

# PHS SENIOR AIDAN BUSCH WINS VFW VOICE OF DEMOCRACY ESSAY CONTEST



*Aidan is pictured (center) with VFW officials after winning at the state level. (From left to right): Brian Duffy, VFW National Commander-in-Chief; Richard Barnes, from Ill. District 4; Aidan; Joseph Wein, from Ill. District 4; and Dave Stout, Commander of the Department of Illinois.*

When Palatine High School senior Aidan Busch was looking for ways to help pay for college, he found a scholarship contest that would end up creating opportunities and friendships he never imagined.

Aidan was a winner in the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) 2017 National Voice of Democracy Program and recipient of the \$2,000 Department of Kentucky and Auxiliary Brian Duffy and Marion Watson Scholarship. He won the district and statewide levels of the competition and traveled to Washington D.C. as a finalist for at the national level. He was sponsored by VFW Post 1337 in Mount Prospect, Ill.

“I am honored and humbled at the same time,” Aidan said. “The VFW is a large organization and they do very good work for veterans. To have their endorsement was a very cool thing. It is a huge honor.”

The VFW is a nonprofit veterans service organization comprised of eligible veterans and military service members from the active, guard and reserve forces. The theme of this year’s essay contest was “my responsibility to America.” Aidan had to not only write the essay, but also present the essay in speech format.

“This gave me a better empathy and greater understanding of veterans and what they have contributed and sacrificed for all of us,” Aidan said. “You hear about veterans’ issues on the news or from your neighbor who served, but when you have face-to-face, extended conversations with veterans, it gives you a perspective of how fortunate we are to live where we do.”



Aidan poses with other scholarship recipients on the last night of the Washington D.C. trip.

Aidan said the whole experience was “mind-opening.” He said he had the pleasure of meeting veterans and gaining friendships with people all over the world.

“I now have friends in all 50 states, Bahrain, Germany, and Puerto Rico, which is a cool thing that came out of this experience,” he said. “I have been in contact with them and we might all meet up over the summer, too.”

In the future, Aidan hopes to study political science or international relations. He is in the process of selecting a university. He will be recognized at a District 211 Board of Education Meeting later this year.

For more information about the VFW contest, please visit the [website](#).

Aidan’s essay is published below:

*When I was seven years old, I made my first dollar. I remember less about how I made it and more about being incredibly anxious to spend it. I couldn’t wait to buy something to call my own, a possession that was mine, purchased with my own hard-earned funds. I didn’t realize at the time, however, that not everything can be purchased with a piece of green paper graced with the likeness of George Washington.*

*Some things can be bought, while others must be paid for. For instance, it’s easy enough to go to the grocery store and buy a loaf of bread. No one denies the fact that it is a simple matter to purchase a hammer and box of nails from the hardware store. One can buy an American flag or star-spangled bunting without too much difficulty. However, some things cannot be purchased with a swipe of a credit card. Some things are not readily accessible in Aisle 4 of the supermarket, between refried beans and Tabasco sauce. Liberty is one of these things. Liberty cannot be placed in a shopping cart, or casually tossed in your trunk to take home. No, Liberty is unique in that you cannot buy it. It is something that has been paid for by others. More specifically, veterans, and those who have laid down their lives in service of freedom. You cannot simply “get” liberty by filling out a mail-order form and putting a stamp on it. People have died, paying the ultimate price, so that I may live and enjoy my liberty. They gave up their opportunity to make choices and live their lives free of worry and persecution so that I, someone who has never known that struggle, may enjoy Liberty.*

Liberty.

Patrick Henry is famous for his "Give me Liberty or give me Death" speech. But If I may be so bold, I would revise this statement. I would change it to "Liberty, because of death." When I say death I don't mean the sad kind, though death certainly is a melancholy affair. No, I mean sacrifice, the willing substitution of a life, an American life, so that I may live an existence of freedom and Liberty. Those who have paid have missed some of life's most important moments, not being present for things that seem incomprehensible to miss to the average citizen. Events such as the birth of a child, the death of a parent, a daughter's graduation, a son's birthday party, supporting a spouse through an illnesses, teaching their child to throw a football, swing a bat or ride a bike. Missing opportunities to watch that squeaky first fifth grade band concert, or make countless trips to and from the soccer fields. They have missed these major or seemingly minor life opportunities so that I may enjoy them without fear or worry.

This is where I am responsible. Being American is unique in that each and every one of us is standing on ground stained with the blood of patriots. Many of us do not realize that our weekly trip to the grocery store is possible only because those who came before us, and fight for us, have died to make it possible. In some countries, one must kiss the entire family goodbye before leaving the house because they do not know if they will return. In America, we have the relative fortune of forgetting that we do not have these luxuries for free. They have been paid for. It is my responsibility to refuse to take these liberties for granted. It is my responsibility to ensure that every death and every act of service by an American, from March 5, 1770 to the day I die, is not wasted.

I can honor these sacrifices in a very practical way by the way I conduct myself on a daily basis. It is my personal responsibility to use these freedoms afforded to me at such a high price in a responsible manner that reflects the original sacrifice. Everyday opportunities abound, like running ahead to hold the door for a young mother pushing a stroller, or helping an elderly neighbor take out their trash. Removing my hat, placing my hand on my heart and standing tall when the national anthem is played. By putting others first, I am honoring what has already been done for me.

It is my responsibility to act as if I am walking on hallowed ground, every step paid for by the blood of Americans. It is the veterans, and those who have served our dear country in life and death, who deserve our undying gratitude and attention.

My responsibility is to remember. To remember those few, the white, black, Latino, Asian, male, female, and American few, who have given up their liberty, their peace, to give me mine. If we forget the sacrifice of these few, we will become an ungrateful nation incapable of appreciating the true value of our liberty. Because after all, it was not purchased, but paid for.

Essay by Aidan Busch