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Congressman Jason Smith's Capitol Report - A Congressional Challenge

AUGUST 20TH 2018 BY DEE LOFLIN

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As summer fades and fall begins, Missourians prepare to send their children back to school or off to college. Fall brings a fresh opportunity for new starts and the chance to be a little better than last year – whether it's in the classroom, on the sports team, or in the local community. Many students in Missouri will soon be active in school programs and their communities, but aren't aware they could receive special recognition from Congress for their achievements and everyday activities.

The Congressional Award, created in 1979, is the highest honor Congress presents to America's youth. The program is tailored to grow a young person's physical, emotional, and social health and teach the values of responsibility, trust, social skills, and planning and organizational skills. Instead of a competition, the Congressional Award is an individual challenge in personal growth open to all young people 14 to 24 years old regardless of backgrounds, abilities, or even grade point averages. The program doesn't award previous accomplishments, it challenges young people to set personally challenging future goals within four program areas: voluntary public service, personal development, physical fitness, and expedition. They develop life skills and explore new fields, guided only by their personal interests and talents. And students are free to work at

their own pace as they progress through six levels of achievement – the only deadline is their 24th birthday.

Plenty of activities Missouri's young people do every day count for the four areas of the program. Most of the activities in Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, KEY Club, 4-H, and other programs are often eligible for the Congressional Award. Volunteering at a local fire department or animal shelter, tutoring, and working on conservation projects are all qualifying and recommended community service activities to share their time and talents for the benefit of others. Playing on team sports or individual fitness activities qualify too – as long as they set physical fitness goals to improve their quality of life. Farming, woodworking, arts and crafts, religious study, and creative writing are all examples of personal development activities where students can strengthen their abilities and learn new skills. The last field, expedition, challenges students to explore unfamiliar environments. It can be something simple, like a canoe or camping trip, or traveling to a new town or historical park and learning the local history, as long as the young person is expanding their horizons.

Currently 50,000 young people nationwide have enrolled in the Congressional Award program. Since the award's creation, participating individuals have contributed 8.5 million hours of public service and created a lasting impact in their communities. The Congressional Award is a great way to bolster college applications, resumes, and extra-curricular activities. In the long run it instills goal-setting habits, employment skills, civic engagement, and personal exploration in America's youth. Gold Medal recipients are invited to an award presentation every summer in Washington, D.C., but I also hold award presentations for winners here in southern Missouri.

For more activity ideas and information about the Congressional Award, please visit www.CongressionalAward.gov. If I or my office can help you through the process in any way, give me a call. You can find my closest office location and phone numbers at www.JasonSmith.House.gov.

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