

As America Turns 250, Volunteers Fight Cynicism With Constitution Education

[Fred Lucas](#) | January 24, 2026



A Florida group seeking to boost youth knowledge of the U.S. Constitution is marking its 10th anniversary on the same year that America turns 250 years old.

The [U.S. Constitution Scholarship Foundation](#), a nonprofit educational and scholarship organization promoting understanding of the Constitution, was founded in 2016 to provide classes and offer scholarships and awards to students in Nassau County, Florida, in the city of Fernandina Beach.

Since the foundation began, the organization has dispensed almost \$400,000 in scholarships and awards. Beyond just prize winners, some 400 students graduated from the University of US program over the last decade, said the foundation's board member Kris Cortes.

"As we celebrate our nation's 250th anniversary this year, it is fitting to consider what are some things we can do as a country to increase the probability that our republic continues on for at least another 250 years," Cortes told The Daily Signal.

"I would submit that increasing our citizenry's knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the U.S. Constitution, our Founding Fathers, and our American heritage could certainly help."

The group will be holding [U.S. Constitution Bowl](#) on April 16. It's similar to the old "College Bowl" format, where student teams in a quiz format hit a buzzer with their answer. The event is a competition with teams of four students from four county public high schools, and one team for homeschool students. The students answer questions about the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the Supreme Court.

The four first place team members in the Constitution Bowl each receive \$2,000 scholarships, with second place and third place team members receiving \$1,000 and \$250 scholarships, respectively.

This year, the program has about 100 students participating, up from about 70 the prior year. When it began a decade ago, fewer than 30 students were involved, Cortes said.

The foundation is composed of volunteers but has drawn some [big-name speakers](#), including Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, former Heritage Foundation President Kay James, and former Attorney General Edwin Meese. Yale Law professor Akhil Amar, a national left-leaning commentator, was also among the speakers.

The foundation was started to address concerns over constitutional literacy. An [Annenberg Public Policy Center survey](#) last year found almost one-third of adults could not identify three branches of government. A Pew Research Center survey in 2023 showed that [only 44%](#) of adults knew that U.S. senators serve six-year terms.

"There should be a more concentrated effort for these future adults," Cortes said. She added, "Young people are cynical about trust in government. Participation in voting is much less among young people."

Cortes and her family moved from the Chicago area to Nassau County, Florida in 2020. Her daughter, Christina, wrote a winning essay about gerrymandering four years ago. Her son Dominic is participating in the University of U.S. and the Constitution Bowl this year.

Cortes said she would like to see the template used elsewhere.

"We hope that programs like ours which strive to bring the Constitution to life, will inspire young people to become more engaged in public policy and participate in civic life as educated voters," Cortes said.

The University of US is the [flagship program](#) of the foundation. Juniors and seniors who pass the final exam get a certificate of graduation, and will be eligible to compete for five scholarships in the essay competition.

Students from the four Nassau County public high schools, as well as homeschooled students, attended classes with the "university" that include ["Amendments to the Constitution," and the "Federalist Papers."](#) Teachers led the classes in full costume, portraying Alexander Hamilton and James Madison, authors of the Federalist Papers.

Cortes recalled sitting in a University of US session that her daughter was participating.

"It was fabulous. So I started to volunteer and attending the adult speaker forums, which are wonderful," she said. "I was then asked to join the board a couple of years ago."

"If we look at the history of republics that have survived over long periods of time, there are common aspects that lead to success," she added. "And for America, I agree with something that Sam Adams once said: 'If virtue and knowledge are diffused among the people, they will never be enslaved. This will be their great security.'"