



AMERICANISM eBulletin



An electronic update of the Americanism Commission

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Americanism Commission

THE AMERICANISM COMMISSION SETS A COURSE FOR THE 2021 NATIONAL ORATORICAL CONTEST

At this time no one knows how long the effects of coronavirus (COVID-19) may be felt. Yet, The American Legion's Americanism Commission recognizes that it must still set a course for conducting its National Oratorical Contest next April so that oratorical chairmen at all levels, as well as department leadership and national staff, may plan accordingly now.

It has been determined that plans will proceed for the National Oratorical Contest to be conducted in its traditional manner – live and in-person – April 2021 in Indianapolis, trusting that conditions will trend to allow.

Oratorical rules state that arrangements for contests leading up to department finals is the responsibility of each department. For levels of competition prior to the department finals contest, the rules and regulations set forth in the oratorical rules are not mandatory – they are offered as a guideline, and your respective department headquarters should be consulted. However, if a department wishes for its finalist to compete in the National Oratorical Finals Contest in Indianapolis next year, rules state that the department finals contest shall conform with national contest procedures, rules and regulations. The decision for having a traditional National Oratorical Contest was made for a couple of reasons.

First, the Americanism Commission takes pride in The American Legion's stellar reputation for upholding the utmost in contest integrity. A live event provides a level of oversight for which the reliability of the contest leaves very little question that The American Legion and its volunteers, staff and contestants have adhered to the highest competitive values and standards of honor.

Second, it's also about the experience. As with all American Legion national level youth programs, whether it's the American Legion World Series, the Junior Shooting Sports shoulder-to-shoulder national championship, Boys Nation or the National Oratorical Contest, the Americanism Commission takes pride in the overall experience provided to youth beyond simply competing or attending an event. When 53 oratorical contestants come to Indianapolis, they are enthusiastically celebrated and honored by American Legion Family members who recognize their achievement for rising to the national competition. The Legion Family actively role models patriotism and advocates the traditions, institutions and ideals of the United States. And the youth have an opportunity to peer bond and learn together.

These are indeed uncharacteristic times. Some may be considering hosting virtual oratorical contests. Others may choose to have a live contest, taking care to observe any public health mandates in place which would require some adjustments. Adjustments may perhaps involve changing from a usual contest location to a larger venue in order to accommodate social distancing. Or it may mean strictly limiting the usual number of spectators in attendance. If a face mask mandate is in place, take care to position a contestant well away from spectators so they are socially distanced safely enough to unmask during their speech. It may perhaps mean keeping a large supply of face masks and handing them out to staff, volunteers, contestants and spectators, and rigorously enforcing their use. Or it may mean the mandatory taking of temperatures as everyone arrives, asking anyone who appears unwell to please leave even if it is a contestant. It may mean dispensing hand sanitizer in great quantities and constantly wiping down areas. With guidance from your department, you must decide what course of action is best.

"Sunshine all the time makes a desert." – an Arab proverb. The decision to hold a traditional in-person National Oratorical Contest in 2021 was not made lightly during these unusually complex times. The Americanism Commission wishes each post, district and department a successful oratorical season.