

Eighty-Nineth Annual
DEPARTMENT OF NEW YORK
The American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program –
“A Constitutional Speech Contest”
• **OFFICIAL RULES** •
• **2025 - 2026** •

Sponsored By
THE AMERICAN LEGION
Department of New York
1304 Park Boulevard
Troy, NY 12180
518-463-2215



Under the direction of
ORATORICAL CONTEST COMMITTEE

JOHN R. MIGA
Department Commander

JAMES W. CASEY
Department Adjutant

This brochure is published and distributed by the Oratorical Contest Committee whose names appear by authority of the Department Executive Committee.

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NAME OF LOCAL CHAIRMAN

GENERAL INFORMATION

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

SPONSORSHIP

An American Legion Post will sponsor their contestants into the County level contests. This sponsorship will continue throughout the remaining contests as the contestant advances from County, to District, to Zone, to Department, ending with the National Contest.

ORGANIZATION

The contest will be under the direction of The American Legion Oratorical Contest Committee which consists of the Department of New York Commander and Adjutant, Oratorical Chair and Vice Chair. Final authority on all issues raised shall remain with the committee. Any inquiry concerning the contest should be addressed to a member of the Oratorical Contest Committee.

FINANCES

The Oratorical Contest is financed entirely by The American Legion Department of New York and the participating American Legion Posts. In sponsoring the contest, The American Legion offers nothing for sale. No admission will be charged to any contest.

AWARDS

The American Legion Department of New York offers contestants competing in the Department Finals scholarships only, in the following amounts: 1st place - \$6,000, 2nd - \$4,000, 3rd - \$2,500, 4th - \$2,000, and 5th - \$2,000. Contestants must give both their Prepared Oration and Assigned Topic Discourse to receive the scholarship moneys to which they are entitled. The scholarships awarded by The American Legion, Department of New York to the five Department Finalists maybe used to attend any high school (tuition only), college or university in the United States. Scholarship money for college or university can be used for tuition, books, classroom supplies, room and board, and other direct fees levied by the educational institution coincident to college enrollment and attendance. Scholarships are good for seven years starting from the first payment requested and will be paid directly to the recipient’s high school, college, or university. A request form must be submitted to the Department of New York Headquarters regarding what amount you would like to have sent to the school.

The Zone level awards are as follows: 1st place \$1000.00; 2nd - \$800.00, 3rd - \$500, and 4th - \$500. If for any reason the Zone winner is unable to compete in the Department of New York Contest; the next Zone contestant that is available to compete will take his or her place. The Zone Winner will not relinquish their title as the Zone Champion or their award.

All awards mentioned above are awarded by the Department of New York and can only be won by contestants competing in the New York Contest. Contestants in the District, Zone and Department contests must give both their Prepared Oration and Assigned Topic Discourse to receive the award to which they are entitled. Travel and hotel expenses are paid by the Department of New York for contestants and chaperone in the Department of New York finals.

ELIGIBILITY

Eligible participants in The American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program – “A Constitutional Speech Contest” shall be **citizens of or lawful permanent residents of the United States**.

All contestants must be bonafide students herein described as any student under the age of twenty (20) years on the date of the National Finals Contest and who is presently enrolled in high school or junior high school (public, military, private, or parochial, or who are home schooled) in which the curriculum is considered to be of high school grade level commencing with grade nine (9) and terminating with grade twelve (12). Students must be enrolled in high school or junior high school during the time of participation at any level of the contest. 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 either be legally domiciled within or attend an educational institution within the department (state) where they enter competition. Contestants can enter competitions in only one department (state).

TIME AND PLACE OF ELIMINATION CONTEST

County, District, and Zone Contests will be held in a timely manner to coincide with Department and National certification dates. The Department Contest will take place March 7, 2026, with a cancellation date of March 14, 2026.

ELIMINATION CONTESTS

The contest shall be conducted based on successive elimination contests: first by **Schools (if applicable)**, second by **Semi-County** and/or **County**, third by **Semi-Districts and/or Districts**, and fourth by **Zones**. The Zone contestants will compete for State honors and prizes at a contest to be held during the month of March.

The high school authorities are authorized, but not obligated, to conduct a contest to select their entries. A school may enter up to three (3) students into the County Contest provided the school certifies each student's entry on the official entry form (FORM # 1). A student who attends school in a county that does not participate in this program, but resides in a county that does participate, shall petition the Department Chairman for entry in the contest where he/she resides, provided, however, the school the student attends certify his/her entry. If neither county participates (that is, where the student attends school or where he/she resides), the school certifying the student shall petition the Department Chairman for entry into another County Contest and/or entry into the District Contest. There are no limitations on home schoolers, but the official entry form (FORM # 1) must be submitted. Home schoolers must compete in the county they reside in. If the county they live in does not participate in this program they may petition the Department Chairman to compete in the next closest county that does. Students will be allowed to read their orations at the HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL ONLY. At all contests above the high school level, including semi-county contests, contestants will be required to present their speeches from memory.

