



HILLSDALE COLLEGE

PURSuing TRUTH · DEFENDING LIBERTY SINCE 1844

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 6, 2026

CONTACT:

Emily Stack Davis

517-803-3745

PR@hillsdale.edu

Follow [@HillsdalePR](https://twitter.com/HillsdalePR)

Hillsdale College Awards Patrick McDonald '26 the 2026 Edward Everett Prize in Oratory

Students competed for cash prizes with speeches on 'Artificial Intelligence — Paradise and Paradise Lost.'

HILLSDALE, Mich. — Hillsdale College's Office of the Provost and Department of Rhetoric and Media hosted the annual Edward Everett Oratory Competition on March 3. The theme of this year's competition was "Artificial Intelligence — Paradise and Paradise Lost." This is the 26th year that the competition has been held. Patrick McDonald '26 won the first-place prize of \$3,000.

"The Everett competition is one way that Hillsdale educates students for self-government," said Professor of Rhetoric Kirstin Kiledal, who oversees the competition. "It cultivates thoughtful deliberation, rational argument, and civil debate about complex and important topics, which are essential skills for citizens of a free republic."

Five finalists presented their speeches to a panel of judges that included Hillsdale College President Larry P. Arnn; entrepreneur and motivational speaker Don Tocco; and Clark Judge, former speechwriter to presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush.

In his winning oration, McDonald described a lawyer who had begun using AI to draft his legal briefs — and then realized he couldn't explain the reasoning himself.

"He was becoming worse at the very reasoning that made him a good lawyer because he was outsourcing his profession to technology," McDonald said. "The problem wasn't that the AI was bad, but that it was too good. And that is the paradox that AI presents: it's becoming so effective and efficient at doing our work for us that it's making us worse at being ourselves. And so, just

as that lawyer had to be wary of outsourcing his profession, we must be wary of outsourcing our judgment.”

Jon Hovance '27 won second place, and Ariel McDowell '27 won third. The other finalists were Gabriel Zylstra '28 and Alex Mooney '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 McDonald, 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 7.5 million. For more information, visit hillsdale.edu.

###