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Two New Jersey High School Students Selected for Senate Youth Program

Two New Jersey high school students were recently selected for the United States Senate Youth Program, an annual initiative geared toward educating youngsters in American politics and government.

John Fang, of West Windsor-Plainsboro High School North in Mercer County, and Rachael Massell, of Glassboro High School in Gloucester County, were chosen from a pool of 184 applicants for the program, which begins March 1.

Fang, a senior, and Massell, a junior, will spend the week of March 1 in Washington, DC, participating in a plethora of activities aimed toward honing their leadership skills and nurturing their interest in government issues. The two youths will learn about senatorial procedures, bipartisanship and leadership.

Both students are leaders in their school communities in more ways than one.

Fang, for instance, is a straight-A student involved in musicals, philanthropy and student government. He's been the student council president for the last two years, and a member for four, and he also founded the high school's Model Congress Club. In 2002, Fang was named as a Distinguished Governor's Scholar.

Massell's credentials are equally impressive. She scored a 760 on her SAT Verbal and a 750 on her SAT Math as a sophomore. She is the current student representative for the Glassboro Board of Education. She is also heavily involved in community service, volunteering for the Glassboro Literacy Inspired Through Teens Encouraging Reading (GLITTER) program. In 2001, she volunteered for the James E. McGreevey for Governor campaign.

"Both John Fang and Rachel Massell should be proud of their accomplishments and honored to be part of the Senate Youth Program," Commissioner of Education William L. Librera said. "The Department of Education is certainly proud of them. We encourage them to continue on their successful paths and continue as examples of what all New Jersey students should aspire to be."

The U.S. Senate Youth Program began 41 years ago. Each state is invited to select two high school students to attend the week-long program. The students also receive a \$5,000 scholarship and all expenses in Washington are covered. The program is open to public and private schools.

Last year's activities included: touring the capitol's historic sites, listening to addresses by United States Education Secretary Rod Paige, Secretary of State Colin Powell, and Associate Justice Antonin Scalia. Students last year also met President George W. Bush and participated in a host of ceremonies.

Both Fang and Massell said they planned on taking what they learned in Washington and applying it at their respective schools.

"My participation and entry in the program will only reinforce the respect that I have for my nation and for my dreams," Fang wrote in his application essay. "I believe that my commitment and desire to facilitate and communicate with my community and fellow classmates is reflective of the same commitment that our Senators share in striving to uphold our Constitution and dutifully respect all Americans."

"When I learned of the U.S. Senate Youth Program, I recognized an opportunity to become a better-informed citizen, a chance to further fulfill my thirst for knowledge of how our government system works," Massell wrote in her application essay. The Senate Youth Program is "the foremost opportunity got high school students to experience America's government firsthand, and thus is the best way to become an effective leader within that very government."

The Department of Education administers the program. Once applications are distributed and collected, the DOE

convenes a panel of experts in social studies and government and selects the students based on the following criteria: leadership qualities, academic standing, community involvement and clarity in speech and thought.

The Senate Youth Program is one of many initiatives encouraged by Governor James E. McGreevey, Commissioner Librera and the Department of Education to improve teaching and learning in New Jersey.

It is emblematic of the Department's mission statement of providing "leadership for a superior education by utilizing multiple and diverse paths to success for all children in New Jersey."

In September 2002, Governor McGreevey and Commissioner Librera hosted a statewide Educational Summit in which they outlined the Administration's 21-point plan for educational reform. The 21-point plan is available on the Department of Education's website: www.state.nj.us/education.

The four key components of the 21-point plan are: involving teachers at all levels of decision making; creating a more professional environment for teachers; better preparing teachers and administrators for the challenges they face in their classroom and in their schools and supporting them once they begin their work; and continued emphasis on recognizing and celebrating excellence.