



**THE AMERICAN LEGION HIGH SCHOOL ORATORICAL
SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM**



“A Constitutional Speech Contest”

Official Department of Tennessee 2026 Rules

Todd McKinley – Department Commander
Terry Ward – Department Oratorical Chairman,
615-519-6523, tswardpost281am@gmail.com

**DEADLINE FOR CONTESTANTS APPLICATIONS
TO THE DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS:
February 9, 2026.**

WE WILL NOT EXTEND THE APPLICATION DATE

**STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS
NATIONAL CONTEST**

Winner \$25,000
First Runner-up \$22,500
Second Runner-up \$20,000

STATE CONTEST

Winner \$3,000
First Runner-up \$2,000
Second Runner-up \$1,000

GENERAL INFORMATION

The purpose of The American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program “A Constitutional Speech Contest” is to develop a deeper knowledge and appreciation of the Constitution of the United States among high school students. Other objectives of the contest include the development of leadership qualities, the ability to think and speak clearly and intelligently, and the preparation for acceptance of the duties and responsibilities, rights, and privileges of American citizenship.

Scholarships are awarded by the American Legion of Tennessee and in cooperation with the National American Legion organization. Winners may use their scholarship to attend any accredited college or university, junior colleges or vocational trade school within the United States following graduation from high school, unless by service in the Armed Forces, and granted an extension of eligibility.

CONTEST ELIGIBILITY

Eligible participants in the contest must be citizens of or lawful permanent residents of the United States. All contestants must be bona fide students herein described as any student under the age of 20 years on the date of the national contest who is presently enrolled in a high school or junior high school (public, parochial, military, private or state accredited home school) in which the curriculum of said high school is considered to be of high school level, commencing with grade nine and terminating with grade 12. High school students that graduate early during the school year are eligible to compete if they are not enrolled in a college, university, trade school or other institution of higher learning at the time of the department finals contest. Contestants must be either legally domiciled within or attend an educational institution within Tennessee. Contestants can enter competition in only one department (state). The three finalists of the national contest will be ineligible for further participation at any level.

A school official must certify the Oratorical Contestant and send the enclosed certification form to the Oratorical Contest Chairman at the following address: The American Legion, Department of Tennessee, 318 Donelson Pike, Nashville, Tennessee 37214 by **February 9, 2026**.

OVERVIEW

Students are expected to present two timed oral speeches, titled the Prepared and the Assigned, to an audience of Legion members, parents, and oratorical speech judges.

PREPARED ORATION

The prepared oration must be on some aspect of the Constitution of the United States with emphasis on the duties and obligations of a citizen to our government. The same subject and oration

used in the department contest must be used in the national contest.

The prepared oration must be the original effort of each contestant and must not take up less than eight (8) minutes or more than ten (10) minutes for delivery.

Contestants may have in their possession a copy of their prepared oration in the first holding room. The copy may be in electronic or paper form. They may consult the copy of their prepared oration until they exit the holding room in order to begin the contest, at which time the copy of the prepared oration will be surrendered to the contest official who is monitoring the first holding room.

ASSIGNED TOPIC

The assigned topic oration must not take less than three (3) minutes or more than five (5) minutes for delivery. The purpose of the assigned topic discourse is to test the speaker's knowledge of the subject, the extent of his or her research, and the ability to discuss the topic as related to the basic principles of government under the Constitution. (See page 4)

The assigned topic shall be drawn by the contest official in full view of the audience immediately before the last speaker begins delivery of his/her prepared oration and will be made known to the audience and each contestant approximately five minutes prior to the time of delivery. The topic will be on some phase of the Constitution of the United States, as listed under assigned topics for the current year's contest in this brochure. No foreign languages or songs.

All contestants at each contest level are required to speak in the English language on the same assigned topic.

It is acceptable to utilize or incorporate short phrases of a foreign language into the prepared oration and/or assigned topic to develop the argument, establish a point, etc. The vast majority of the prepared oration and/or assigned topic must be delivered in the English language.

Singing of a song in any language is not permitted and will result in the immediate disqualification of the contestant. The contestant may, however, quote a verse(s) of a song provided proper attribution is made. In the prepared oration and the assigned topic discourse, quotations must be indicated as such. Where quotations are more

than 10 words in length, the author's name must be given in the manuscript and cited orally.

SCHOLARSHIPS

At the National level, the three levels of competition are titled Quarterfinals, Semifinals and Finals. Department (state) winners who are certified and participate in the quarterfinal round of the national contest will receive a \$2,000 scholarship. Each quarterfinal winner advancing to the semifinal round receives an additional \$2,000 scholarship. The three finalists in the final round of the national contest receive scholarships as follows: 1st place: \$25,000; 2nd place: \$22,500; 3rd place: \$20,000. Payments of scholarships are made directly to the registrar's office at the institution where the student is accepted.

