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To: All Legion Leadership
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The American Legion

For God and country **NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS P.O. BOX 1055 INDIANAPOLIS, IN 46206-1055**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Columbia, Mo. Youth Sweeps to Victory, Earns $18K Scholarship in American Legion Oratorical Contest

INDIANAPOLIS (April 21, 2013) – A senior from David H. Hickman High School in Columbia, Mo., capped a busy weekend of competition in Indianapolis by earning an $18,000 college scholarship and first place in The American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship Program – "A Constitutional Speech Contest." His winning oration was titled "This Great House."

Ashwath Kumar started the weekend as one of 53 state or territorial champions in the 77th annual contest. He advanced to the championship through three rounds of intense competition.

Brandon Posner, a high school senior from Doylestown, Pa., earned a $16,000 college scholarship with a second place finish, while Ellen Joy Densmore of Denver, Colo., earned a $14,000 scholarship and finished third. The scholarships account for a small portion of post-secondary scholarships that The American Legion, the nation's largest veterans organization, awards annually.

In his prepared oration, Kumar pointed out that conflict is not bad in a constitutional government. "Conflict is the fuel of change, and change is the engine of the Constitution. Conflict led to the formation of this country, conflict drives us every year to select representatives in government, and conflict underlies every policy, every court case, every decision that determines the course of our future. The right amount of tension holds together the foundation of our great house."

He implored Americans to protect the Constitution. "Albert Einstein said, 'The strength of the Constitution

lies entirely in the determination of each citizen to defend it. Only if every single citizen feels duty bound to do his share in this defense are the constitutional rights secure.' As citizens of the United States, as the proud owners and builders of this great house, it is our responsibility to protect and maintain the Constitution: for ourselves, for each other and for all of posterity."

In each round of the weekend competition, orators delivered a rehearsed 8- to 10-minute address and a randomly assigned 3- to 5-minute oration on a constitutional topic, each without the benefit of notes and in front of a live audience, including the judges. The 2.4-million member American Legion developed the contest to encourage young people to improve their communications skills and to study the U.S. Constitution. More than $3 million in scholarships have been awarded over the history of the contest.

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