

DATE: October 24, 2012
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MEMORANDUM TO: Department Oratorical Chairpersons
Conference Attendees

**SUBJECT: REPORT OF THE 43rd ANNUAL DEPARTMENT ORATORICAL
CHAIRPERSONS CONFERENCE; 14th NATIONAL
AMERICANISM CONFERENCE**

Attached is the report of the 43rd annual Department Oratorical Chairpersons Conference that was held in Indianapolis, Indiana on September 29 – 30, 2012.

For those who requested and paid for the group photograph, it is also enclosed.

On behalf of National Americanism Commission Chairman Joseph E. Caouette, we wish to thank all who attended the conference.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns regarding the contest. With our best wishes for success for your 2013 contests, I remain,

Sincerely,



COLIN W. SHORT
Assistant Director
Americanism and Children & Youth Division

Attachment

Cc: Joseph E. Caouette, Chairman, National Americanism Commission
James G. Brouillette, Chairman, Youth Activities Subcommittee
Department Adjutants
Jill Druskis, Director, Americanism and Children & Youth Division
Michael D. Buss, Deputy Director, Americanism and Children & Youth Division
Richard Smith, Deputy Director, Americanism and Children & Youth Division

The American Legion
43rd Annual Department Oratorical Chairperson Conference
14th National Americanism Conference
September 29 – 30, 2012
Indianapolis, Indiana

Digest of Proceedings

Saturday, September 29, 2012
Panorama Ballroom, 21st Floor, Sheraton Indianapolis City Centre Hotel

Following the taking of the conference photograph, Conference Chairman Ralph Bozella (CO), National Executive Committeeman and past department Oratorical chairman, called the 43rd annual Department Oratorical Chairperson Conference to order at 8:15 a.m.

Victor DeSloover (ID) gave the Invocation. David King (KY) led the group in the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. Conference Chairman Bozella conducted the POW/MIA Empty Chair ceremony.

Department chairpersons, alternates, and guests introduced themselves to the group. Almost one third of the conference chairpersons are new appointees. Forty-two departments were represented by their chairperson or designated alternate. There were forty-eight total in attendance. Attendees were: Alabama – Chrystal Maxwell; Alaska – Jan Scott; Arizona – Roger Munchbach; California – Phil Heller; Colorado – Ralph Bozella and Paul Talafuse; Connecticut – Paul Spedalieri; Delaware – Charles Armbruster; District of Columbia – John Miller; Florida – Ron Musselwhite; Hawaii – Dennis Zatecka; Idaho – Joseph Kaiser; Illinois – Michael Carder; Indiana – Richard Seto and Curt Rewarts; Iowa – Vic DeSloover and Kathy Nees; Kansas – Jim Gravenstein; Kentucky – David King; Maine – Tommy Adkins; Maryland – James Corkery; Michigan – John Bradford; Minnesota – Tess Davis; Mississippi – Joe Kersh; Missouri – Duane Benton; Montana – Jeff Holmes; Nebraska – Michael Hatfield; Nevada – Jerry Finley; New Hampshire – Ken Maynard; New Mexico – Clarence Ortega; New York – Tony Paternostro; North Carolina – Jerry Tart; North Dakota – David Daeley; Ohio – John Looker and Bill Towne; Oklahoma – Edwin Lowe; Oregon – Jackie Collison; Pennsylvania – Bob John and Norlynn John; Puerto Rico – Isidora Cerpa; South Dakota – Fred Nelson; Tennessee – John Keys; Texas – J. Lynn Vowell; Virginia – Theresa Wahl; Washington – Mike Montaney and Carol Reed; West Virginia – Stacy Wehrle; and Wisconsin – Robert Stone.

Many shared their personal contest “life experiences” and the number of years they have been involved with the oratorical program.

Conference Objectives

Chairman Bozella reviewed the conference objectives:

- Education
- Uniformity and Consistency
- Increase Contest Participation
- Evaluate National and Department Procedures

Welcome and greetings – Joseph Caouette (NH), Chairman, National Americanism Commission

National Americanism Chairman Joseph Caouette (NH) brought welcome and greetings.

“The oratorical contest is my favorite program,” stated Caouette. “You are giving a young man or woman the opportunity to stand up and speak in front of an audience.”