The national organization of The American Legion awards scholarships to the three finalists, department winners, and first round winners who are eliminated during the second round of competition. A contestant must give both his or her prepared oration and the assigned topic presentation to receive a scholarship. In addition to the scholarships awarded by the national organization, there are several hundred scholarships awarded at the discretion of intermediate organizations, to participants at post, district or county, and department levels of competition as described in this bulletin. (See page 4)

CONTEST REGULATIONS

A random drawing shall be held by the official in charge of the contest to determine the order in which the contestants will appear. The contest chairman shall announce the title of the contestant's prepared oration immediately after introducing him/her as contestant No. 1, contestant No. 2, etc. The chairman will request the audience to refrain from applause until the judges have made their decision.

A raised platform is not compulsory; however, it is strongly recommended. **The use of notes, amplification, lectern, or speaker's stand by contestants, or prompting in any manner, is not permitted. Props are not permitted.**

WHAT TO WEAR

Uniforms are not permitted. Appropriate business attire is required by all contestants. Contestants are not permitted to wear awards and medals from previous competitions.

AMERICAN LEGION DEPARTMENT OF TENNESSEE CONTESTS

At the Department (state) contestants shall conform to National contest procedures, rules, and regulations.

If the American Legion Department of Tennessee were to certify a winner to the National Americanism Division of The American Legion and the Department did not conduct its final competition in conformity with the rules and regulations as set forth herein, in the judgment of the director of the Americanism Division or the director's representative, the winner will be disqualified from competition in the national contest.

The Department of Tennessee may certify one contestant into the national contest. If for any reason the state winner is unable to compete in the national contest, the department first runner-up may be substituted following approval by The American Legion's National Americanism Commission. A department first runner-up accepted into national competition will be entitled to all national awards, entitlements, and compensation that the department winner would have received had he/she participated at that level.

POST/SCHOOL CONTEST

Posts with more than one applicant should conduct local qualification contests before the District competition is held, between February 10th, 2026 through February 20th, 2026. **The 2026 Department Oratorical Application for each student is due at Department Headquarters by February 9th, 2026.** An online link to the Department's Oratorical application for 2026 can be found at:

[2026 Preliminary Contestant Application and Certification.pdf](#)

DISTRICT

District Chairmen will conduct a District Oratorical Contest within their respective Districts during the period of **February 21st through March 21st,**

2026. Upon completion the District Chairmen will certify the contest winner and subsequent runners-up to Department Headquarters. District Chairmen may elect to conduct a District Semi-Final Contest within a District if there are many contestants. The Semi-final Contests as well as the final District Contests must be held between the dates provided. In the event of severe weather, the District Chairmen may reschedule the contest as long as the contest remains within the specified period. The District winner competes in the Division contest. If the winner cannot compete, the first runner-up replaces the winner. All contestants participating in a District contest, and not advancing to the Division contest, receive a \$25 award check.

DIVISION

A Division contest will be conducted in the three grand divisions of the state **March 28th through April 4th, 2026.** The Division Chairman will certify the winner to Department Headquarters upon contest completion. Division winners compete in the State Contest. (Locations to be announced) Division winners not advancing to the State final but participating in the Division contest receive a \$100 award check. All checks are mailed after the state contest to the home of the contestant.

DEPARTMENT (STATE)

The Department Contest is scheduled for **April 11th, 2026** starting at 10:00 am, the American Legion Headquarters for the state at 318 Donelson Pike, Nashville, TN. The winner of the State contest competes for the state at the National Contest, scheduled for **May 15th – 17th, 2026 at Hillsdale College, in Hillsdale Michigan.**

The three finalists in the State contest receive scholarships to attend any post-secondary educational institution in the United States for advanced education at accredited colleges, universities, or vocational schools.

Scholarship awardees will have one year after high school graduation to apply for the scholarship funds. If application is not made in writing to the American Legion Department of Tennessee, 318 Donelson Pike, Nashville, TN 37214 within one year, the scholarship funds revert to the oratorical account. Any scholarship awardee entering active

military service within the one-year grace period will retain their scholarship, providing the awardee notifies The American Legion Department of Tennessee, in writing, of their entry into service. Upon entry into the military service, the awardee needs to advise The American Legion Department of Tennessee of their address annually. If the awardee does not apply within five years of the date of entering active military service, the scholarship funds will revert to the oratorical account.

