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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

Maryland High School Senior Sweeps to Victory,

Earns $18K Scholarship In American Legion Oratorical Contest

INDIANAPOLIS (April 8,2008) – A high school senior from Elkton, Md., capped a busy weekend of competition in Indianapolis by earning an $18,000 college scholarship. The title of his winning oration: "Our Fallible Framers."

Spencer Harjung, a student at Rising Sun High School, started the weekend as one of 53 state champions in the 71st annual American Legion National High School Oratorical Scholarship Program – "A Constitutional Speech Contest" and advanced to the top through three rounds of intense competition.

Virginia Macfarlan, a senior who is home-schooled in Siloam Springs, Ark., earned a $16,000 scholarship while Christopher Pagliarella, a senior from the Hopkins School in Seymour, Conn., earned a $14,000 college scholarship. The scholarships account for a small portion of the roughly $3.5 million in post-secondary scholarships that The American Legion, the nation's largest veterans organization, awards annually.

In his speech Harjung spoke on how the founding fathers were good men but not perfect men.

"James Madison had stage fright. Washington's teeth started falling out at the age of 24. Benjamin Franklin wanted to be a swim coach. These men were just that: men," Harjung said.

" They were not 'demi-gods,' as Thomas Jefferson described them. They were men. Fallible, typical: men. Yet for centuries they have been carved in marble, cast in bronze, and perceived as America's royalty, and they've even been compared to the mighty Greek gods. In fact, if you visit the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., you'll see a large painting called 'the Apotheosis of Washington,' which depicts George Washington ascending to heaven and becoming a god."

Harjung concluded that the framers did not consider themselves gods or the Constitution infallible. "There is a story that upon exiting the Constitutional Convention Benjamin Franklin was approached by a group of men who asked him what sort of government the delegates had created. His answer was: 'A republic, if you can keep it,'" Harjung said. "The citizens of the United States have kept it, and they don't show any signs of stopping soon. But written into the Constitution is a strong message to every citizen: we are not gods. We may have one of the strongest governments in the world, but it isn't perfect, and it requires maintenance. Patriotic rhetoric isn't what has made this country great—and America is not inherently great. America was made great by a handful of people—just people—and America needs the help of every citizen—every person--to stay that way."

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 2.7-million member American Legion developed the contest to encourage young people to improve their communications skills and to study the U.S. Constitution.

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