Chairman Caouette stressed, “You must have a trained and well qualified contest staff, hence your attendance here this weekend. We expect you to take back home all that you will learn here and pass it on to your oratorical program volunteers.”

“My greatest satisfaction is going to a district contest and seeing a contestant’s first exposure to getting up and to address an audience with confidence,” said Caouette. “We are giving young people a wonderful opportunity to express themselves and to learn about the Constitution of the United States. Today’s youth are very knowledgeable about the Constitution, but through this program we will make sure that they truly understand and appreciate the document.”

Mr. Caouette also made mention of the possibility of scheduling a contest and then going and finding out due to weather that there is to be no contest. He mentioned that even in frustrating situations like that, it is our obligation to always be providing the best service to the students and to remember that the true purpose of the contest is to help the students learn the Constitution.

Chairman Caouette thanked all on behalf of the thirty-two members of the National Americanism Commission for all that they do for the Oratorical program and for the youth of their communities. Chairman Caouette concluded by saying, “Thank you for making a difference for the youth of our nation. Thank you for what you are doing, you are doing a great job. We receive the best of the best because of your dedicated efforts. You all are a great credit to the program. Thank you again for what you do.”

Welcome and greetings – Jill Druskis (NE), Director, Americanism and Children & Youth Division

Americanism and Children & Youth Director Jill Druskis (NE) brought welcome and greetings.

Director Druskis expressed excitement and appreciation for all the efforts of the Oratorical chairpersons and their commitment to running an excellent Oratorical contest. She also thanked the audience by stating, “I want to thank each of you very much for your dedication in being here this weekend. You have left home and family to devote your time and attention this weekend to sharing information with others, as well as gaining new information that will aid in continuing to grow yourselves as you help shape the next generation.”

Protect Youth Sports – Brad Snellings, Company President and Vice President of Marketing, and Bruce Sprowl, Regional Sales Manager

Americanism and Children & Youth Director Jill Druskis (NE) introduced Brad Snellings, company President and Vice President of Marketing, and Bruce Sprowl, Regional Sales Manager, Protect Youth Sports. Mr. Snellings gave a presentation on Protect Youth Sports, which National Headquarters has selected as the exclusive background check provider for all of its national youth programs. Resolution 12 of the National Executive Committee, Spring 2012, states “that departments of The American Legion are strongly urged and encouraged to establish background screening procedures and policies similar to those of the National Organization for volunteers supporting youth programs conducted within their departments.” Therefore, Mr. Snellings provided information on how the process works, potential costs involved, and protections provided. Mr. Snellings answered many questions regarding the dynamics and logistics of background checks for each state.

Review of the 2012 Contests

Mr. Colin Short (IN), Assistant Director, Americanism and Children & Youth Division, provided an after-action report of the 2012 contests.

Rebecca Frazer (IN) was the 2012 national champion. Chas Baines (ID) finished in second place. Jack Donaldson (MN) finished third.

Mr. Short reported that there were 13 repeat contestants from 2011, 12 Home-schooled contestants, and Chas Baines (ID) made his third appearance!

There were 52 departments who participated in the 2012 contest – South Carolina and Mexico did not participate.

Mr. Short also reviewed “lessons learned” from the 2012 national finals contests. There was a very good following of parents, friends, and members of the sponsoring posts present to support the 52 contestants.

Oratorical College (Session 1)

Mr. Short briefed the group regarding various rule changes, additions and clarifications that have been made over the past seven years including:

- The state accreditation requirement for home-schooled students has been deleted. Accreditation differs from state to state, if it is even available and/or required by a state. (Clarification – 2009)
- Department final contests shall conform to the national contest procedures, rules and regulations. It is strongly recommended that contests at all levels follow the national contest procedures, rules and regulations with particular emphasis to include the assigned topic portion in the contest. (Clarification – 2005)
- Eligibility (Clarification – 2006):
Contestants must either be legally domiciled within or attend an educational institution within the department that they enter competition. Contestants can enter competition through only one department.
- The prepared oration (Rule Change – 2005):
The prepared oration must be on some aspect of the Constitution of the United States with emphasis on the duties and obligations of a citizen to our government. The same subject and oration used in the department contest must be used in the national contest.
- The prepared oration and assigned topic (Clarification – 2006 & 2009):
The singing of songs is not permitted and will result in the immediate disqualification of the contest. The contestant may quote a verse(s) of a song provided proper attribution is made.
- Contest regulations (Addition – 2005):
The use of any type of electronic/digital data gathering, receiving and/or transmitting equipment in any form by contestants or members of the audience is prohibited. This is of particular concern due to the sophisticated data gathering capabilities of today’s cellular telephones.
- Use of the English language for the prepared oration and assigned topic (Approved Ruling – 2007):
It is acceptable to utilize or incorporate short phrases of a foreign language in order to develop the argument, establish a point, etc. It is to be understood that the vast majority of the prepared oration and/or assigned topic must still be delivered in the English language.
- The contestant must give both their prepared oration and assigned topic in order to receive scholarship moneys they are entitled to. (Clarification – 2007)