HIGH SCHOOL RESPONSIBILITY

Please assure your contestants are aware of the February 9, 2026 Contest Certification deadline, along with the contest dates so they have sufficient time to prepare their orations. A School Officer must sign the enclosed Official Certification form confirming contestants' enrollment in school. Students will compete within their District.

TRAVEL EXPENSES

The national organization of The American Legion will pay the travel and lodging expenses of each department winner and one chaperone to the national contest. **All contestants must be accompanied by a chaperone over 21 years of age, preferably a parent of the contestant.**

The national organization of The American Legion shall not assume liability for personal injury, property damage or loss sustained by any contestant or chaperone enroute to or from the contest; however, The American Legion does carry a nominal group accident insurance policy on contestants certified into the national competition. Contestants will travel by an air carrier selected by the national organization of The American Legion or personal automobile if previously approved by the national organization of The American Legion.

TIMEKEEPERS

Official timekeepers maintain an accurate time record of each contestant's efforts. Timekeepers are in full view of the contestants. The timekeepers begin timing each contestant at the start of the prepared oration. The timekeepers are to be equipped with a stopwatch and time placards of specific time remaining for the presentation.

JUDGES

The judges are an integral part of the Oratorical Contest. Their qualifications are considered carefully as the decision of the judges is final and must be reached without bias. Impartial judging in all contests is the key to fairness and success of the program which results in the selection of a national champion.

All department finals and the national contest must use five judges. No publicity shall be given to the names of the judges in advance of the contest. During the contest, the judges will be seated in various locations in the auditorium and each judge shall render his or her final decision without consultation with other judges or any other person. Judges will be advised that a lack of emphasis in the prepared oration and the assigned topic discourse on the duties and obligations of a citizen to our government must result in their downgrading of the contestant. Judges are permitted to downgrade a contestant up to a maximum of 10 points for failure to speak about the Constitution. The contest chairman will announce any violation of time for each contestant. A penalty of one point for each minute, or fraction thereof, shall be assessed against the contestant's total score.

The judges, timekeepers, tabulators, and the contest chairman, following the last assigned topic discourse, may proceed to a private room for final review and tabulation. The decision of the judges is final.

TABULATORS

The contest chairmen will appoint no less than three tabulators for the department finals contest. It will be their responsibility to review the judges' scorecards to be certain they are fully tabulated and signed before they are submitted for final tabulation.

Judges' scorecards for department finals and the national contest will not be divulged to anyone at the site of the contest.

The judges' scorecards become the property of The American Legion National Headquarters.

TV AND RADIO

Live television and radio broadcasts are permitted in all contests as well as taping or other types of media for later showing, provided: 1) the lighting and other site conditions are the same for all contestants; 2) the taping or broadcasts shall in no way distract the contestants or interfere with the announced scheduled time of the contest; 3) the normal speaking voice of the contestant is not interfered with or amplified within the auditorium; and 4) The American Legion is in no way financially obligated without its prior approval.

GENERAL RULES

Contestants are required to remain in a separate room, where the discourse of the other speakers cannot be heard, until it is their turn to speak (contestants will be under the supervision of an individual appointed by the contest chairman). As the contestants conclude their prepared orations, they must return to a separate holding room. As each speaker concludes his or her assigned topic discourse, they will not be allowed to associate with contestants who have not fulfilled the assigned topic requirement.

Approximately five minutes prior to the time of the delivery of the assigned topic discourse, contestant No. 1 will be informed of the topic drawn for the assigned topic and shall be permitted to retire to privacy under the direction of an individual appointed by the contest chairman, whose duty it shall be to see that no contestant is permitted to consult any text matter or notes having any connection with the subject matter upon which he/she is to speak, other than the actual words of the topic provided on the card drawn.

Each succeeding contestant will be called upon in the order in which she/he previously appeared. She/he shall also, in turn, be informed of the topic of the assigned topic discourse and shall then be escorted to privacy in the manner as provided for all contestants.

ASSIGNED TOPICS FOR 2026

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.

NATIONAL FINALS CONTEST

The national finals contest will be held at **Hillsdale College, Hillsdale, Michigan, May 15-17, 2026** Quarterfinal and semifinal rounds are scheduled for Saturday, May 16. The championship is scheduled for Sunday, May 17. Please note the following mandatory requirements:

- All contestants and chaperones must arrive on Friday, May 15, 2026. Contestants are lodged at a hotel to be determined and arranged through the national office.
- A mandatory pre-contest orientation session for all contestants is scheduled for the evening of Friday, May 15, 2026.
- A banquet honoring all contestants is scheduled for the afternoon of Sunday, May 17 2026. Contestants and chaperones are asked to depart for home after the banquet.

The 2026 Oratorical application can be found on the Department's website at: [2026 Preliminary Contestant Application and Certification.pdf](#)