

## Timothy Wellman, MO – 2022

Where do I begin?

When I learned I had been chosen for the United States Senate Youth Program, it was actually around two days after the official notification had been sent out. The email announcing the decision had gone into a folder that I didn't receive notifications for, and one that I didn't check until two days after the Friday that they released it. However, on that Sunday morning, my life changed forever, and I began the process of being a part of one of the greatest public service programs in the world.

The online feature had to be the aspect I was most worried about. Where I lived, which was in the middle of nowhere in rural northeast Missouri, the internet is one of the most unreliable forms of communication. Of course, I knew we had delegates from Alaska and Hawaii and guests from all over the world, but the doubt still lingered in my mind. In hindsight, while I was kicked out of Zoom briefly a couple of times, there were unique parts of that virtual program that made it all the more special.

The most prevalent of those had to be the masses of delegates that were put together all at once. I distinctly remember scrolling through the list of faces during the opening ceremony and just seeing so many smiling kids just like myself. As a student, I was surrounded by peers who never had any interest in government or politics of any kind. Yet, here I was, face-to-face with some of the brightest young minds in the country. The Foreign Policy Simulation, which had to be one of my favorite memories, really brought out those critical thinking skills and showed me just how much certain individuals are passionate about specific subjects.

Even still, the greatest experience of all had to be the speakers. I don't know how Rayne, Lynn, and the rest of the staff do it, but year after year, they manage to bring in legendary politicians, activists, and thinkers to impart wisdom to us, and it's absolutely incredible. I got to ask Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg, a man significantly more prominent than the title would suggest, about his rise to fame from mayor to presidential candidate, and the advice I received truly was invaluable. Between him, Senator Cory Gardner, Justice Anthony Kennedy, and so many more, I learned a lot about my future and about myself through the USSYP.

To end off with some words of encouragement, if a Missouri delegate, or anyone else for that matter, happens to be reading this, this program is a work of art. It will help you grow; it will help you become educated, and it will help you succeed in life. The fact that you're here is no coincidence. You're destined for greatness, and it starts with the USSYP.