



November 8, 2018

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
United States House of Representatives
H-204
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader Pelosi:

Congratulations on winning a majority of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives for the 116th Congress. As the House Democratic Caucus prepares to assume control of Congress, it will hire hundreds of new staffers. We believe this provides an opportunity to improve racial diversity among the Democrats' top and key mid-level staff.

As you know, the Joint Center's September 2018 report, [*Racial Diversity Among U.S. Top House Staff*](#), revealed several facts, including:

- Although people of color accounted for 43 percent of Democratic registered voters, they only account for 24.7 percent of Democratic House top staff.
- Much of the House Democrats' top staff diversity comes from Congressional Black Caucus Members. Although the average White Democratic House Member represents a district that is 37.4 percent people of color, people of color make up less than 8 percent of the staff who work for White Democratic Members in the positions of chief of staff, legislative director, and communications director. African Americans hold only 2.1 percent of these positions.
- White Republican House Members have 10 chiefs of staff of color, while White Democratic House Members have only 6 chiefs of color.
- Currently, House Democrats have no Latino/as or Asian American / Pacific Islanders who serve as full committee staff directors or as leadership office chiefs of staff, policy directors, or communications directors.

We urge you to take the following steps immediately in preparation for the 116th Congress:

1. ***Fully Staff Diversity Initiative:*** Immediately add staff to the House Democratic Diversity Initiative to help identify, prepare, and refer diverse candidates for top and key mid-level staff positions to new Members, current committee and subcommittee Ranking Members, and other Members with open positions. The Initiative should also track the progress of

the entire Democratic Caucus and individual Members toward the hiring goals detailed below. Currently, the House Democratic Diversity Initiative has one staffer.

2. ***Clear Goals:*** Immediately develop Democratic diversity hiring goals in which people of color are at least half of those hired in new top and mid-level staff position openings over the next four months, to reflect the nation's population and to address the extreme lack of diversity among current top staff. Communicate particular responsibilities in helping to meet those goals to current committee and subcommittee Ranking Members and to new Members.
3. ***Assess Staff Diversity in Making Committee Assignments:*** In determining committee assignments for the 116th Congress, direct the Democratic Steering & Policy Committee to factor in whether a Member has demonstrated a commitment to racial diversity in the Member's existing top and key mid-level staff positions.
4. ***Commit now to make the following structural changes*** by February 2019 if you are elected Speaker for the 116th Congress:
 - a. ***Rooney Rule:*** Formally adopt and implement the Rooney Rule, which would require that Democratic personal and committee offices interview at least one person of color for every top staff position (e.g., chief of staff, legislative director, communications director, staff director) and key mid-level staff position (e.g., legislative assistant, counsel, policy advisor, press secretary). Senate Democrats adopted this rule in 2017. House Democrats indicated a commitment to adopt the Rooney Rule in 2017, but have not yet publicly indicated that they actually adopted and are implementing the rule. Data should be kept to measure compliance with and the effectiveness of the rule.
 - b. ***Disclosure:*** Collect and annually publish demographic data on each staff position in each Democratic office. It is difficult to fix a problem that is not measured. Senate Democrats started this practice in June 2017.
 - c. ***House Diversity Office:*** Create a Bipartisan House Diversity Office that serves both Democratic and Republican Members, with full funding, staffing, and other resources to track staff diversity, collect demographic data and analyze trends, organize implicit bias training, and help Members develop written diversity plans that include goals and retention strategies.

The incoming Democratic caucus will be the most racially diverse in American history. This historic class embodies the principle that diverse coalitions are essential not only in securing electoral victories, but also in creating policy that represents all Americans. In the new Congress, senior and key mid-level staffers will help develop legislation, manage offices, hire employees, and work with elected Members to respond during times of crisis. These staffers will have significant influence in providing oversight of hundreds of administrative agencies that employ over three million civilian and military workers and a multi-trillion dollar budget and appropriations process that affects every American.

Diversity among top and mid-level staff must be a priority. House Democrats in the 116th Congress cannot control the actions of the U.S. Senate, the executive branch, or the judiciary, but they can control their own actions with regard to staff diversity. You are well positioned to ensure that our most democratic branch of government is truly representative of our nation. We hope you take advantage of this leadership opportunity.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Spencer A. Overton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial 'S' and a long, sweeping underline.

Spencer Overton
President
Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies