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CONTACT:

Emily Stack Davis

517-803-3745

PR@hillsdale.edu

Hillsdale College Awards Sophomore Jon Hovance the 2025 Edward Everett Prize in Oratory

Students competed for cash prizes with speeches on ‘Education and the Republic.’

HILLSDALE, Mich. — Hillsdale College’s Office of the Provost and Department of Rhetoric and Media hosted the annual Edward Everett Oratory Competition on March 6. The theme of this year’s competition was “Education and the Republic.” This is the 25th year that the competition has been held. Jon Hovance ’27 won the first-place prize of \$3,000.

“The Everett competition requires students to practice thoughtful deliberation, rational argument, and civil debate about complex and important topics,” said Professor of Rhetoric Kirstin Kiledal, who oversees the competition. “These skills are essential for a free and self-governing people, and this contest is one way of preparing students to become the citizens and statesmen our country needs.”

Five finalists presented their speeches to a panel of judges that included Hillsdale College President Larry P. Arnn; Daniel Coupland, dean of the Graduate School of Classical Education and professor of education; and Clark Judge, former speechwriter to presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush.

In his winning oration, Hovance spoke on the transformative power of education, arguing that schools ought to abandon the Progressive philosophy that views it as solely for the sake of employment.

“American history is filled with the idea that education isn’t just about report cards and diplomas, it’s about developing one’s soul,” Hovance said. “It’s a beautiful idea, but just walk into the average public school and you’ll realize it’s one we haven’t lived up to. And that’s my concern. I fear that somewhere between the founders’ ideal education, and today’s real

education, we've lost its power. And in doing so, we've deprived our children of the most valuable resource we have."

Nina Morey '27 won second place, and Patrick McDonald '26 won third. The other finalists were Ariel McDowell '27 and Alexa Travis '27.

Through an endowment from the Saul N. Silbert Charitable Trust, Hillsdale College hosts the annual Edward Everett Oratory Contest to encourage Hillsdale College undergraduate students to hone the craft of public discourse and reasoned debate. Undergraduate students in good standing compete for prizes of \$1,000 for third place, \$2,000 for second place, and \$3,000 for first place. The first-place winner also receives a historic artifact associated with Edward Everett, the 19th-century American orator who is the competition's namesake, gifted by a friend of the College.

For a headshot of Hovance, click [here](#). For photos from the competition, click [here](#). For photos of Hillsdale College, click [here](#). For a high-resolution copy of the Hillsdale College clocktower logo, click [here](#).

About Hillsdale College

Hillsdale College is an independent, nonsectarian, Christian liberal arts college located in southern Michigan. Founded in 1844, the College has built a national reputation through its classical liberal arts core curriculum and its principled refusal to accept federal or state taxpayer subsidies, even indirectly in the form of student grants or loans. It also conducts an outreach effort promoting civil and religious liberty, including a free monthly speech digest, *Imprimis*, with a circulation of more than 6.8 million. For more information, visit hillsdale.edu.

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