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Wyoming Students Selected for United States Senate Youth Program
Students Headed to Washington, D. C. and to Receive \$10,000 Scholarship

January 09, 2024, Washington, D.C. —The United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) announces that high school students Mr. Casey J. Dean Toner and Ms. Grace H. Zhou will join Senator John Barrasso and Senator Cynthia Lummis in representing Wyoming during the 62nd annual USSYP Washington Week, to be held March 2 — 9, 2024. Casey Toner of Glenrock and Grace Zhou of Laramie were selected from among the state's top student leaders to be part of the 104 national student delegation. Each delegate will also receive a \$10,000 college scholarship for undergraduate study.

The USSYP was created by Senate Resolution 324 in 1962 and has been sponsored by the Senate and fully funded by The Hearst Foundations since inception. Originally proposed by Senators Kuchel, Mansfield, Dirksen and Humphrey, the Senate leadership of the day, the impetus for the program as stated in Senate testimony is "to increase young Americans' understanding of the interrelationships of the three branches of government, learn the caliber and responsibilities of federally elected and appointed officials, and emphasize the vital importance of democratic decision making not only for America but for people around the world."

Each year this extremely competitive merit-based program provides the most outstanding high school students - two from each state, the District of Columbia and the Department of Defense Education Activity - with an intensive week-long study of the federal government and the people who lead it. The overall mission of the program is to help instill within each class of USSYP student delegates more profound knowledge of the American political process and a lifelong commitment to public service. In addition to the program week, The Hearst Foundations provide each student with a \$10,000 undergraduate college scholarship with encouragement to continue coursework in government, history and public affairs. All expenses for Washington Week are also provided by The Hearst Foundations; as stipulated in Senate Resolution 324, no government funds are utilized.

Casey Toner, a junior at Glenrock Jr/Sr High School, serves as the state vice president for the Family, Career and Community Leaders of America organization. He has advocated for Career and Technical Education, including efforts related to the Prep Act and Perkins funding, where he engaged with Wyoming Senators John Barrasso and Cynthia Lummis. His leadership extends to the state level, where he has actively participated in various opportunities within Wyoming's capital, advocating for local bills and participating in Governor Mark Gordon's proclamation signings. Recently approved as a high school intern for the Wyoming Senate, Casey will gain firsthand experience in the workings of state government, providing him with valuable insights into potential future career paths. His future career plans will lead him to attend the University of Wyoming, where he plans to dual major in political science and CTE education. Looking forward, Casey aims to intern in the Wyoming government, absorbing skills and knowledge from representatives at both the state and national levels.

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UNITED STATES SENATE YOUTH PROGRAM

2024 Wyoming Delegate Announcement

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Page -2-

Grace Zhou, a senior at Laramie High School, serves as the Wyoming president of DECA, an organization focused on business and entrepreneurship. She has served as the president of Key Club, vice president of Zonta Club, vice president of marketing in National Honor Society, vice president of community service in Spanish Honor Society, club ambassador of Multicultural Club, class president of Student Council, president of Orchestra Council and team captain of Academic Decathlon. Grace has organized project-based initiatives such as the Red Sand Project which raises awareness about human trafficking and Days for Girls where she helped make feminine hygiene kits to send to third-world countries. She also contributes to local food drives and trash pickups, and volunteers for Interfaith. Grace was awarded the President's Volunteer Service Award Gold Medal. She presented her research at the American Association for Cancer Research and is now applying for a patent. She is currently a legislative intern, and her future includes pursuing a public policy and behavioral economics degree with an emphasis on public health.

Chosen as alternates to the 2024 program were Ms. Emma Pehringer, a resident of Buffalo, who attends Buffalo High School and Mr. Carson Krueger, a resident of Laramie, who attends Laramie High School.

Delegates and alternates are selected by the state departments of education nationwide and the District of Columbia and Department of Defense Education Activity, after nomination by teachers and principals. The chief state school officer for each jurisdiction confirms the final selection. This year's Wyoming delegates and alternates were designated by Mrs. Megan Degenfelder, Superintendent of Public Instruction.

During the program week, the student delegates will attend meetings and briefings with senators, the president, a justice of the Supreme Court, and leaders of cabinet agencies, among others.

In addition to outstanding leadership abilities and a strong commitment to volunteer work, the student delegates rank academically in the top one percent of their states among high school juniors and seniors. Now more than 6,100 strong, alumni of the program continue to excel and develop impressive qualities that are often directed toward public service. Among the many distinguished alumni are: Senator Susan Collins, the first alumnus to be elected U.S. senator; Secretary of Transportation and former Mayor of South Bend Indiana, Pete Buttigieg, the first alumnus to be appointed as a cabinet secretary; former Senator Cory Gardner, the second alumnus to be elected U.S. senator and the first to be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives; former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, the first alumnus to be elected governor; former Chief Judge Robert Henry, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit; former Ambassador to West Germany Richard Burt and former presidential advisors Thomas "Mack" McLarty and Karl Rove. Additional notables include former Lt. Governor of Idaho David Leroy, former Provost of Wake Forest University Rogan Kersh, military officers, members of state legislatures, Foreign Service officers, top congressional staff, healthcare providers and other university educators.

Members of the U. S. Senate Youth Program 2024 annual Senate Advisory Committee are: Senator Catherine Cortez Masto of Nevada, the 2024 USSYP Democratic Co-Chair and Senator John Barrasso, M.D. of Wyoming, the 2024 USSYP Republican Co-Chair. The full USSYP Senate Advisory Committee consists of the vice president of the United States and the Senate majority and minority leaders who annually serve as the program's Honorary Co-Chairs; two senators, one from each party, serving as acting Co-Chairs who each have keynote speaking roles, and an eight-member bipartisan Senate panel, four senators from each party, who lend their names in support. Serving on the Advisory Committee for the upcoming program are: Senator John Fetterman of Pennsylvania, Senator Maggie Hassan of New Hampshire, Senator Edward J. Markey of Massachusetts, Senator Alex Padilla of California, Senator John Boozman of Arkansas, Senator Katie Britt of Alabama, Senator John Hoeven of North Dakota and Senator Thom Tillis of North Carolina.