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

January 12, 2026, Washington, D.C. —The United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) is pleased to announce that high school students Ms. Makaylah Ayanna Barnes Adams and Ms. Elani Trejo will join Senator Richard J. Durbin and Senator Tammy Duckworth in representing Illinois during the 64th annual USSYP Washington Week, to be held March 7 — 14, 2026.

Makaylah Barnes Adams of Decatur and Elani Trejo of Romeoville were selected from among the state's top student leaders. They will join the delegation of 104 outstanding high school students - two from each state, the District of Columbia and the Department of Defense Education Activity - for an intensive week-long study of the federal government and the people who lead it, meeting with Senators, the President, a Supreme Court Justice, and other high-level officials. Each delegate will also receive a \$10,000 undergraduate college scholarship with encouragement to continue coursework in government, history and public affairs.

About the 2026 USSYP Delegates:

Makaylah Adams, a senior at Mt. Zion High School, serves as the National Honor Society Vice President. She is also the Vice President of Young Leaders in Action, a nonprofit based in Macon County that provides volunteer opportunities and grants, and hosts a leadership conference in Central Illinois. As part of Key Club, she has served as a Lieutenant Governor and Convention Chair, where she has organized and presented at conferences such as the Illinois–Eastern Iowa District Convention. She also participated in Girls Lead, a program led by Lieutenant Governor Julianna Stratton, and was mentored by Shelith Hansbro, the Confidential Assistant to the Director of the Illinois Department of Corrections. She was a research intern at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign through the Army Educational Outreach Program, where she studied the properties of innovative, environmentally friendly battery electrolytes. She loves theatre and participates in marching band, drama club, and a mixed ensemble a cappella group. Makaylah has a passion for sustainability and plans to major in aerospace and nuclear engineering and would like to one day join the Space Force.

Elani Trejo, a senior at Romeoville High School, serves as the President of Student Leadership. She is a Valley View District 365U Board Ambassador, carrying student, family, and staff perspectives to district leadership. As the first Latina to serve in this role, she works to ensure policy discussions reflect the needs of multilingual and underrepresented students. She is a four-year President of Key Club and the Latin American Student Organization, where she grew membership to over 100 students and organized cultural and service programming that fostered inclusion across the school community. Elani contributes to programming through the Dupage County Area Project, assisting efforts that promote youth empowerment and leadership. She has been a catechist and mentored young students in religious studies for four years. As a Changemaker Youth Fellow with the Southwest Suburban Immigrant Project, she participated in immigrant justice and civic engagement initiatives. She deepened her commitment to public service through her internship with Illinois State Representative Dagmara Avelar, where she assisted with legislative research, community outreach, and constituent services. Elani plans to pursue studies in education, with a focus on advancing equitable learning environments.

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Chosen as alternates to the 2026 program were Mr. Drew Jansen, a resident of Highland, who attends Highland High School and Mr. Gage Cobbley, a resident of Gridley, who attends El Paso-Gridley High School.

Delegates and alternates are selected by the state departments of education, including the District of Columbia and the Department of Defense Education Activities, after nomination by teachers and principals. The chief state school officer for each jurisdiction confirms the final selection. This year's Illinois delegates and alternates were designated by Tony Sanders, State Superintendent of Education.

About The United States Senate Youth Program

The 2026 United States Senate Youth Program Co-Chairs are Senator Katie Britt of Alabama and Senator Edward J. Markey of Massachusetts. 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 Barrasso, M.D. of Wyoming, Senator Steve Daines of Montana, Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith of Mississippi, Senator Tim Scott of South Carolina, Senator Catherine Cortez Masto of Nevada, Senator Andy Kim of New Jersey, Senator Angus S. King, Jr. of Maine, and Senator Elissa Slotkin of Michigan.

The USSYP is a competitive, merit-based program created by Senate Resolution 324 in 1962 by the sons of William Randolph Hearst and the Senate leadership of the day - Senators Kuchel, Mansfield, Dirksen, and Humphrey. The USSYP is designed to encourage America's most talented young people to consider public service as an important, life-long, and noble pursuit. Senate Resolution 324 passed unanimously.

The Hearst Foundations have fully funded the program since inception, as stipulated in SR 324, no government funds are utilized.

USSYP alumni now number more than 6,300 and many go on to build legacies of public service. The distinguished alumni include Senator Susan Collins, the first USSYP delegate to be elected U.S. Senator; former Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg, the first to be appointed as a Cabinet Secretary; Representative Sarah McBride, the second to be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives; 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, and former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, the first to be elected Governor.

For more information, please visit ussenateyouth.org

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