



**Department Of Arizona
The American Legion
September 2025/2026 Contest Year
THE AMERICAN LEGION HIGH SCHOOL ORATORICAL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM**

GREETINGS Everyone,

I want to thank each of you for volunteering your valuable time to assist with the conduct of the 86th Annual American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program, Post, District, Area and State levels. It should be a fun and informative event for each of us again this year. I look forward to speaking to each of the contestants, as you all know they are extraordinary youth with bright futures.

GENERAL OVERVIEW.

WHO: YOU who have volunteered to assist with our competition in a variety of roles/positions. Our contestants from The American Legion, Department of AZ, All Areas, All Districts , and All Post Level competitions.

WHAT: Oratorical competition are where contestants will present their original 8-10-minute speech on any part of the Constitution, and then a 3-5-minute talk on one of four topics (current year) they have been studying in preparation for this event (see attachments for the four topics for 2026).

WHEN: **We begin these events in February at Post, District and Area discretion and based on time constraints for the contestants. This coming year I would like to emphasize the IMPORTANCE of being on-time and at the event (No Exceptions).** Staff also should arrive for an indoctrination briefing at their respective times and places (Contestants will arrive at designated times by Post, District and Area Chairman discretion for their indoctrination briefing). The actual contest starts at designated times with an invocation and honors to the flag. As Department Chairman I will try and make some of these events but I encourage each Area Chairman to be present for their respective events.

WHERE: Each Post, District and Area will set the appropriate stage for the contest to be held and make proper arrangements for directions and notification of these events in plenty of time for the contestants to be available.

WHY: This year I expect high school students begin their initial phases early in order to prepare for the National Contest as they compete for progressive scholarship funding up to \$25,000 located at Hillsdale College, Hillsdale MI.

DRESS: The youth and the Moderator will be in business attire. Staff may wear the same, but business casual is acceptable. Please, **no t-shirts, sandals, or shorts.** If you are a member of The American Legion, please wear the appropriate uniform cap for your position in the Legion. Legion polos are acceptable attire.

GENERAL FLOW.

At each event there will be a brief staff meeting to review contest rules and conduct.

The contestants will arrive for a brief review of rules and conduct. They will have had a training session with their respective sponsoring Post to answer any questions or concerns and to go through the sequence of events.

At each event we will have an opening ceremony for the audience with an invocation and Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag. The speakers will be sequestered in a waiting room where they will draw a numbers that will set the order of presentations. At the appointed start time, the contestants will be escorted in-order to the

event by an escort. The Moderator will introduce them by their selected number (basically their name until the winners are announced at the end).

They will then begin their 8-10-minute speech. The two Timekeepers (Primary and Secondary) will start their timers with the first word of the speech and Judges will begin evaluating per their scorecard guidance.

For the 8-10-minute speech, Timekeepers will hold up a prepared number sign at the 8-, 9-, and 10-minute mark. For the 3-5-minute talk, Timekeepers will hold up a prepared sign at the 3-, 4- and 5-minute mark.

After the last word of the speech, the Primary Timekeeper will announce the time when requested by the Moderator. The contestant will be met by the Escort at the stage steps previously used and guided to the “post-speech waiting room.”

There will be no applause until the end of the contest when winners are announced. The auditorium should remain silent for the Judges to complete their evaluations and prepare for the next contestant.

The Judges will indicate when they have completed their scoring which will cue the Moderator to call for the next contestant. The procedure will continue until all contestants have made their presentation.

Before the last speaker presents, the Moderator will have a random audience member draw from a container one of the four **“ASSIGNED TOPICS”** for the second phase of the event. A topic card will be delivered to the **“preparation waiting room”** and revealed only to the contestants when they arrive.

The escorts will then flow from the **“post-speech waiting room”** to the **“preparation waiting room”** where the contestants will be seated one at a time in the same presentation order established. The selected topic will be provided to the contestant. The escort will stand outside the room, with the door open, and **allow the contestant five minutes** to gather thoughts/prepare for the 3-5-minute speech segment. Paper and pen will be available for the contestants to write down/organize thoughts, but the notes must be surrendered to the escort at the end of the five-minute prep period. **(This is a good rule to have two rooms set aside for the contest)**

When called by the Moderator, the contestant will be escorted again to the stage steps and introduced by their number. The speech will be presented, and the contestant will be escorted to a waiting area (fish pond area) while remaining contestants prepare and then give their presentations.

At the conclusion of this phase, the contestants will be escorted to their initial waiting room. The Judges and Tabulators will be excused to the conference room to examine scores and select the winners. No contact should be made with any contestants during the transition. The contestants will be escorted back into the theater to await the decision of the Judges as certified by the Tabulators. They will be seated in reserved seats next to the Timekeepers.

From this point applause and photographs will be allowed.

With decisions made, The Chief Tabulator will lead the Judges and Tabulators to the theater entry doors. When recognized by the Moderator, The Chief Tabulator will lead the other Tabulators and Judges in single file to center-stage. The Judges and Tabulators will be introduced from center stage.

When requested by the Moderator, the Chief Tabulator will then present the Moderator the names of the winners and return to the line-up. Judges and Tabulators will then take one step back to allow room for the contestants to enter the stage in front of them.

