

2026-2027 Theme "What a Veteran Taught Me About America"

Student Entry Deadline: Oct. 31, 2026
Patriotic Audio Essay Competition Grand Prize: \$35,000 Award

What is the Voice of Democracy Program?

Since 1947, the Voice of Democracy has been the Veterans of Foreign Wars' (VFW's) premier scholarship program. Each year, nearly 26,000 high school students compete for more than \$2 million in scholarships and incentives. Prizes and scholarships can be awarded at the Post, District, state and national level. National winners will be notified of their scholarship & placement. Students compete by writing and recording an audio essay on an annual patriotic theme. This year's theme is,

"What a Veteran Taught Me About America"

The Rules

The Voice of Democracy is open to students in grades 9-12 by the Oct. 31 deadline who are enrolled in a public, private or parochial high school or home study program in the United States, its territories and possessions: or dependents of U.S. military or civilian personnel in overseas schools. Although U.S. citizenship is not required, students must be lawful U.S. permanent residents or have applied for permanent residence (the application for which has not been denied) and intend to become a U.S. citizen at the earliest opportunity allowed by law. Foreign exchange students, students age 20 or over, GED or Adult Education Students are ineligible.

You must be the sole author of your essay. Inappropriate use of ChatGPT or other AI tools is not allowed. The recording must be in your own voice and in English. Hearing/speech impaired students should email the Voice of Democracy National Office at youthscholarships@vfw.org for special instructions. No music, singing, poetry or sound effects are allowed. To ensure fairness and impartiality in judging, essays **must be anonymous**. **Please do not include your name, address, school name, or any other personal identifiers in the body of your essay.** Additionally, avoid references to your race, sex, religion, national origin, or other specific personal characteristics that could reveal your identity. General references to nationality or patriotic identity (such as being an American or referencing American values) are permitted if they are relevant to the essay theme. However, personal identifiers tied to your individual background or experience should be avoided.

You may enter only one competition at one Post (if otherwise eligible) per year. At any time during the contest, additional participant personal information could be requested by the VFW, including but not limited to a photograph, SSN, or biographical information.

Advancement

Decisions of Judges at all levels are final. One winner for every 15 entries from each Post advances to District and one District winner advances to the state (Department) competition. Contact the post where you entered at to check on your advancement

What Is the Deadline for My Entry?

All entries competing at the Post level must be in the hands of that VFW Post by midnight, Oct. 31, 2026. It is the responsibility of the student to meet this deadline by submitting their entry to the proper location - ensuring it is a participating Post.

How do I enter?

Record your original 3-5 minute (+ or - 5 second max.) audio in MP3 format (no videos) on a flash drive, or other electronic device. You will submit the recording, a typed essay and this completed entry form. Provide these items to your school/group competition or VFW Post for judging.

All entries begin at the VFW Post level. The only exception is where schools/classes/youth groups have large numbers of students and wish to conduct their own competition, Submitting one winner for each 15 students to the VFW Post. Individual students may submit their entry directly to a Post. Your local post will give instructions on how to turn in your entry to them. Audio may be submitted physically on a Flash Drive, emailed to the Post (with permission) or submitted through our online platform using Scholars App. **To submit through Scholars App you must first receive a QR code or link from your local post.** Entries sent to VFW National Headquarters directly will not be considered.

If you need help finding a participating VFW Post, follow these instructions: Visit this website [vfw.org/FindaPost](https://www.vfw.org/FindaPost) to "Find A VFW Post." If you do not have success in finding a Post, or if you have trouble getting in touch with them, you can contact your VFW Department (state) office to see if they can offer any information or assistance. You can visit this link <https://www.vfw.org/ContactUs/> and look for "Find a State Contact" to get your VFW state office's phone number and email. If you still need assistance, please email us at [VFW National Headquarters at youthscholarships@vfw.org](mailto:youthscholarships@vfw.org).

What Are the Judging Criteria?

Originality is worth 35 points:

Treatment of the theme should show imagination and human interest.

Delivery is worth 35 points:

Speak in a clear and credible manner.

Content is worth 30 points:

Clearly express your ideas in an organized manner. Fully develop your theme and use transitions to move smoothly from one idea to another.

