



89th Annual 2026 High School Oratorical Scholarship Program "A Constitutional Speech Contest"



Pictured left to right: South Dakota American Legion Department Commander Kevin Morello, Finalist Christian Carley, Piedmont; Finalist Preston Singrey, Arlington; 3rd place winner Ada Sharp, Aberdeen; 1st place winner Elena Andrews, Beresford; 2nd place winner Blixia Broussard, Rapid City; and Department Americanism Chairman, David Booze.

WHAT TO DO

Write an oration, which takes not less than EIGHT (8) minutes nor more than TEN (10) minutes to deliver, on some phase of the Constitution of the United States which will give emphasis to the attendant duties and obligations of a citizen to our government.

In addition to the above prepared oration, each contestant must be prepared to speak extemporaneously for THREE (3) to FIVE (5) minutes on one of four (4) Articles or Amendments of the US Constitution that have been chosen as Assigned Topics for the 2025 Contest, which can be found at: <https://www.sdlegion.org/oratorical-scholarship/>.

DATES FOR ENTERING AND COMPLETING CONTEST

High school students who wish to enter the contest should notify their high school principal, who should then notify their local Post American Legion officials. If there is more than one entrant from a high school, there must be a Post contest conducted under the joint auspices of the high school and the American Legion Post to decide the local representative. Every high school conducting a local contest under the joint auspices of the school and local American Legion Post is authorized to enter a contestant in the district contest.

LOCAL CONTESTS

Contestants are not required to commit oration to memory for local contests, and during the preparation period for the extemporaneous talk, may make notes to be used during delivery. However, no notes or prompting will be allowed in contests above the Post level.

Chairpersons of local contests will secure no less than three nor more than five competent local citizens to judge the local contest.

All Post contests must be completed by December 22, 2025 due to early district contests and holiday office closures. Send the name of the Post first -place winner to your District Americanism Chairperson.

DISTRICT CONTESTS

District American Legion Americanism Chairs, and the counties under the jurisdiction of each are as follows:

DIST. 1 – (Butte, Corson, Dewey, Harding, Lawrence, Meade, Perkins, Ziebach counties) Chair: Melanie McDonald, (caminal228@proton.me) 15030 224th St, Box Elder, SD 57719. District Contest to be held at Countryside Church, 625 Woodland Dr, Spearfish; **January 11, 2026, 2:00pm**. Storm date, January 18th, same time and place.

DIST. 2 – (Bennett, Custer, Fall River, Haakon, Jackson, Jones, Mellette, Pennington, Shannon, Todd counties) Chair: Doug Harris (doughinut@gmail.com), 4913 Charmwood Dr, Rapid City, SD 57701. District Contest to be held at SDSM&T Classroom Bldg., 501 E. Saint Joseph St, **January 4, 2026, 10:00 a.m.** Storm date, January 11th, same time and place.

DIST. 3 - (Gregory, Hand, Hughes, Hyde, Lyman, Potter, Stanley, Sully, Tripp counties) Chair: Larry Madsen, (larry.madsen@hotmail.com) 906 E Commercial Ave., Gettysburg, SD 57442. District Contest to be held at the Faith Lutheran Church Christian Living Center, 714 N Grand Ave, Pierre, SD. **January 18, 2026, 2:00 p.m.** Storm date, January 25th, same time and place.

DIST. 4 – (Brown, Campbell, Edmunds, Faulk, McPherson, Spink, Walworth counties) Chair: Dale Strom, (dale_strom@yahoo.com) 115 N. Kline St, Aberdeen, SD 57401. District Contest to be held at the Post Home, 617 S 15th St, Aberdeen, SD 57401 **January 10, 2026**, contestants arrive at 12:30; contest at 1:00 p.m.

DIST. 5 – (Brookings, Clark, Codington, Day, Deuel, Grant, Hamlin, Marshall, Roberts counties) Chair: Arlo Jurens, (arlo@century21gka.com) 48228 219th Ave. Elkton, SD 57026. District Contest will be held at Castlewood Community Center, 204 Main St, Castlewood, SD, **Jan. 11, 2026**, 1:00 p.m. Storm date, Jan. 18th, same time and place.

