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Ocala, Fla., High School Senior Sweeps to Victory, Earns $18K Scholarship in American Legion Oratorical Contest

INDIANAPOLIS (April 12, 2015) – A senior from Vanguard High School in Ocala, Fla., 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." Her winning oration was titled "Our Greatest Honor."

Geeta Minocha started the weekend as one of 52 state or department champions in the 78th annual contest. She advanced to the championship through three rounds of intense competition.

Rowan Macwan, a high school junior from Naperville, Ill., earned a $16,000 college scholarship with a second place finish, while Emma Skahill, a senior from Earlham, Iowa, 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 her prepared oration, Minocha pointed out that the Constitution was not a document that could have declared George Washington a king, but was instead a document "remodeling the government of the United States." She lamented that voter turnout is now the lowest since the 1940s.

"Who we vote for matters. The leaders we elect should reflect the spirit of our society," Minocha said. "Their main goal should be the preservation of our rights as written in our founding document. Failure to vote, then, is the equivalent of rejecting the freedoms bestowed on each individual by our Constitution. These freedoms, like a family heirloom, should be treasured and held dear. But it appears we have begun to take these freedoms for granted."

Minocha repeated President Kennedy's call for American's to accept responsibility for the future. "Together, let us now answer his call," she said. "Together, let us preserve and protect Democracy and all its ideals. Together, let us exercise our Constitutional right and vote."

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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