2026-2027 Official Entry Form
Voice of Democracy Competition
Must Be Completed by All Contestants

Name: First, M.I., Last _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

() _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Date of Birth (mm/dd/yy) _____ Grade in School _____ Age _____ Jacket Size _____

School Name, City, State _____

Teacher's Name and Email (if applicable) _____

To Be Completed by Student's Parent/Guardian
(Required even if student is 18 or over)

Parent/Guardian Name (Printed) _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date _____

() _____

Parent/Guardian Daytime Phone _____

Parent/Guardian Email _____

Participant Agreement for Students
Advancing to National Level

If selected as a first-place state winner, I have the consent of my parent/guardian and school to attend the Founding Forward Spirit of America Leadership trip to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania as a guest of the VFW National Organization. In consideration for permission to participate in the National Voice of Democracy Competition ("Competition") I do hereby, for myself, for my heirs, executors, administrators and assignees, waive, release and discharge all rights and claims which I have or which may hereafter accrue against the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) and/or the Departments (state organizations) of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and their respective officers, agents, successors and assigns from any damages which may be sustained by me in connection with my participation in or association with the Competition and/or arising out of any travel related to the Competition. In the event of sickness, accident or injury in connection with the Competition, I consent to and accept the services of a duly licensed medical, surgical or dental specialist selected on my behalf and for such treatments, as they may deem necessary. I understand that VFW will not be liable for such treatment. I further understand that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States retains non-exclusive rights to use my audio file, essay, name and likeness in the promotion and execution of the organization's programs and activities.

I Have Read and Understand the Rules and
Participant Agreement

I certify that I am the sole author of the enclosed audio/essay entry and that I have not inappropriately used any AI tools or Chat GPT. I have only entered the competition once yearly if otherwise eligible. I understand that if it is found that I have entered any other Post's competition or used this essay for another VFW competition, I face elimination from the competition and will return any and all prizes or incentives awarded.

Signature of Student Participant _____ Date _____

To Be Completed by the VFW Post

I certify that this student has an authorized entry in our VFW Post level Voice of Democracy Competition.

Post Commander/Chairperson Signature _____ Post # _____

VFW Auxiliary President/Chairperson Signature (if applicable) _____

Post Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

VFW Post Email _____

No. of students participating _____

No. of winners advanced to District _____

Amt. of Post/Aux. scholarship awards \$ _____

Amt. of Post/Aux. additional expenses (banquet, pins, etc.) \$ _____

To Be Completed by the VFW District

I certify that the student named in the previous section is the duly selected winner of the Voice of Democracy Contest District Competition and is our sole entry into the Departments.

District Chairperson Signature _____ Dist. # _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

() _____

Phone _____ Email _____

To Be Completed by the VFW Department Chairperson

I certify that the student named in the previous section is the duly selected first place winner of the Voice of Democracy Department Competition and is our sole entry into the National Judging.

Department Chairperson Signature _____

() _____

Daytime Phone _____ Email _____

The winner ☒ has been ☐ will be (check one) notified that they are the first place Department winner on _____

For assistance contact:
816.968.2787
Email: youthscholarships@vfw.org

Local VFW Post Information:

Contact: _____

Phone: _____ Best Time To Call: _____

Alternate Contact: _____

Phone: _____ Best Time To Call: _____



**The American Legion
High School Oratorical Scholarship Program 2026
"A Constitutional Speech Contest"**

As of Sep 3, 2026

Goals:

Develop a deeper knowledge and appreciation of the US Constitution among high school students
Develop the ability to think and speak clearly and intelligently

Students give: **one prepared** (not less than 8 nor more than 10 minute) speech on some aspect of U.S. Constitution (students choosing), with an emphasis on citizen's duties & obligations and **one assigned** (not <3 nor >5 min) speech on one of four (4) topics selected at random at the contest. (See below for this year's 4 topics.)

Eligibility:

Student presently enrolled in a Jr. high school, high school or home school, grades 9-12.

(Early in year HS graduates eligible if not enrolled in a college, university, trade school or institute of higher learning at time of state contest, Feb-Mar? 2027.)

Under the age of 20 on date of national contest, May, 2027

Legally domiciled within or attend a school within the department (state) where they enter the competition.

Citizen or lawful permanent resident of the United States.

Contest schedule: Top winner at each level advances to next level.

Area & Dept info is tentative based on Last Yr – Concrete Info to follow

Post 45	Jan 9, 2027 (Sat 10am) Orland Memorial Hall (327 4th St, Orland, CA)
District 4	Jan 30, 2027 (Sat 10am) Vet Mem Center (1425 Veterans Memorial Cir, Yuba City)
Area 1	Feb 20 2027 (Sat 1pm) City Hall Council Chambers 50 Natoma Street, Folsom
Dept (State)	Mar 21, 2027 (Sun 1pm) Vets Admin Hospital Fresno (Auditorium), 2615 E Clinton Ave, Fresno, CA
National	May 14-16 2027 Hillsdale, Michigan at Hillsdale College.

