

Mike Hanley
Commissioner

P.O. Box 110500
Juneau, AK 99811-0500
education.alaska.gov

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**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT**

Eric Fry
Information Officer

907.465.2851
cell: 907.321.5564
eric.fry@alaska.gov

Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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Alaska Students Named to U.S. Senate Youth Program

JUNEAU -- John Walsworth of Homer and Shanelle Afcan of Marshall have been named Alaska's representatives to the U.S. Senate Youth Program by the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development. Grant Ackerman and Emily Sexton, both of Fairbanks, were named alternates.

Since 1962 the U.S. Senate Youth Program has provided opportunities for academically talented young people with demonstrated leadership abilities to deepen their understanding of America's political process. Participating students are selected for their academic excellence, leadership abilities, and commitment to public service.

"I congratulate Alaska's delegates and alternates to the prestigious United States Senate Youth Program. It was difficult to choose from among so many talented and engaged students," said Alaska Education Commissioner Mike Hanley. "They represent all the students who strive to serve their schools and communities."

Two student delegates from each state, the District of Columbia, and Department of Defense schools will participate in an intensive week-long educational program in Washington, D.C., in March. Students will hear policy addresses from senators, cabinet members, officials of the Departments of State and Defense, and directors of federal agencies. Students will meet a Supreme Court justice. Members of the military serve as mentors.

In addition, each student receives a \$5,000 scholarship. The program, including all expenses for Washington Week, is funded by the Hearst Foundation.

John Walsworth is a senior at Homer High School. John serves as student council vice president, school site council member, and district-wide representative to the Curriculum Review Committee. Other leadership roles include: peer tutoring, varsity basketball team captain, substitute conductor for concert and swing choirs, and first chair trumpet in the symphonic band. John's long-term goal is to attend one of the nation's military academies.

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Shanelle Afcan is a senior at Mt Edgecumbe High School, the state-run boarding school in Sitka. Shanelle serves as student body president and Code of Conduct Committee chair. As a board member of Alaska Youth for Environmental Action, Shanelle serves as a youth organizer and peer trainer. She is a member of the National Honor Society and news editor for the school Radio Club. Shanelle plans to pursue a degree in environmental and political science.

Grant Ackerman is a junior at West Valley High School in Fairbanks. Grant serves as student council vice president and mentor with the Ignition Program. He volunteers with the food bank and World Ice Art Championships. He attended the Federal Service Language Academy, to learn Russian, and the League of Creative Minds at Stanford. He is a recipient of the American Legion Award. When not running or cross country skiing, Grant is developing a website on the importance of international relations for young people.

Emily Sexton is a senior at Monroe Catholic School in Fairbanks. She serves as the regional student government president and is the past president of the statewide Alaska Association of Student Government (AASG). She created the AASG Serves competition, which awards funds to a school that creates innovate and productive community service. Emily has been instrumental in developing teen suicide awareness campaigns.

Alaska students interested in applying for the 2014-2015 program should see www.usenateyouth.org. Applications are generally available in early September.

For more information, contact Program Coordinator Shari Paul at 907-465-6535 or shari.paul@alaska.gov.

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