Each District will structure their contest to conform to the number of contestants that have applied to compete in the County contests, and how many will advance into the District contest or contests. **No County or District will have more than six contestants in any preliminary or final contests unless approved by the Department Chairman.** The District Chairman will report the first and second place winners to the Zone Chairman.

A contestant, who may have no competition in any contest, shall be certified as the winner of that contest, and said contestant shall be eligible for the next higher competition.

NATIONAL CONTEST

The National Contest is tentatively from May 15 to 17, 2026, at Hillsdale College, Hillsdale, Michigan. The New York State winner is eligible to participate in the National Quarter Finals Contest. The winner of this contest is eligible to compete in the National Semi-finals Contest. The winner of this contest then participates as one of the Three National Finalists where 1st place is awarded a college scholarship of \$25,000, 2nd - \$22,500, and 3rd - \$20,000. **The three National Finalists are ineligible for further participation at any level.**

CONTEST REGULATIONS

The Department of New York rules as set down in this brochure follow the National Rules very closely. This is done to prepare the contestant for the Department of New York finals and succeeding National Contests.

Uniforms are not permitted. Appropriate business attire is required of all contestants. Contestants are not permitted to wear clothing with school names or awards and medals from previous competitions.

The use of notes, amplification, lecterns, or speakers' stand by contestants, or prompting in any manner is **NOT** permitted **EXCEPT** at the high school level. The use of any type of audio/video recording, electronic/digital data gathering, receiving, and/or transmitting equipment in any form by the contestants or members of the audience is prohibited.

A drawing shall be held by an official of the contest to determine the order in which all contestants will appear. This order will remain the same for both the prepared oration and the assigned topic discourse.

The time allotted for each contestant to deliver their prepared oration shall not be **less than eight (8) or more than ten (10) minutes** and for the assigned topic oration, **not less than three (3) or more than five (5) minutes.**

An official timer shall be named by the Contest chairman whose duty shall be to keep an accurate time record of each contestant and the timekeeper shall be located on the main floor in full view of the contestants. **The timekeeper shall begin timing each contestant at the start of the prepared oration.** The timer will be equipped with timecards for the prepared oration carrying the numbers 8, 9, and 10. When 8 minutes have elapsed, the time warning card with the figure 8 thereon shall be shown to the speaker, following cards 8, 9 and 10 as the speaker progresses. The same procedure shall be used with cards bearing the numbers 3, 4, and 5 during the assigned topic discourse. The Contest Chairman shall announce the time used by each contestant for the prepared oration and the assigned topic discourse once the contestant has left the room. The Contest Chairman will then announce any violation of time for each contestant for the benefit of the judges. **A Penalty of ONE (1) POINT will be deducted from the final score for each minute, or fraction thereof, over or under allotted time for the prepared oration and the assigned topic discourse.**

In the prepared oration, as well as in the assigned topic discourse, quotations must be indicated as such. Where quotations are more than **ten (10)** words in length, the author's name must be given in the manuscript and cited orally. **The singing of a song(s) 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.**

ALL CONTESTANTS AT EACH CONTEST LEVEL ARE REQUIRED TO SPEAK IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE FOR BOTH THE PREPARED ORATION AND THE ASSIGNED TOPIC ORATION. 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. It is to be understood that much of the prepared oration and/or assigned topic must still be delivered in the English language.

THE 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 of our government. The same subject and oration used in the county, district, and zone contests must be used in the department and national contest.

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

Contestants may have in their possession a copy of their prepared oration in the first holding room. The copy may be electronic or paper form. They may consult their copy of their prepared oration, until they exit the holding room 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. All will be returned to the contestant at the end of the contest.

ASSIGNED TOPIC

The Assigned Topic Discourse will be part of all contests from the County through the National Contest.

The assigned topic discourse must not take less than three minutes or more than five minutes to deliver. The purpose of the assigned topic discourse is to evaluate 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.

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 (5) minutes prior to the time of delivery. The topic will be on some phase of the Constitution of the United States selected from Articles and Sections as listed under assigned topics for the current year's contest in this brochure.

During the preparation period, the contestant must not consult any books or person and may refer only to the actual words of the topic provided on the card drawn.

The Assigned Topic Discourse must not take less than three minutes or more than five minutes for delivery and must be memorized.

JUDGING STANDARDS

The judges are a very 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 Department Champion and, ultimately, a National Champion. No contest should be judged by an even number of judges.

JUDGING SYSTEM

No publicity should be given to the names of the judges prior to the Contest. During the Contest, the judges shall be seated in different locations in the auditorium and each judge shall render his/her decision without consultation with other judges or any other people.

Judges will be advised that lack of emphasis in the prepared oration and assigned topic discourse on the duties and obligation of a citizen must result in their downgrading of the contestant involved. Judges are permitted to downgrade a contestant up to a maximum of **ten (10) points** for failure to speak on the Constitution.