Scholarship Prizes:: (Last yr's amounts. Area & Dept not yet announced. May vary slightly)

Post	1 st \$200, 2 nd \$150, 3 rd \$100 (Coming Post 45 includes Coming, Orland & Hamilton City)
District	1 st \$400, 2 nd \$200, 3 rd \$100 (Butte, Colusa, Glenn, Sutter, Tehama, & Yuba Counties)
Area 1	1 st \$700, 2 nd \$400, 3 rd \$200 (Area 1, California divided into 6 geographic Areas)
Dept (State)	1 st \$1,200, 2 nd \$1000, 3 rd \$700
National	1 st \$25,000, 2 nd \$22,500, 3 rd \$20,000 (All National participants receive \$2000. 2 nd round eliminated get additional \$2000. Funds for participant & chaperone travel & lodging to National.)

Oratorical Information, complete rules and materials at the American Legion National website:

<https://www.legion.org/get-involved/youth-programs/oratorical-contest> and at Dept of CA

<https://calegion.org/oratorical-2/>

Attached:

2007 Oratorical letter to High Schools (with 4 assigned topics)

2027 Assigned Topics for 1 of 4 3-5 min speech

2027 Student Participation Form. (Please add parent/guardian's name & contact info in margin.)

Email completed form to dp407@att.net.

Rules excerpt & Sample Score Sheet

Any questions contact:

David Price, Commander, American Legion Raisner Post 45, Coming, CA

cell: 530-521-9412

email: dp407@att.net

PO 773 Coming CA 96021

Assigned Topics for 2027 Oratorical Contest

One of these four (4) topics will be selected at random at each contest. Contestants give a not less than 3 nor more than 5 minute speech on the selected topic.

The Preamble

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Article VI Paragraph 2

This Constitution, and the Laws of the United States which shall be made in Pursuance thereof; and all Treaties made, or which shall be made, under the Authority of the United States, shall be the supreme Law of the Land; and the Judges in every State shall be bound thereby, any Thing in the Constitution or Laws of any State to the Contrary notwithstanding.

Amendment XIV Section 3

No person shall be a Senator or Representative in Congress, or elector of President and Vice-President, or hold any office, civil or military, under the United States, or under any State, who, having previously taken an oath, as a member of Congress, or as an officer of the United States, or as a member of any State legislature, or as an executive or judicial officer of any State, to support the Constitution of the United States, shall have engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the same, or given aid or comfort to the enemies thereof. But Congress may by a vote of two-thirds of each House, remove such disability.

Amendment XXII Section 1

No person shall be elected to the office of the President more than twice, and no person who has held the office of President, or acted as President, for more than two years of a term to which some other person was elected President shall be elected to the office of the President more than once. But this Article shall not apply to any person holding the office of President when this Article was proposed by the Congress, and shall not prevent any person who may be holding the office of President, or acting as President, during the term within which this Article becomes operative from holding the office of President or acting as President during the remainder of such term.

Excerpt: American Legion Oratorical Program Chairman's Guide. (**Emphasis added by Post 45 Cdr Dave Price**)

Contest Rules

The Prepared Oration

The oration must be on **some aspect of the Constitution**, with **emphasis on a citizen's duties and obligations** to our government. The same subject and oration used in the department contest must be used in the national contest.

Prepared oration must be the **original effort** of each contestant and **not take up less than 8 minutes or more than 10 minutes for delivery**.

Contestants may have a copy of their prepared oration while waiting in the first holding room. They may consult the copy until they exit to begin the contest. The copy will then be surrendered to the contest official monitoring the first holding room. (**NO NOTES DURING SPEECH.**)

Quotations must always 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.

No foreign languages or songs.

All contestants are required to speak in the **English** language

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

Singing is not permitted and will result in **immediate disqualification**. The contestant may, however, quote a verse(s) of a song(s) provided proper attribution is made.

Assigned topic discourse

The assigned topic discourse must **not be less than 3 minutes or more than 5 minutes** for delivery. The purpose of the assigned topic 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 US Constitution.

The **assigned topic shall be drawn** by contest official in full view of the audience immediately before delivery of the last speaker's prepared oration and will be known to the audience and each contestant approximately **5 minutes prior to their delivery**.

Dress

Uniforms are not permitted. Appropriate **business attire** is required for all contestants. (Male: pants/slacks, collared shirt and tie, Female: same or dress/blouse.)

Contestants may not wear awards and medals from previous competitions.

Contest regulations

A **drawing** 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 or her as contestant No. 1, contestant No. 2, etc. (**NO NAMES**). The chairman will request the audience **refrain from applause** until the judges have made their decision.

A raised platform is not compulsory but recommended. The use of **props, notes, amplification, lectern or speaker's stand by contestants or prompting in any manner is not permitted**.

Use of any type of **electronic/digital** data gathering, receiving and/or transmitting equipment in any form by contestants or members of the audience is **prohibited**.

