Politics a Turnoff?
Not for These Kids
by Ruth Winter
Young People Who Love Politics

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Why would bright, talented young people want to train for a career in politics? Haven't the Watergate and Iran-Contra scandals soured them? The answer is "no!" Some of the nation's outstanding college students are headed for jobs in city, state and federal government service. They are doing so with the aid of a foundation set up by Congress as a living memorial to that master politician, President Harry S. Truman.

"I'm sure my father would have been very happy with such a memorial," says Margaret Truman Daniel. "He wanted to be educated. He showed me through college. I wanted to go to New York and have a career instead, but he felt strongly about education. The scholarships permit young people to enter the field and see what a fine career it is. My father felt politics was wonderful, that all you had to do was to be honest. He was an honest man."

Since 1977, 51 Truman Scholars have been chosen annually, one from every state plus the U.S. dependencies. They are each awarded up to $5,000 a year for the last two undergraduate and two postgraduate years of college. The awards are based not only on academic excellence and leadership but on the desire to become a public servant.

Truman Scholar Kiron Skinner, 19, a senior at Spelman College in Georgia, made up her mind at age 14 to enter politics. At 15, newly graduated from high school, she became the youngest Congressional intern when she went to work in the Washington office of Rep. Pete McCloskey (R., Calif.). Kiron's goal now is to become an ambassador.

The current Iran-Contra scandals have not changed her mind about a career in government service. In fact, Kiron was exposed to political corruption early in her own life when she ran for class secretary in junior high school.

"I had a standing ovation when I finished my campaign speech," she recalls. "The other girl's speech received lukewarm applause. Yet, the next day I was told I had lost the election."

Kiron's mother came to school and demanded a
These youngsters are motivated by the desire to become tomorrow's public servants.

Joannene has been working for the city ever since.

"My one good life is to be a bureaucrat," Joannene says. "It's not a dirty word. Bureaucrats is the ideal system. It has just been bastardized by the politicians. They don't like it because we bureaucrats use the system and they avoid it.

Joannene is assistant district manager of the Community Board of a "little City Hall." She attends New York University at night on the Truman Scholarship, and on weekends she works in a lawyer's office to earn extra money.

Truman Scholar Ernest Calderon, 22, a Mexican-American law student at the University of Arizona, has also seen politics in action firsthand. He worked as an intern for Arizona Rep. Morris Udall and Sen. Dennis DeConcini during the summer of 1978 and last summer was employed in the office of Gov. Bruce Babbitt.

"The thing that impressed me," Ernest says, "was the potential for helping people that politicians have. The doors would be closed for the average person, and a letter from the Governor or a call from a Congressman would open them up.

"You have to utilize your talents in drawing the good from power," he added "rather than letting the power draw the bad from you."

Ernest feels, regarding the Abscam scandals and Watergate, that many politicians misplace the ability to fulfill the public need. "They assume they are the only people who can provide the service. They get caught in maintaining their position when they should be relying on their integrity and the integrity of the office. You probably do have to make deals, but compromise in itself is not an ugly word. I think we all compromise. If you have a really sensitive perception of the public needs and if you have the common sense to realize your own limitations, you will minimize the compromises you have to make.

Speaking of compromises, Margaret Ziegler will have to make a big one of her own before she can fulfill her ambition to run for the Senate from Montana. She is engaged to a Harvard student majoring in astronomy. "And he claims there is no astrophysics in Montana," Margaret says with a laugh.

Nevertheless, at a political rally when she was 8 years old, Margaret informed Mike Mansfield, then Senator from Montana, that she intended to run for the Senate.

"Good luck—I'll back you," he said. He may soon have to make good on his offer.

For further information about the scholarships, write to: Harry S. Truman Scholarship Foundation, 712 Jackson Pl., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001.