DIST. 6 – (Aurora, Beadle, Brule, Buffalo, Davison, Hanson, Jerauld, Kingsbury, Miner, Sanborn counties) Contact Jim Pekron, (Pekronjim@gmail.com) 2231 N Kimball St, Mitchell, SD 57301. District Contest to be held at the Kimball American Legion Post, 232 S Main, Kimball, SD, **January 17, 2026**, 1:00 p.m. Storm date, Jan 24th, same time and place.

DIST. 7 – (Lake, Lincoln, McCook, Minnehaha, Moody, Union counties) Chair: Dan Wyatt, (dakotasarge@gmail.com), 23932 454th Ave, Madison, SD 57042. District Contest to be held at the Humboldt Community Center, **January 11, 2026**, 1:00 p.m. Storm date January 18th, same time and place.

DIST. 8 – (Bon Homme, Charles Mix, Clay, Douglas, Hutchinson, Turner, Yankton counties) **TO BE DETERMINED.** Contact District Commander, Steve Mueller for more information. Cell: 605-661-0694 email: steve.mueller195@gmail.com. District Contest to be held at the Springfield Community Center, **January 10, 2026**, 10:00 am. Storm Date January 17th, same time and place.

District Chairpersons are in charge of District Contests. **ALL District Contests must be completed on or before January 25, 2026.

EACH DISTRICT CHAIRPERSON MUST

Report the name of the District winner to the Department Americanism Commission Chair, Carol Howitz, at 605-645-3411 or Carol.howitz@gmail.com and to SD American Legion State Headquarters at: 605-886-3604 or maryjo@slegion.org upon the completion of their District Contest.

“All the great speakers were bad speakers at first”
Ralph Waldo Emerson

STATE CONTEST

The top contestant from each District will compete in the State Finals on Sunday, February 22, 2026. The contest will be held at Arrowood Resort and Conference Center in Oacoma, SD at 10:30 a.m. or at the conclusion of the non-denominational Sunday Church Service and the adjournment of the 2026 SD American Legion Mid-Winter Conference. Five judges will evaluate the work of the contestants in the State Contest.

NATIONAL CONTEST SCHOLARSHIPS

The National Contest will be held in Hillsdale, Mich., at Hillsdale College, May 15 - 17, 2026. Scholarship awards are presented to the three finalists in the Final Round of the National Contest as follows: 1st place - \$25,000; 2nd place - \$22,500; 3rd place - \$20,000. Each Department (State) winner who is certified into and participates in the first round of the National Contest, will receive a \$2,000 scholarship. Each first-round winner who advances to and participates in the second round but does not advance to the Final Round will receive an additional \$2,000 scholarship to pursue education beyond high school.

PRIZES AND AWARDS

Local awards must be funded by the local American Legion Post.

Chairpersons of District contests will secure three or five competent citizens to judge the district contest.

The winner of each District contest will receive a medal and have the right to represent the district in the State contest. Any other prizes at the District level are the responsibility of the individual District.

The first-place winner of the State competition will receive a \$1,500 scholarship and a trophy, plus a plaque for display in his/her high school trophy case. Second place winner will receive a \$1,000 scholarship and a trophy, and third place winner will receive a \$500 scholarship and a trophy. Remaining finalists will each receive a \$200 scholarship and a trophy. Award scholarships are redeemable in any school above high school level within 5 years of graduation.

MATERIAL FOR STUDY

All contestants and coaches should be familiar with the rules for the American Legion Oratory Contest as defined in the national brochure; Annual High School Oratorical Scholarship Program, “A Constitutional Speech Contest” which are available on-line at: <http://www.legion.org/publication> or by writing The American Legion State Headquarters, PO Box 67, Watertown, S.D. 57201.

Teachers of Government, History, Civics, English and Speech can all be of great assistance to students in helping to prepare for the contests. School and public librarians can be of help as well.