The American Legion

For God and country

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Waukee, Iowa, Youth Sweeps to Victory, Earns $18K Scholarship in American Legion Oratorical Contest

INDIANAPOLIS (April 7, 2019) – A junior from Van Meter High School in Iowa 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." Patrick Junker's winning prepared oration was titled "The Spread of Constitutional Apathy and how to Quarantine it."

Junker, who lives in Waukee, Iowa, started the weekend as one of 53 state or department champions in the 82nd annual contest. He advanced to the championship through three rounds of intense competition. Junker was sponsored by American Legion Post 403 in Van Meter.

Caleb Maue, a home-schooled junior from Homer Glen, Ill., earned a $16,000 college scholarship with a second place finish, while Eden Carnes, a home-schooled freshman from Friendsville, Tenn., 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, Junker warned that apathy and ignorance about the U.S. Constitution can endanger freedom. "In a study done by the Freedom Forum Institute, 40 percent of the American survey respondents could not name a single freedom under the First Amendment. The question becomes this, 'How can we fight and defend our rights if we don't even know what those rights are?'"

Junker encouraged making education about the Constitution a priority. "We must not only teach students the Constitution, but we must also teach them the importance it has on our everyday life. We must teach them this importance in order to safeguard our future."

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 nearly 2-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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