Mr. Short reviewed highlights from *The American Legion National High School Oratorical Contest Chairman's Guide*. The same guide can be used to conduct the post contest through the department finals. In addition, it is possible to enlarge and duplicate the contest forms available in the booklet. Copies of this booklet, the national rules brochure and the promotional brochure were bulk shipped to department headquarters in June. The rules brochure, promotional brochure and the Chairman's Guide are available on The American Legion's website.

The following points of emphasis were discussed:

- By resolution, scholarships awarded at the national competition can only be used for colleges and universities within the United States or possessions thereof.
- Eligible participants:
Contestants must be citizens of or lawful permanent residents of the United States.
- The three national finalists are ineligible for further participation at any level.
- The prepared oration and assigned topic must be given in the English language.
- The prepared oration is 8 to 10 minutes in length; the assigned topic is 3 to 5 minutes in length.
- Contestants may have a copy of their prepared oration with them in the first holding room; once they exit the holding room to begin the contest; the copy remains behind in the holding room.
- Props:
The United States flag is considered to be a prop if a contestant were to "grab", "gripe", or otherwise wrap themselves in the flag. Simply pointing at the flag is not considered using the flag as a prop.
- Dressing in costume is not allowed.
- Contest judges will be seated in different areas of the contest room. Their location will not be identified to the contestants in advance of the contest.
- Contest tabulations procedures:
Will be done in private with no contestants, coaches, parents in the tabulation room!
Do not sacrifice accuracy for contest expediency.

Oratorical College (Session 2) Tabulation and Tie-breaking Procedures; Practical Exercises

Mr. Short led the group in the annual review of tabulation and tie-breaking procedures. Numerous tie-breaking examples were reviewed.

Mr. Short also provided guidance concerning primary and alternate judge determination and associated tabulation procedures/methods:

- Five judges are designated as primary; the other two judges are alternates.

- Various methods to determine the primary and alternate judges; whatever method is used to determine the primary and alternate judges ensure at least two people are involved in the process!
- Number the judges scorecards 1 – 5 to correspond to the five primary judges.
- Write a big “A” on the alternate judges’ scorecards to remind all that these scorecards is not included in the tabulation process.
- Only the five primary judges’ scorecards are used to determine a winner.
- Contestant placement – highest number of final total points is the first place finisher and so on.
- The contestant placement data is transcribed to the tabulation card for each respective judge in the contestant record of choice block.
- The tabulation process will be done in private with no contestants, coaches, or parents in the same room.
- Don’t sacrifice accuracy for contest expediency!

Contest Rules and Format Discussion

Conference Chairman Ralph Bozella (CO) opened the floor for discussion on any items of concern in the area of contest rules and format. Approved measures from this discussion are noted above in the Conference Recommendations section. Below are the remaining items of discussion.

Department Eligibility

Tony Paternostro (NY) proposed the following rule change, which was voted down by the group:

Contestants must enter competition within the department (state) of their educational institution. If a department (state) does not participate in The American Legion Oratorical Program they may enter within the department (state) they live in with the permission of the department (state) of the educational institution they attend. Contestants can enter competition in only one department (state).

Mr. Paternostro stated, “National material is sent to high schools throughout the country. In New York, we produce our own brochure that follows the national rules, but also has particular rules and information that will only affect how New York’s contests are conducted. Also, there are many students now that are crossing boundaries and getting their high school education in other states other than where they live. Even though we all follow the National rules we all have some changes to conform to our areas. I fell we need to have a national starting point for all our contestants. This will also eliminate a contestant from picking and choosing which state they would have a better chance of advancing.”

