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South Dakota 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 Ms. Leila Grace Balsiger and Ms. Katie Elizabeth Schulte will join Senator John Thune and Senator Michael Rounds in representing South Dakota during the 62nd annual USSYP Washington Week, to be held March 2 — 9, 2024. Leila Balsiger of Winner and Katie Schulte of Yankton 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.

Leila Balsiger, a senior at Winner High School, serves as the president of the Student Council and is a member of the National Honor Society. She volunteers for Feeding South Dakota, local blood drives, Children's Miracle Network fundraising, Vacation Bible School week at Trinity Lutheran Church, works with disabled individuals and fills bags of food for community members in need. She is team captain in some of the sports she participates in, which include basketball, volleyball, and cheer. Leila plans on attending Grand Canyon University to major in biology with an emphasis in pre-medicine.

Katie Schulte, a senior at Yankton High School, serves as the vice president of the Senior Class. She is a National Honor Society officer and a Student Council representative and is actively involved in her church and community. Throughout high school, she has volunteered at the Yankton Area Banquet, her church's office, The Clothing Closet, Domestic Violence Center, and Kids in the Park. She was also honored to sew a Quilt of Valor for a Vietnam veteran to honor and thank him for his service. In Katie's freshman through junior years she was a consistent presence on the Roll of Excellence. She is a member of the dance team and a sideline cheerleader, winning the 2023 Sideline Cheer Athlete of the Year award. Katie plans to attend college to have a professional career as a physician.

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Chosen as an alternate to the 2024 program was Mr. Jagur Jaxon Parks, a resident of Rapid City, who attends Stevens 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 South Dakota delegates and alternates were designated by Dr. Joseph Graves, Secretary of Education.

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.

For more information please visit: www.ussenateyouth.org

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