



## **VFWCA Announces Statewide Winner of Voice of Democracy Scholarship**

Winning Essay, *“How Are You Showing Patriotism and Support for Our Country?”* Advances to Nationals for \$35,000 Scholarship

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**SACRAMENTO, CA** – Irene Pan, a twelfth grader from Fullerton, California, was named the first-place winner of the California statewide Voice of Democracy Scholarship Program by the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of California. She is sponsored by Post 3173 in District 2. As the state winner, Irene will continue to compete at the national level for a \$35,000 scholarship for higher education at an American university, college or vocational/technical school.

Irene will be escorted to the national finals by VFW Department of California State Commander Dave Kuta and VFW Auxiliary Department of California State President Kathleen Okolski. She is also invited to participate in the Founding Forward Spirit of America Leadership trip to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania as a guest of the VFW National Organization.

The Voice of Democracy program requires the entrants to write and record a three-to-five-minute speech on a patriotic theme. This year’s theme is *“How Are You Showing Patriotism and Support for Our Country?”* and students from all over the world entered the program for a chance to win various scholarships. Winners were determined at multiple levels, before making their way to the state finals. Each state will then submit its finalist, and a national winner will be awarded this spring. About 25,000 high school students enter the competition nationally.

The scholarship winner was announced during the annual VFWCA Voice of Democracy Banquet, alongside the winner of the Patriots Pen program. Finalists from each district were invited with their families to attend the banquet and connect with VFWCA members and leadership.

Irene’s winning audio essay explored the true definition of each line of The Pledge of Allegiance and her own deep connection to those words and phrases as a declaration of patriotism and

support for our country. She shared her essay as a speech during the event following her announcement as the winner.

“The Voice of Democracy Program is an opportunity for the VFWCA to connect with our youth, who are the future of our Nation. The students who participate in these programs are showing their desire to be leaders, and their commitment to civic engagement for the benefit of our society,” said VFWCA State Commander, Dave Kuta “We are proud to encourage and support the brilliant young minds that are working towards a bright future for us all.”

The winner of the Department of California’s Patriot’s Pen youth essay contest was also recognized during the Voice of Democracy Banquet. Andrew GE who attends eighth grade in San Ramon, was awarded the scholarship. He was sponsored by Post 75 in District 10.

For more information about the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of California, please visit [vfwca.org](http://vfwca.org).

*The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. is a nonprofit veterans' service organization composed of combat veterans and those who currently serve on active duty or in the Guard and Reserves. Founded in 1899 and chartered by Congress in 1936, the VFW is the nation's largest organization of war veterans and is one of its oldest veterans' organizations. With 2.1 million members located in 7,700 VFW Posts worldwide, the VFW and its Auxiliaries are dedicated to "honor the dead by helping the living" through veterans service, legislative initiatives, youth scholarships, Buddy Poppy and national military service programs. Annually, the VFW and its Auxiliaries contribute more than 11 million hours of community service to the nation.*

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