The contestants will be called to center stage. One Escort will guide them single file, in their presentation order, to the steps where they will enter the stage and line-up in front of the Judges/Tabulators.

On command of the Moderator, representatives **from each sponsoring Post** will step forward to the stage steps and draw the name of the contestant they are sponsoring and who they will follow through the remainder of the contest.

The winners will be introduced and awarded one by one. When the winner is identified, he/she will take a step forward. The Moderator will approach from the right side with flowers or gift of choice and viewed by the audience, and Post Sponsor will approach from the left side of the stage with the financial gift. The Moderator and Sponsor will award prizes to the winner. After the award, the contestant will step back to the line and face the audience as Moderator and Sponsor return to their positions to prepare and announce the next winner.

The remainder of the staff will then be asked forward and recognized for their contributions to the event.

When complete, we will close with a benediction. The meeting will be adjourned and guests will exit to lunch at locations of their choice.

At each event starting with the POST LEVEL it will be determined who will be returning for the next event for the DISTRICT LEVEL competition, AREA LEVEL and ending with the DEPARTMENT LEVEL competition. The selection selection of TWO WINNERS from EACH POST level competition and then TWO WINNERS from DISTRICT LEVEL, then TWO WINNERS from AREA LEVEL completion. This will give a total of SIX winners at the DEPARTMENT LEVEL competition. Only ONE WINNER will compete in the National competition and there is a runner up in case the number one winner is unable to make the FINALS in Hillsdale, MI

STAFF POSITIONS AND GENERAL DUTIES.

I am happy to say that we have sufficient staff volunteers to fill our needs. I also intend to use some of you at the Department Level, as it will keep things organized and flowing for the contestants and audience.

CHAIRMAN/MODERATOR: Oversees local organization and conduct of the event. Post Commanders or Post Chairman will be Post Moderators, District Commanders or District Chairman are encouraged to serve as Moderators for each of their respective events and Area Vice Commanders or Area Chairman are encouraged to serve as the Area Moderators and manage the flow of the events. Department Chairman will serve as the moderator for the Department competition.

JUDGES. We are asked to have at least 5 Judges. Judges will be located throughout the auditorium and not known to the contestants until after the contest is over. Judges will be given a clipboard with scoresheets (see attachments) to take notes and assign scores for the speakers. After the speaker completes, the Judges will be allowed to finish annotating their scores, as the speaker is escorted into the "post speech waiting room." The Judges will be introduced to the audience and speakers just before announcement of the winners.

TABULATORS. We have three volunteers who are quite adept with numbers who will verify scoresheets and tabulate scores to select the winners. The Tabulators will select a Chief who will lead the Judges and Tabulators back into the auditorium to deliver the results to the Moderator.

TIMEKEEPERS. We have two. They should bring a stopwatch they know how to operate, such as a cellphone, to monitor and record elapsed time. Timing will start with the first word of a speech and end

with the last. Both timers should sit together and cooperate as necessary if one watch malfunctions. They will hold up corresponding number signs at the 8-, 9-, and 10-minute marks for the 8-10-minute speech. They will hold up corresponding number signs at the 3-, 4-, and 5-minute marks for the 3-5-minute speech.

ESCORTS. We should have at minimum three Escorts. They will be in or adjacent to each of the two waiting rooms where they will sit with and monitor the contestants until it is their turn to speak. To ensure each gets to hear at least one speech, they can rotate as desired when it is time to take a contestant to the stage. They will ensure that all notes and printed study materials are surrendered as they leave the waiting room. At the appointed time, the Escort will guide the contestant-up-next to the auditorium to the stage steps, then be seated to observe until the speech is complete. When instructed by the Moderator they will escort the speaker to the “post-speech waiting room” and set up for the escort of the next contestant. These Escorts will also ensure there is no conversation between contestants at any time.

USHERS. We will have at least two Ushers. Ushers will initially meet and guide participants and guests to the auditorium. Contestants will initially be seated at the back of the theater for the invocation and Pledge of Allegiance. Other audience members may be seated comfortably throughout the theater. Ushers guard the doors to ensure no one enters during the speeches. They will open the doors to allow the escort and contestant in/out of the theater. When they approach the stage/speaking area, contestant will place their hand over their heart and the Usher will salute the flag. Ushers are usually seated near the area to escort them back once they finish their respective oration.

SUMMARY.

At time indicated in the morning/afternoon all staff will meet briefly in the area to review procedures and answer any questions. At a time indicated, staff can take a breather, meet incoming guests, but be back in your theater seats by a time ready to begin.

At time indicated there will have a brief meeting with the contestants and walk them through the facility, so they are more comfortable with the venue. If you are in the area when they guide them through, please be very quiet so I can have effective communications with them.

Please review the applicable attachments, and REMEMBER, it may seem complicated, but make it easy. We will be flexible as necessary to fulfill requirements. Sure, mistakes may be made, but we’ll press forward and make it a wonderful experience for the youth we will be serving.

CLOSING.

Thanks again for your assistance with this. It has been an interesting adventure this past year and I am looking forward to this coming year to be even better. REMEMBER our key purpose is to help develop our leaders for tomorrow. We’ll do that and make friends for life.

S/F

Paul G. Johnson

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