The Contest Chairman will announce any violation to time for each contestant. **A penalty of one point for each minute or fraction thereof shall be assessed against the contestant's total score. A copy of the judge's scorecard is on the last page of this brochure.**

The judges, tabulators, and the Contest Chairman, following the last Assigned Topic Discourse, will proceed to a private room for final review and tabulation.

County, District, Zone, and Department Chairmen are required to review all judges' scorecards from their respective contests within twenty-four (24) hours to ensure that the appropriate results were certified based on official rules, regulations, scoring, and tie-breaking procedures. If a mistake is found within twenty-four (24) hours, the respective chairman will contact the Department of New York Oratorical Chairman at ((H) 516-308-7019 or (C) 516-361-4687) for further instructions. Protests are subject to the same twenty-four (24) hour rule. Exactly twenty-four (24) hours after a contest result is announced, those results become **OFFICIAL** and **CANNOT** be changed.

TABULATORS

The Contest Chairman 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. The Record of Choice will be used to determine the winner. If there is a tie the use of the two-way tie breaking procedure will be used.

Judges' scorecards for Department Finals **will not be divulged** to anyone at the site of the contest. The judges' scorecards become the property of The American Legion Department of New York.

DISQUALIFICATION

If, due to a violation of the contest regulations, a contestant is disqualified or voluntarily withdraws from the contest after having progressed through one or more of its stages, his/her place is to be taken by the contestant adjudged next best to him/her in the competition in which he/she participated prior to disqualification or withdrawal.

Should a contestant become suddenly unable to compete or withdraws from competition, then his/her place is to be taken by the contestant adjudged next best to him/her in the last competition in which he/she participated prior to his/her disability or withdrawal, provided said contestant is available and can proceed with the competition without unduly delaying the contest. If said contestant cannot be made available in time to receive briefing and permit starting the contest at the posted time, then the contest shall proceed with the available contestants.

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.

PAST WINNERS

New York State High School Oratorical Scholarship Program – “A Constitutional Speech Contest”

<u>Year</u>	<u>Winner</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Winner</u>	<u>Hometown</u>
1939 **	Thomas Haggerty	Rosedale	1998-1999	Lisa Schwartz	East Hills
1951 *	Ronald Hengen	Queens	2000	Heather Derrigo	Watertown
1953 **	Joel Bernstein	Buffalo	2001	Kara French	Philmont
1954*	George J. Clements	Penn Yan	2002-2003	Natasha S. Alford	Syracuse
1955*	David Leahy	Brooklyn	2004	Jessica Kye Fredette	Syracuse
1957*	William Toth	Bronx	2005	Evan Patrick Geary	Webster
1961**	Robert J. O’Connell	Bronx	2006	Rory A. Eaton	Wantagh
1968**	John Cangilos	Albany	2007	Serena R. White	Franklin
1973*	Jeanne Zurmuhlen	Staten Island	2008	Alanna Parisi	Staten Island
1978*	David Silva	Staten Island	2009	Kashyap Rajagopal	New York
1980*	Paul C. Kunhel	Garden City	2010	Madison Malone Kircher	Warren
1981-1982	Robert Barber	Watertown	2011	Steven Velardo, Jr.	Dutchess
1983	Susan Noto	Williamson	2012	Caitlin Kennedy	Dix Hills
1984	Joseph Clark	Lackawanna	2013	Jacob Caldwell	Chautauqua
1985	Regina Biscoglio	Bronxville	2014	Andrew Russo Hartnett	Cobleskill
1986	Kedra Small	Buffalo	2015	Jessica Heather Norris	Almond
1987	Julie Kay Kuhns	Binghamton	2016	Melissa A. Woodford	New City
1988	Marie I. Bodack	Yonkers	2017	Jared Rios	Kings
1989	John C. Stehlin	Buffalo	2018	Melissa Barnosky	Orleans
1990	James Hogan	Sodus	2019	Melissa Barnosky	Orleans
1991	Katheryne Leccima	Spring Valley	2020	Victor Gelfuso	Otsego
1992	Julie Rose Kidd	Frewsburg	2021	Ian Chung	Broome
1993	Amy Christine DiStasio	Staten Island	2022	Ian Chung	Broome
1994	Kelly Cleary	Brooklyn	2023*	Ian Chung	Broome
1995**	Aron Egner**	Ballston Lake	2024	Na Gooden	Westchester
1996*	Lina Shaf*	Chestnut Ridge	2025	Katherine Mazaroski	Nassau
1997	Christopher Geisel	Clifton Park			

*Denotes National Finalist **Denotes National Winner



**2025 Department of New York Oratorical
Champion Katherine Mazaroski and National
Vice Commander Charles Robbins and
Department Commander Keith Koster**

Katherine Mazaroski

Katherine Mazaroski is the 2025 Department of New York Oratorical Champion. She was a Junior at Sacred Heart Academy. She represented Nassau County, 10th District, Zone 2 and was sponsored by the Carle Place Post 1718. She has always been passionate about American History and politics. She has been performing since she was young, graduating from theater to mock trial and debate events. She leads the Junior American Legion Auxiliary and hopes to attend a service academy to serve in the military after high school