Speech and Hearing Impairment

John Miller (DC) offered a discussion about the possibility of participation in the contest by speech and hearing impaired students. Oratorical Contest Program Manager Colin Short (IN) informed the group that he spoke with Adam Jacobi of the National Forensic League (NFL) to find out what the NFL does in these situations. The NFL consults the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) to determine what accommodations, such as an interpreter, it would be willing to allow the contestant with which to compete. Also, Mr. Short informed the group that he had spoken with the National Judge Advocate who said that we should allow participation for all eligible students, but that, for the time being, the rules should not be modified to accommodate speech and hearing impaired students.

New "48-Hour Rule"

Oratorical Contest Program Manager Colin Short (IN) informed the group of the new "48-hour rule" which states that "Department chairmen are required to review all judges scorecards from the department final within forty-eight (48) hours to ensure that the appropriate winner was certified based on official rules, regulations, scoring, and tie-breaking procedures. If a mistake is found within forty-eight (48) hours, the chairman will contact National Headquarters immediately at (317) 630-1249 for further instruction. Exactly forty-eight (48) hours after department final results are announced, those results become official and cannot be changed."

2013 National Finals Contest Arrangements and Planning

This year's contest will be held at a new location, the Indianapolis Wyndham West.

Contestants, chaperones and staff will arrive on Friday, April 19. Contestants from the Departments of Alaska, France, and Hawaii may elect to arrive one day earlier due to the distance they travel. In view of the constant state of flux of airline schedules, ticket prices, and additional fees and surcharges, Mr. Short asked for the assistance of the chairpersons in advising their department winners to be flexible with regards to travel to Indianapolis.

Air travel for contestants and their chaperones will continue to be arranged by National Headquarters staff. An additional form continues to be included on the back of the Certification of Department Winner form to assist family members and others in making airline reservations to attend the contest.

Mr. Short further stressed that National Headquarters must grant approval for those contestants who live within 400 miles and elect to drive to the national finals. The National Americanism Commission is somewhat flexible with this requirement on a case-by-case basis. Those contestants and chaperones that drive must arrive at the contest site no later than 4:00 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time.

The quarter-final and semi-final contests will be held April 20, with the national championship contest being held mid-morning April 21. An awards luncheon will follow to

honor and recognize all contestants. Catholic Mass and the Protestant service will be held Saturday evening for the attendees. The contestants and their chaperones will depart Indianapolis late Sunday afternoon.

Mr. Short informed the group that once again for the 2013 contest year, the Certification of Department Winner form is the only form that the department adjutants and chairpersons will receive. The Contestant Biography, Certificate of Original Effort, Waiver of Claim, and the Contest Arrival Date Understanding and Agreement forms will be electronically transmitted or mailed to the contestant immediately after receipt of the Certification of Department Winner form. This procedure has virtually alleviated the usual every year occurrences of lost forms and has significantly reduced the delays in getting the completed forms from the contestants back to National Headquarters. The certification form was included in the conference packet.

Short reported that the Certification of Department Winner form and a cover memorandum will be e-mailed to department adjutants and oratorical chairpersons by the middle of November. Also included in this mailing will be the various contest forms that can be reproduced locally, numbered time cards and the assigned topics.

Short stressed that departments are to have their final contest completed no later than March 25, 2013. Short also reported that there are usually two or three departments each year that have their contest after the established deadline date, which presents no difficulties.

Contestants will once again be required to submit a digitized copy of their prepared oration, **however will no longer need to submit a paper copy for the 2013 National Finals.** Failure by the contestant to submit a copy of their prepared oration will result in their disqualification from the national finals. The digitized copies make for ease of including the orations on The American Legion's contest website and publications.

Contestants and chaperones will continue to receive a daily per diem of \$18 based on \$4.50/quarter day.

The mileage rate of \$.18/mile will also remain the same for the year and will be paid to either the contestant or chaperone not both. Mileage will be paid to those authorized to drive to the contest and for travel between home and the airport for one round trip only.

Short also extended an open invitation to all to either attend or serve on the national finals contest staff.

Future National Finals Contest Date

- April 4-6, 2014
- April 10-12 or 17-19, 2015 - tentative

- April 8-10 or 15-17, 2016 - tentative
- April 21-23, 2017 - tentative

Future Americanism / Oratorical Conference Dates

- Sept. 27-29, 2013

The conference was recessed at 3:30 p.m.

