

Samuel Miller, KY – 2015

How such a life-changing, extremely well organized program, jam-packed with incredible speakers and everything an individual interested in politics could ever ask for, could be put on annually in a finely tuned week blows my mind. I must extend my deepest gratitude to all those who believe in this program and work so hard to make it a wonderful experience. After having been a delegate, I am a devout believer in the Senate Youth Program, too.

After hearing about USSYP through my college counselor, I was determined to become a delegate. I applied to the program twice: junior year making it to the final rounds, but falling short and senior year feeling the flood of sheer joy after receiving the good news. I knew the program would be outstanding before Washington Week even began; I did not know that I was still underestimating how great it would be. We had the opportunity to see the institutions where history has been made and heard from many people who are famous for making history right now. One of the purposes of the program is to let delegates see that the people who serve the government are relatable humans and not just locked up in towers far, far away. We realize that we can become the future leaders of the country if that is what we pursue. Major Garrett delivered one of my favorite pieces of advice, "it is better to be second and right than first and wrong." Though this advice came directly from his work with the news, I believe it applies to many other areas of life and it will serve me well.

One thing the Senate Youth Program instills upon delegates is the importance of being an informed citizen. To be informed, we as citizens must be knowledgeable about power. Power is something we should all care about. Many believe power has a negative connotation because they connect its meaning to tyrannies and dictatorships. But power is about decision making, which is at the heart of government. The central reasoning behind our democratic government is the consent of the governed. This consent gives government legitimate power to make collective decisions for the citizens. We should care about power because we should care about the powers and rights we have as citizens and the powers people have over us. If citizens valued power more, people would want to become more informed about the decisions that are made that directly affect us on the local, state, and national levels. We would pay more attention to government and hold it accountable more often when it errs. More people would use their right to vote. I would argue government would function more smoothly if people cared about power more.

After having participated in the program, I have a renewed sense of optimism in the future of the country. Most media attention is spent on negative stories and political polarization. But having interacted with the other delegates from all around the United States, I am a strong believer in the future of the nation. I loved hearing the diverse set of passions that other delegates had. One characteristic all delegates shared is interest in public service. I believe I speak for the entire delegation when I say the program solidified our interest whether we want to take the role of a political activist, a policymaker, a civil servant, or an informed citizen. I must give my thanks to the Hearst Foundations, the staff, the Military Mentors, and the other program believers for the incredible opportunity that is the Senate Youth Program.