00 each	Total	\$ 9,000.00
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National Finals Contest

3 Finalists with awards of \$18,000.00; \$16,000.00; and \$14, 000.00	<u>\$48,000.00</u>
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Total Amount of Awards	<u>\$138,000.00</u>
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PROPOSAL # 1
NO CHANGE IN MONEY

Quarter Final Round

9 Contests of 6 Contestants each, Total of 54 Contestants
2 from each contest moves on to Semi-Final round

54 contestants at \$1,250.00 each	Total	\$67,500.00
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Semi-Final Round

3 Contests of 6 Contestants each, Total of 18 Contestants
1 from each contest moves onto the National Finals Contest
15 contestants at \$1,500.00 each

Total	\$22,500.00
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National Finals Contest

3 Finalists with awards of \$18,000.00; \$16,000.00; and \$14, 000.00	\$48,000.00
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Total Amount of Awards	\$138,000.00
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PROPOSAL # 2
CHANGE IN MONEY

Quarter Final Round

*9 Contests of 6 Contestants each, Total of 54 Contestants
2 from each contest moves on to Semi-Final round*

<i>54 contestants at \$1,250.00 each</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>\$81,000.00</i>
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Semi-Final Round

*3 Contests of 6 Contestants each, Total of 18 Contestants
1 from each contest moves onto the National Finals Contest*

<i>15 contestants at \$1,500.00 each</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>\$22,500.00</i>
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National Finals Contest

<i>3 Finalists with awards of \$18,000.00; \$16,000.00; and \$14, 000.00</i>	<i>\$48,000.00</i>
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<i>Total Amount of Awards</i>	<i>\$151,500.00</i>
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<i>Total amount needed for Proposal # 2</i>	<i>\$151,500.00</i>
<i>Original Scholarship Awards</i>	<i>\$138,000.00</i>
<i>Total additional money needed</i>	<i>\$ 13,500.00</i>

RESOLUTION NO. 81, NATIONAL CONVENTION 2018

SUBJECT: CHANGE DATE OF ORATORICAL NATIONAL FINALS TO MAY

ORIGIN: NEW YORK

WHEREAS, The American Legion has been conducting a program known as "The American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program – A Constitutional Speech Contest" which has provided over \$3,000,000 in scholarships; and

WHEREAS, contestants participate from all the Departments of The American Legion in the final series of contests held in Indianapolis, Indiana, in the month of April each year; and

WHEREAS, this forces Departments to hold their Department Contests in the months of January, February, and March which is a very critical time for inclement weather; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the National Organization move the National Oratorical Contest to the month of May each year which would give Departments in the snow belt the month of April to hold their Department Contests which is a month more stable in the winter; and, be it further

RESOLVED, The National Contest scheduling during the month of May each year would have continuity for all Departments as they will setup their calendars for the year knowing that each year this month is set aside for the National Oratorical Finals; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the National Organization to institute this change for the betterment of the Oratorical Program and the youth of our Country.

RESOLUTION NO. 83, NATIONAL CONVENTION 2018

**SUBJECT: INCREASE AMOUNTS OF SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED WINNERS OF
NATIONAL ORATORICAL CONTEST**

ORIGIN: NEW YORK

WHEREAS, The American Legion has been conducting a program known as “The American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program – A Constitutional Speech Contest” which has provided over \$3,000,000 in scholarships; and

WHEREAS, contestants participate from all the Departments of The American Legion in the final series of contests held in Indianapolis, Indian; and

WHEREAS, these contests are divided into three rounds, a Quarter final round consisting of nine contests with six contestants in each contest. A second round, known as the Semi-Finals, which is made up of the winners from the Quarter Final round, a total of three contests of of three contestants each, and the National Final contest made up of the winners from the Semi-Final Rounds, a total of three contestants; and

WHEREAS, over the last twenty years that the National Finals has been held in Indianapolis, Indiana the scholarship awards are as follows; first round all contestants receive \$1,500.00 scholarship as long as they perform both the Prepared and Assigned discourses. Contestants that advance to the Semi-Final but do not advance to the National Finals will receive an additional \$1,500.00 scholarship. The National Finalists have a potential of being awarded s scholarship in the amounts of \$18,000.00, \$16,000.00, or \$14,000.00; and

WHEREAS these amounts have not been changed in the twenty years of the existence of the contest while being held in Indianapolis, Indiana; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the National Organization increase the aforementioned scholarship awards to \$2,500 for the First Round contestants; \$3,000 to the Semi-Final contestants that do not advance to the National Finals; and the National Finals scholarship awards to \$20,000; \$18,000; and \$16,000.