

ORATORICAL CONTEST COMMITTEE

Carl M. Ostergaard, Jr., Chairman

The 87th annual American Legion Department of New Jersey's High School Oratorical Scholarship Program, a *Constitutional Speech Contest*, was conducted at the Joyce Kilmer Post 25 in Milltown on March 28, 2025. This year's program had participation from all five of the Department's oratorical districts and the competition was intense as the quality of all of the speakers was excellent.

Diya Ranjan, a senior at the Woodbridge Academy Magnet School, sponsored by Middlesex County's Woodbridge Post 87, finished first and was awarded \$4,000 in scholarship funds. Diya was invited to compete in the national quarter finals on May 15, 2026, at Hillsdale College, in Hillsdale, Michigan, and will be awarded another \$2,000 with an all-expense paid trip by national to compete in the National Oratorical Scholarship Competition. The title of her speech was *Civic Participation: Our Greatest Duty to our Nation*. We wish Diya continued success at the National Oratorical Competition.

Andrew Hadley, this year's first runner up, is a senior at Donavan Catholic High School, and was sponsored by the George P. Vanderveer Post 129 in Toms River, Ocean County. He was awarded \$2,500 and is the alternate for the national competition. Andrew's speech was titled *Democracy Drowning*. In 2025, Andrew placed third at the Department Oratorical finals and had an excellent repeat performance this year.

Liana Lemoine, a sophomore at Cedar Creek High School, was sponsored by the Kenneth B. Hawkins Post 61 in Atlantic City, Atlantic County. She was awarded \$2,000. Her speech was called *We the People*.

Morgan Covington, a senior at Union High School, was sponsored by the Connecticut Farms Post 35 in Union, Union County. She was awarded \$1,000. Her speech was called *The Hidden Amendment: The Reserved Powers*.

Ellie Kim, a junior at Northern Valley Old Tappan High School, was sponsored by Norwood Post 272 in Norwood, Bergen County. She was awarded \$1,000, and her speech was called *The Electoral College*.

I would like to thank this year's Oratorical Contest Committee for a job well done and to everyone in the Legion Family who attended the competition. **Judges** – Ocean County DEC **Anthony Gladden** (Post 455 – Ocean), Morris County DEC **Will Kramer** (Post 43 – Morris), Past American Legion Auxiliary President **Colleen Lopez**, Department Service Officer **Judith Morales** (Post 227 – Passaic), American Legion Auxiliary President **Trish Muller**, and Department Finance Officer **Larry Platt** (Post 5 – Union). **Tabulators** – Past Department Commander **Dan Dunn** (Post 87, Middlesex), Past NEC and Past Department Commander **Berley Hanna, Jr.** (Post 499 – Union), and NEC and Past Department Commander **Eugene O'Grady** (Post 232 – Ocean). **Timekeepers** – Middlesex County Adjutant **James Demarest** (Post 65 – Middlesex) and Union County Adjutant **Geraldine McManus, DDS** (Post 228 – Union). **Holding Room Monitors, Ushers and Escorts** – Department Vice Commander **Joel Bloom** (Post 211 –

Middlesex), Middlesex County Vice Commander **Helena Gaither** (Post 306 – Middlesex), Middlesex County Vice Commander **Jeff Golden** (Post 87 – Middlesex), Middlesex County Vice Commander **Richard Sturtevant, Jr.** (Post 306 – Middlesex), and our amazing **American Legion Police** under the leadership of **Dennis Smith** (Post 528 – Warren). Department Chaplain **Rev. Robert Horn** (Post 348 – Ocean) delivered the invocation, and **Historians** – Past Department Commander and Department Chief Information Officer **Steve Fisher** (Post 286 – Camden), Middlesex County DEC **Gary Cooper** (Post 401 – Middlesex), and Department Historian **Mike Smith** (Post 174 – Passaic).

Finally, I would like to thank my Vice Chairman **Sophia Dmoch** (Post 310 – Bergen), Atlantic County DEC **Patricia Tatum** (Post 61 – Atlantic), and Department Programs Specialist **Tammie Abdrabou** for all of their hard work in making our program a success and highlighting our wonderful student orators. I also want to thank our host for the Department's competition, Commander **Ron Dixon** (Post 25 – Middlesex) of the Joyce Kilmer Post in Milltown for another wonderful job opening up your magnificent post to our Department and our orators.

This year I would like to highlight **Phil Wien** (Post 66 – Burlington) as the **2026 Oratorical Legionnaire of the Year**. Phil is the current Oratorical Chairman for Oratorical District 4 and this year he is celebrating his 32nd year of supporting the Department of New Jersey's Oratorical Program. I wanted to highlight Phil and thank him for his many years of service to our American Legion and to the generations of children in our State. Thank you, Sir, for your continued service!

In closing, I would like to thank Department Commander **Dan Channel** (Post 209 – Union) for the appointment as your Department Oratorical Chairman. I had big shoes to fill and it was an honor to serve and to lead this committee.