

VFW 2026 National Youth Scholarship Winners Announced

Maine high school senior takes home top \$35,000 scholarship

April 11, 2026

PHILADELPHIA – Earlier today the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) proudly named the national winners of its 2025-2026 Voice of Democracy® and Patriot’s Pen® youth scholarship competitions as it presented more than \$176,000 in national scholarships and awards.

For the first time in two decades, the national winners were announced at a special 79th annual Parade of Winners ceremony at the historic Union League of Philadelphia

(<https://www.facebook.com/VFWFans/videos/810588638297398>) during the winners’ trip to Founding Forward’s Spirit of America Youth Leadership experience at Valley Forge. The trip, awarded to every VFW Department (state) winner, was sponsored by Twisted X (<https://twistedx.com/>).



VFW Junior Vice Commander Glenn Umberger Jr. and VFW Auxiliary President Lois Callahan present Voice of Democracy first place winner Olivia Drewniak (left) with her \$35,000 scholarship, and Patriot’s Pen first place winner Andrew Ge (right) with his \$5,000 award during the 2026 Parade of Winners on April 11, 2026, at the Union League in Philadelphia.

VFW Junior Vice Commander Glenn Umberger Jr. and VFW Auxiliary President Lois Callahan were joined by Twisted X Senior Director of Sales Clayton Smith to announce this year’s winners, presenting the national first place Voice of Democracy top \$35,000 T.C. Selman Memorial Scholarship prize to Olivia Drewniak.

Following the announcement, Drewniak delivered her winning essay (https://youtu.be/FP_k3OSnJTw) on this year’s thought-provoking theme, “How Are You Showing Patriotism and Support for Our Country?” Read her winning essay (<https://vfw-org-hqagarhxahbybyd9.z01.azurefd.net/-/media/VFWSite/Files/Media-and-Events/Articles/2026/2026VODFirstPlaceWinnerDrewniakME.pdf?v=1&d=20260320T171243Z&la=en>). Drewniak, a high school senior at Morse High School in Bath, Maine, was sponsored by VFW Post 7738 in Bath.

Second place winner Kylie Saltzman, a senior at Lower Cape May Regional High School in Cape May, New Jersey, was awarded the \$21,000 Charles Kuralt Memorial Scholarship. She was sponsored by VFW Post 386 in Cape May. **Abigail Smith, a junior homeschool student in Bloomington, Indiana, was sponsored by VFW Post 604 and its Auxiliary in Bloomington and received the third place \$15,000 VFW Scholarship.**

The Parade of Winners presented \$176,500 in national scholarships, with this year's contest awarding more than \$1.6 million combined at the local, Department and national levels. All Department winners received a college scholarship worth at least \$1,000.

Also featured during today's awards ceremony was the 2026 Patriot's Pen first place winner, Andrew Ge. Sponsored by VFW Post 75 in Danville, California, Ge was awarded the top first place Patriot's Pen award of \$5,000 and delivered his winning essay (<https://youtu.be/Zpiulg7HuqA>) addressing the same theme, "How Are You Showing Patriotism and Support for Our Country?" Read his winning essay ([//vfw-org-hqagarhxahbybyd9.z01.azurefd.net/-/media/VFWSite/Files/Media-and-Events/Articles/2026/2026PatriotsPenFirstPlaceWinnerGeCA.pdf?v=1&d=20260320T174750Z&la=en](https://vfw-org-hqagarhxahbybyd9.z01.azurefd.net/-/media/VFWSite/Files/Media-and-Events/Articles/2026/2026PatriotsPenFirstPlaceWinnerGeCA.pdf?v=1&d=20260320T174750Z&la=en)).

The Patriot's Pen second place winner, Michael Sieniawski, sponsored by VFW Post 1337 located in Mount Prospect, Illinois, will receive a \$4,000 award, while third place winner Brandon Darnell, sponsored by VFW Post 5738 located in Clare, Michigan, will receive a \$3,500 award.

The VFW is now accepting entries for its 80th annual Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen competitions. To win a share of nearly \$2.7 million in scholarships and awards, middle and high school students must answer "What a Veteran Taught Me About America." The deadline to enter is Oct. 31, 2026. To read more about the contests or download the entry form, visit vfw.org/YouthScholarships.

See the complete list of all 2026 Voice of Democracy winners ([//vfw-org-hqagarhxahbybyd9.z01.azurefd.net/-/media/VFWSite/Files/Media-and-Events/Articles/2026/2026-Voice-ofDemocracy-Scholarship-Listing.pdf?v=1&d=20260402T135611Z&la=en](https://vfw-org-hqagarhxahbybyd9.z01.azurefd.net/-/media/VFWSite/Files/Media-and-Events/Articles/2026/2026-Voice-ofDemocracy-Scholarship-Listing.pdf?v=1&d=20260402T135611Z&la=en))

and for Patriot's Pen

([//vfw-org-hqagarhxahbybyd9.z01.azurefd.net/-/media/VFWSite/Files/Media-and-Events/Articles/2026/2026-Patriots-PenScholarship-Listing.pdf?v=1&d=20260331T140054Z&la=en](https://vfw-org-hqagarhxahbybyd9.z01.azurefd.net/-/media/VFWSite/Files/Media-and-Events/Articles/2026/2026-Patriots-PenScholarship-Listing.pdf?v=1&d=20260331T140054Z&la=en)).