



November 28, 2018

The Honorable Cindy Hyde-Smith
United States Senate
113 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator-Elect Hyde-Smith:

Congratulations on your election to a full term in the United State Senate. As you transition to the 116th Congress, I wanted to bring your attention to startling numbers regarding diversity and inclusion in top-level Senate staff.

As you may know, the Joint Center recently [released a report](#) on examining top staffers among Senate and House Members in Mississippi. We found that:

- People of color account for **42.5 percent** of Mississippi's population, but they account for only **18.75 percent** of the top staffers who work for the U.S. House and U.S. Senate Members who represent Mississippi.
- African Americans make up over **37 percent** of Mississippi's population but less than **13 percent** of the top staffers who work for the Mississippi congressional delegation.
- Of the six top staffers who work for U.S. Senators from Mississippi, **none are African American.**

We applaud your previous efforts in hiring a Latina top staffer. As you potentially expand your office with new committee assignments in the next Congress, we believe you have an opportunity to start to change these statistics over the next few months as you hire additional top staff and mid-level staff for your office. We urge you to immediately implement some of the reforms that your fellow Senators have adopted recently, including the Rooney Rule, which would ensure that you recruit and interview at least one person of color for each vacant top staff position.

In addition to hiring diverse top and mid-level staffers, we urge you to take the following steps immediately in preparation for the 116th Congress:

1. **Clear Goals:** Promptly develop hiring goals to ensure diversity among those hired in new top and key mid-level staff position openings in your office.
2. **Adopt a Diversity Plan:** Develop a written office diversity and inclusion plan that includes recruitment and hiring goals, retention and development strategies for staff, data collection and analysis procedures, a clear allocation of responsibility among staff and performance evaluation for implementation of the plan, and unconscious bias



training for all managerial staff involved in recruitment, hiring, evaluation, and retention.

3. ***Rooney Rule:*** Implement the Rooney Rule, which the Senate Democratic Caucus adopted in 2017, in a bipartisan way. This rule requires your office to interview at least one person of color for every top staff position. One of the chief factors in perpetuating the lack of diversity among senior levels has been the lack of recruitment of qualified people of color for senior positions. We believe that the Rooney Rule should be applied to key mid-level staff position openings as well, as a diverse mid-level staff is important in ensuring a pool of candidates for top positions in the future. Data should be kept to measure compliance with the rule and the effectiveness of the rule.
4. ***Support Chamber-Wide or Conference-Wide Efforts to Improve Staff Diversity,*** such as the creation of an independent and bipartisan Diversity Office.

Although you already have a Senate staff, you can significantly expand your office and fulfill a promise to your constituents to be an effective representative of all Mississippians. You have an opportunity to show your constituents that the experiences and skills of all Americans are vital to your work. Ensuring racial diversity among your staff would enhance the deliberation, innovation, legitimacy, and outcomes of your office and of the Senate as a whole.

We look forward to working with you.

Regards,

Spencer Overton
President
Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies