HENRY CLAY CENTER
CIVILITY ★ DISCOURSE ★ COMPROMISE

# What is the College Student Congress?

**The College Student Congress gathers fifty-one rising college seniors, one from each state and Washington, D.C., together with lawmakers, academics, politicians, journalists, and business leaders to learn about the dynamics of public policy and public policy decision making through the lens of the legacy of Kentucky's greatest statesman and compromiser, Henry Clay. Carefully chosen guest speakers engage with the students throughout their time, and students participate in an intensive curriculum and project designed by the University of Kentucky Martin School of Public Policy and Administration and the Henry Clay Center staff. Additionally, students have the opportunity to travel to Washington, D.C. with the College Student Congress to take what they've learned about public policy and see it in action in our nation's capital.**

**Each year's program invites students to focus on different dimensions of four unique policy challenges that are currently facing the nation. Previous topics have included areas such as healthcare, net neutrality, national security, immigration, criminal justice reform and the national debt. Students self- identify and subdivide as leaning more or less towards conservative or liberal ideology on the four topics, and then proceed to create a partisan policy proposal for their respective given topics. This results in a conservative and liberal proposal for each of the topics. The challenge presented to participants is then to negotiate and cooperate their way through the week to reach a compromise, combining elements of their partisan proposals to present a single, bipartisan proposal on their topic.**

**WHO?**
**Rising College Seniors**
**(Juniors in the 2026 – 2027 School Year)**

**COST?**
**There is NO cost to apply for or attend the Student Congress**

**WHERE?**
**Hosted at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, KY, and American University in Washington, D.C.**

## What Makes the Student Congress Unique?

**At the Student Congress, it's all about the process. While students will have opportunities to develop tangible policy solutions and recommendations, we challenge participants to engage with the mechanisms by which these solutions are achieved. Why do you hold the opinion that you do? How do you engage with someone who holds the opposite opinion? What are your areas of mutual interest? Students will be challenged to interact with peers who hold different beliefs than they do, to civilly and openly engage in dialogue about their differences, to learn to listen to one another and, ultimately, to come together in the spirit of cooperation in order to achieve progress for the common good.**

## Why Should Students Apply?

**Throughout the Student Congress, students will develop and hone their leadership, communication, negotiation and interpersonal skills, all while creating friendships and lasting bonds among the cohort of participants. Alumni cite the congress as transformative for their outlook and goals, setting many on paths of leadership and public service. Participants will have an unparalleled opportunity to research, develop, negotiate, debate and present solutions to current public policy issues with peers and experts in the field. They'll also have memorable opportunities to participate in unique events and network with professionals in Lexington, Kentucky and Washington, D.C. – all on full program scholarships!**

## What are Some Program Highlights?

**The Student Congress is packed with academic, professional, and social opportunities. Some previous activities include:**

- **Visits to U.S. Capitol, Microsoft, Department of State, Council of State Governments, Bipartisan Policy Center, Congressional Country Club and more**
- **Private conversations with the Clerk of the Supreme Court, Senate Majority Leader and other Congressional and private sector policy makers**
- **Special dinners and receptions, tours of Kentucky distilleries, local sightseeing and more**

# Participant Testimonials

**"The Henry Clay Center College Student Congress is a hidden gem that exposed me to a national community, some of whom are friends I will stay in contact with for the long-term. The activities, challenging my conceptions of effective policy, stakeholder participation, and exposing me to state government institutions, significantly impacted my perspective on what it takes to work in public policy and the opportunities available to me. As a rising senior, it was the exact program I needed to reflect on my post-grad aspirations and have a handful of organizations and partners I can reach out to for mentorship and connections navigating the realm of public service alongside similarly motivated peers!"**

**"The Henry Clay Center College Student Congress is a once in a lifetime opportunity that no one should glance over. These two weeks are entirely transformative with the first week focusing on developing a policy proposal, and the second week focusing on how various political actors advocate for and implement policy. Alongside that, you'll meet various people that come from various backgrounds with widely differing opinions, and you will forge invaluable connections."**

**"The Henry Clay Center has provided me an opportunity to meet hard-working, motivated students from across the country. The experiences made with this group are priceless and have left a lasting impact on me. Despite only knowing everyone for two weeks, this group of individuals feels like a second family."**

**"The College Student Congress was truly one of the most impactful experiences of my life. Meeting so many other students with similar aspirations helped expose me to countless new viewpoints and ideas that changed my own opinions on politics and public policy. Beyond the policy benefits, I made many new friends that I will keep in touch with over the course of my career and life, and made plenty of long-lasting memories that I will never forget."**

**"The College Student Congress was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Connecting with peers from all around the country and building my skills and knowledge through collaboration with this diverse and talented group was deeply enriching, both professionally and academically. And, actively engaging with individuals working in numerous roles in federal, state, and local governments deepened my understanding of complex government functions and the wide range of potential career paths available to those with an interest in governance and public service. This program exceeded my high expectations, and I strongly recommend it to interested college students."**

**The College Student Congress will take place in Lexington, Kentucky and Washington, D.C. from May 17th – May 27th, 2027.**

***Lexington/University of Kentucky portion: May 17 – May 22**
***Washington, D.C. portion: May 23 – May 27**

**Online applications are due by December 23, 2026, and can be found on the Henry Clay Center's website [www.henryclaycenter.org](http://www.henryclaycenter.org)**

## For More Information:

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