The time allotted for contestants to deliver their **prepared oration** shall be between **eight and 10 minutes**, and between **three and five minutes for the assigned topic**.

The contest chairman will name an **official timer** who will keep an accurate time record of each contestant. The timekeeper will be 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 should be equipped with a stopwatch and **time cards** for the prepared oration with the figures 8, 9 and 10. When eight minutes have been used, the time warning card with the figure 8 shall be placed in full view of the speaker, following with 9 and 10 as the speaker progresses. The same procedure shall be used with cards bearing 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 immediately after each contestant speaks.

Contestants will remain in a private room where the discourse of other speakers cannot be heard until it is their turn to speak; they will be under the supervision of a person appointed by the contest chairman. As the contestants conclude their prepared orations, they will return to a soundproof waiting room. As speakers conclude their assigned topic discourse, they **shall not be allowed to associate with contestants** who have not fulfilled the assigned topic requirement.

About **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 retire to privacy under the direction of a person appointed by the contest chairman, whose duty it shall be to see that **no contestant is permitted to consult any text or notes having any connection with the subject matter upon which he or she is to speak**, other than the actual words of the topic on the card drawn.

Succeeding contestants will be called on in the order in which they previously appeared. They shall also, in turn, be informed of the topic of the assigned topic discourse and escorted to privacy in the manner provided for contestant No. 1.



THE AMERICAN LEGION
HIGH SCHOOL ORATORICAL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM - "A" CONSTITUTIONAL SPEECH CONTEST -
JUDGES SCORECARD



NAME OF JUDGE: _____

A. CONTENT		Contestants					
1. Was the speech original, fresh, and direct, applying the contestant's knowledge?	Prepared Orator 12 points Assigned Topic 4 points	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Did the contestant skillfully select examples, descriptions, analogies, and specific data?	Prepared Orator 12 points Assigned Topic 4 points						
3. Was the speech logical, well organized, and developed?	Prepared Orator 12 points Assigned Topic 4 points						
4. Did the contestant show a comprehensiveness of knowledge of the subject matter?	Prepared Orator 16 points Assigned Topic 6 points						
B. SPEAKING SKILLS		1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Did the contestant use volume, rate, pitch, and diction effectively?	Prepared Orator 6 points Assigned Topic 4 points						
2. Rate the contestant's style: language use, word arrangement and selection, and transitions.	Prepared Orator 6 points Assigned Topic 4 points						
3. Were body actions -- poise, eye contact, posture, gestures, facial expressions -- appropriate?	Prepared Orator 6 points Assigned Topic 4 points						
SUB-TOTAL							
PENALTIES: 1 point for each minute or fraction thereof over or under allotted time	Prepared Orator Assigned Topic						
1-10 points for failure to speak on the Constitution							
Final Total Points							
Position Number - 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 (Highest Points - 1st place, second highest points - 2nd place, etc.)							

Score all contestants - NO TIES PERMITTED

Judge's Signature: _____



THE AMERICAN LEGION
DEPARTMENT OF CALIFORNIA

ORATORICAL CONTESTANT PARTICIPATION PLEDGE

I PLEDGE IT MY DUTY TO LOVE MY COUNTRY, THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, TO SUPPORT ITS CONSTITUTION, TO OBEY ITS LAWS, TO GIVE ALLEGIANCE AND RESPECT TO ITS FLAG, AND TO DEFEND IT AGAINST ALL ENEMIES.

Signature of applicant

Date

All contestants must sign this pledge and it must be presented to the Oratorical Commissioner prior to the Oratorical Program.

THE AMERICAN LEGION REGISTRATION FORM

CONTESTANT NAME: _____ DOB: _____

CELL PHONE: _____ ALTERNATIVE NUMBER: _____

EMAIL: _____

MAILING ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

PREFERRED METHOD OF CONTACT: _____

NAME OF SCHOOL: _____ GRADE: _____

SCHOOL CONTACT PERSON: _____ TITLE: _____

TITLE OF PREPARED ORATION: _____

- - - - - To be completed by Contest Officials Only - - - - -

OFFICIAL STATEMENT: I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT: _____

NAME OF HIGH SCHOOL: _____ GRADE: _____ DOB: _____

IS THE WINNER OF POST/DISTRICT/AREA: _____

AMERICAN LEGION ORATORICAL CONTEST, DATE: _____

THE WINNER IS SPONSORED BY: Post/ District/ Area _____

SIGNED BY: _____ SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____

Contest	Date	Standing	Awards
Post #:	_____	_____	\$ _____
Area #:	_____	_____	\$ _____

Contest	Date	Standing	Awards
District #:	_____	_____	\$ _____
Dept #:	_____	_____	\$ _____

Total Scholarship Awards:

Date: _____ Ck#: _____ G.T.\$ _____