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January 3, 2017

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*The Madison Group*

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Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Charles Schumer  
Democratic Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

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Dear Senators:

The 115th Congress will begin with more African-American elected members of the House and Senate than any period since reconstruction - Forty Seven members of the House of Representatives and three United States Senators. Congressman George White's words were more prophetic than he knew when he said in, "this is perhaps the Negroes' temporary farewell to the American Congress; but...phoenix-like he will rise up some day and come again..."

Under normal circumstances the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress would be a cause for great celebration, however the celebration is tempered by our concern for the Senate's gross lack of diversity amongst its professional staff corps. It is a problem that has been well documented in a study by the Joint Center for Economic and Political Studies, the nation's leading think tank on African-American issues, and in a number of articles written at the end of 2016. As the sun sets on the two historic terms of our nation's first African American president we should not allow to subside the sentiment that America is best when it embraces its diversity.

As the nation's oldest and largest non-partisan association representing African-American Government Relations Professionals, it is not our role to pile on and continue to highlight the obvious, but instead to offer viable solutions that may have been overlooked or yet to be examined. Diversity is integral to continuing the pipeline of talent that feeds our industry, the Congress and the nation, and while the House is doing its part, the Senate lags decades behind.



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**The Problem**

Here are the facts: Of the nearly 300 top Senate staff positions in Senators’ personal offices (Chiefs of Staff, Legislative Directors, Communications Directors), less than two dozen are staffers of color. Currently, there is only 1 African-American Chief of Staff in the United State Senate, and she serves Senator Tim Scott and 1 African-American Legislative Director serving newly elected Senator Kamala Harris.

	Black	Latino	AAPI	Native Am.	POC
<b>U.S. Population</b>	13.3%	17.6%	5.8%	1.2%	37.9%
<b>Top Senate Staff in Personal Offices</b>	0.7%	2.3%	3.7%	0.3%	7%

The lack of diversity in the Senate is a bipartisan problem. Although 22% of Democratic voters are black, Democrats have no African-American Chiefs of Staff or Communications Directors. As of today, Senators Cortez Masto (NV) and Harris (CA) are the only newly-elected Senators that we know of who have hired a person of color in one of the top three positions. While two of the newest Senators have taken immediate steps, the data will show the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress will closely resemble the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress.

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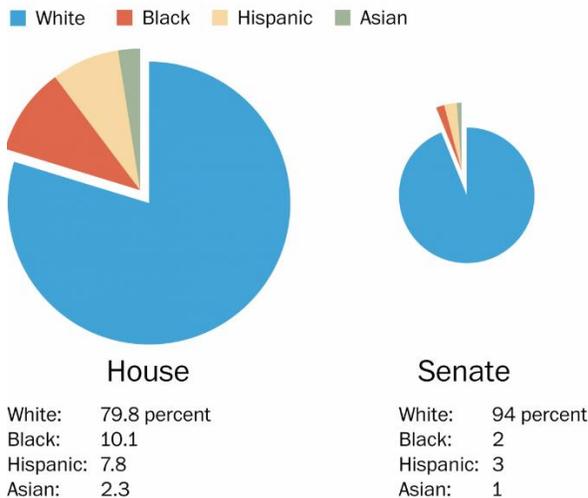
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**Racial composition of the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress**



If no other actions are taken to diversify the top three positions, people of color serving in senior roles in offices of the newly elected Senators will be 9.5%, which is only slightly higher than the percentage of top staff of color in the personal offices of the U.S. Senate as a whole. This lack of diversity will have dire long term consequences and, will grind the overall talent pipeline to a screeching halt. Top staffers assist in the management of the Senate legislative agenda, shape the \$3.8 trillion U.S. federal budget, provide oversight of federal agencies (over 4.1 million employees) and hire, manage, mentor and promote Senate staff. They are also key in recommending staff to key positions in the private sector which can ultimately pave the way for non-profit and private sector boards of directors. These are often the individuals tapped to come back and serve in presidential administrations, regardless of party.

**The Solution**

Challenges like this cannot be solved without the direct participation of elected leaders. Members of Senate Leadership should “lead from the front” and urge all Members of the Senate to instruct their chiefs of staff and legislative directors to take decisive and sustained action to ensure that our government is representative of the people it serves. We like to refer to them as the “Six Simple Steps”:

1. **Interview** and hire people of color as senior legislative assistants, legislative assistants and press assistants in personal offices and on committee and subcommittee staff;



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2. **Engage** in a Memorandum of Understanding with the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation via the CBCF's Emerge 535 initiative with the goal of developing a pre-vetted, paid pipeline of talent. There are several examples of CBCF Fellows succeeding and being hired to serve in the Senate upon completion of their fellowships;
3. **Engage in Memorandum of Understanding** with APAICS, CBCF, INSIGHT America, CHCI, and the GW Native American Political Leadership Program;
4. **Re-establish**, and fund, the Lyndon Baines Johnson Fellowship, eliminated in the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress, and target first generation college graduates from Historically Black Colleges and Universities along with other minority serving institutions;
5. **Employ** the National Football League's (NFL) "Rooney Rule" in the hiring processes for the top positions in personal and committee offices; and
6. **Support** legislation for a Chief Diversity Officer for the U.S. Senate set to be proposed in 2017.

Highly-qualified people of color are more than capable of contributing substantially in these positions. The ranks of this organization are filled with that talent, or have direct access to capable individuals willing to serve their country. That they are government affairs professionals should not be a deterrent to allowing them to serve again or providing advice on qualified candidates. It is incumbent upon all Senators to prioritize staff diversity. A diverse staff informs public policy in a full and complete manner. It allows policy makers to develop solutions to our nation's problems through an inclusive lens rather than a singular view. Diversity brings understanding along with more inclusive and representative voices to the decision-making table.

Finally, for the last seven years the Washington Government Relations Group has hosted a dinner celebrating diversity in Washington, DC. The proceeds from the dinner go to support scholarships for undergraduate students interested in pursuing a career in public service. So far we have provided 22 scholarships to deserving young men and women and, look to maintain that trend long well into the future. To do so, we need your assistance. These talented young people need something to aspire to and that can only be done if the Senate begins to take action on diversity.

When we held our inaugural dinner, there was no Senator who could match the diversity efforts by then Majority Whip James Clyburn and Homeland Security Committee Chairman Bennie Thompson. