



November 9, 2018

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture
1010 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Ranking Member Peterson:

Congratulations on winning a majority of seats in the U.S House of Representatives for the 116th Congress. As you prepare for new responsibilities as the presumed Chair, you will hire several new staffers. We believe this provides an ideal opportunity to improve racial diversity among top and key mid-level staff who work for Democratic Members.

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

- Although people of color accounted for 43 percent of Democratic registered voters, they account for only 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. ***Clear Goals:*** Promptly develop Democratic diversity hiring goals in which people of color are at least half of those hired in new top and key mid-level staff position openings (e.g., staff director, deputy staff director, general counsel, counsel, policy

advisor, professional staff member) over the next four months to reflect the nation's population and to address the extreme lack of diversity among current top staff.

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:*** Formally adopt and implement the Rooney Rule, which would require your office to interview at least one person of color for every top and key mid-level staff position opening. 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 the rule and the effectiveness of the rule.

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 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 key mid-level staff must be a priority. I understand that you may not be able to control the actions of other components of the U.S. Congress, the executive branch, or the judiciary, but you will have considerable discretion over your own actions with regard to staff diversity. You are well positioned to help 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 that reads "Spencer A. Overton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Spencer Overton
President
Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies