

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Nethercutt Foundation Announces 2009 Fellowship Winners

Spokane, Wash. - Eight area college students have been selected for the Class of 2009 Nethercutt Fellows.

The Nethercutt Fellowship program, created last year, was designed to give college students a greater understanding of the importance of civic education and involvement through academic and hands-on experience in eastern Washington and in Washington, DC.

The program is sponsored and administered by the George R. Nethercutt Foundation, a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization.

The George Nethercutt Foundation Class of 2009 includes: Tyler Whitney, Whitworth University; Michelle Creek, Whitworth University; Gillian Goodrich, Whitworth University; Rashid Gabdulhkov, Whitworth University; Allison Roehling, Gonzaga University; Shaughnessy Murphy, Gonzaga University School of Law; Dustin Massie, Eastern Washington University; and Jessica Pilgrim, Washington State University.

"Our nation is great, and our government unique," states Nethercutt who served ten years as Washington State's 5th Congressional District Representative. "But too many of the graduates coming out of colleges and universities around our country don't understand how it works. If we are to have truly principled and committed future leaders, those leaders need to understand how the United States has developed, historically, economically and socially."

The Nethercutt Fellowship includes lectures, selected readings, and discussions. Topics will include the fundamental principles of the American economic system; the basics of political theory and current political developments; and constitutional law and principals.

A highlight of the program is an all-expenses paid trip to Washington, DC. On this trip, students visit the White House, tour the Senate and House of Representatives, meet with Members of Congress, tour selected federal agencies, and meet with ranking government officials. To distinguish his curriculum from the usual site-seeing program, Nethercutt arranges personal off-the-record meetings with Washington power players. Last year, Fellows met with Steve Largent (CEO Cellular Telecommunications and Internet Association), former Senator Trent Lott (President of Breaux-Lott Leadership Group), and Congressman Frank Wolff (R-10th VA), just to name a few.

In addition, each Nethercutt Fellow is required to complete an internship with a governmental, quasi-governmental, or political entity in their communities. Examples include: local, state or federal political leaders (i.e. mayor's office, congressional office, etc.); policy council of the local chamber of commerce; political campaigns; court house/judicial internships; political action committees, etc.

"This experience will give students a first-hand look at how government works and how they can participate to better their community," Nethercutt said.

Stressing the importance of the program, Nethercutt refers to the Intercollegiate Studies Institute's (ISI) third Report on Civic Literacy released in November 2008 entitled "Our Fading Heritage: Americans Fail a Basic Test on Their History and Institutions." The new study follows up on two previous reports from ISI's National Civic Literacy Board that revealed a major void in civic knowledge among the nation's college students. This report goes beyond the college crowd however, examining the civic literacy of everyday citizens, including self-identified elected officials.

More than 2,500 randomly selected Americans took ISI's basic 33 question test on civic literacy and more than 1,700 people failed, with the average score 49 percent, or an "F". Elected officials scored lower than the general public with an average score of 44 percent and only 0.8 percent (or 21) of all surveyed scored an "A". Even more startling is the fact that over twice as many people know Paula Abdul was a judge on American Idol than know that the phrase "government of the people, by the people, for the people" comes from Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. (For more survey results or to read the report, visit www.americancivilliteracy.org).

Furthermore, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, an institution responsible for evaluating the condition of American education since 1969, released its latest "Nation's Report Card: Civics" last year.

"The report showed that at America's K-12 schools, students are failing in the area of civics education," said Nethercutt. "I find the results of both of these studies disturbing. Students who learn about the founding of America, the economic system governing and sustaining us, and the institutions that drive public policy are more likely to vote and engage in civic dialogue than those who don't."

The Foundation will be expanding the Nethercutt Fellowship program to all colleges and universities in Washington State in the fall of 2009. The application will be available on the Foundation website, www.nethercuttfoundation.org, in August.