Attendees enjoyed a conference reception held at the Sheraton Indianapolis City Centre Hotel hosted by Maggi Van Dyk, President of S.A. Van Dyk, Inc. in honor of all program volunteers. All enjoyed the evening of good fellowship and camaraderie.

Sunday, September 30, 2012 Panorama Ballroom, Sheraton Indianapolis City Centre Hotel

Following Catholic Mass and Protestant Worship Services, Conference Chairman Bozella called the Sunday session to order at 9:00 a.m.

Victor DeSloover (IA) offered the Invocation.

David King (KY) led the Pledge of Allegiance.

A Post Everlasting Ceremony, led by Conference Chairman Ralph Bozella, Victor DeSloover (IA), Phillip Heller (CA), and Tony Paternostro (NY), remembered comrades William Wilkin (CA, 1983-88), Larry Fredrickson (CA, 1968-69,90-91,95-97), and Richard Hochbrueckner (NY, 1979-2003), who passed away in the past year.

Final Comments – Colin Short

Mr. Short thanked everyone for a most successful contest year and conference and wished them continued success for their 2013 contests. He asked the conference attendees to contact him if they ever needed assistance regarding the contest. Mr. Short reiterated his request that attention be given to department websites so that valuable information can be found by potential contestants.

For the Good of The American Legion

There were no additional comments or questions.

Final Comments – Ralph Bozella

Conference Chairman Bozella also wished everyone success for the coming year and thanked all for a most successful conference.

Bozella said, “We came here yesterday with four major objectives for the conference. First, we were here to educate ourselves more about the contest. I would say that I think we have done that. Our people in the field look upon us as the subject matter experts. We talked about how we cannot be the experts unless we ourselves are thoroughly familiar with the rules and procedures. I think that we have learned a lot about that as well. We also discussed that we should be able to convey our knowledge to our people at all levels that are involved in the contests. Second, we need to continue to stress contest uniformity and consistency. Third, we stressed the need to improve and increase contest participation. Finally, we reviewed the procedures at the department and national level to ensure that we are aware of some of the potential issues that may arise.”

Chairman Bozella also thanked Clara Jewell, Americanism and Children & Youth Administrative Assistant, for all of her amazing efforts in making the conference run so well.

Following the salute to the colors, the conference was adjourned at 9:40 a.m.

CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) That a new Judges Feedback form be added to the National Finals judges materials. This form will also be made available to departments if they desire to use it. The form enables judges to provide positive and constructive feedback to contestants which they can use to improve their performance from year to year. There had been many requests for a feedback form from contestants as this is common in National Forensic League and other competitions. Department of Missouri Oratorical Chair Duane Benton submitted a design that was unanimously endorsed by the conference for use at the National Finals.
- 2) That the judges scorecard criteria content be changed immediately from descriptive words (example: “Voice and Diction”) to question form (example: “Did the student use volume, rate, pitch, and diction effectively?”). Department of Missouri Oratorical Chair Duane Benton submitted a design that was unanimously endorsed by the conference.
- 3) That transportation be provided by The American Legion from the site of the National Finals, the Wyndham Indianapolis West, to downtown Indianapolis during the weekend of the National Finals for contestants and chaperones who wish to explore downtown in their free time.
- 4) That the Americanism Commission consider a change of venue for the 2015 National Finals and beyond so that the contest can be held in downtown Indianapolis. It is the feeling of the chairpersons that part of the quality, attractiveness, allure, and excitement of the contest is its proximity to downtown and the location of the hosting hotel.
- 5) That the Americanism Commission consider changing the current rule, which states, “High school students that graduate early during the school year are eligible to compete **if they**

are not enrolled in a college, university, trade school or other institution of higher learning at the time of the department finals contest,” to eliminate the highlighted wording so that anyone who is enrolled in high school at the beginning of the school year is eligible to compete in the contest that year regardless of when they graduate or if they enroll in a college.

STAFF ACTION ITEMS

National Staff will complete the following staff action items:

- Distribute the new Judges Feedback form, via e-mail, to those Oratorical Chairs who desire to have it used in their contest.
- Distribute the new Judge’s Scorecard, which includes the approved question format to each Oratorical Chair via e-mail.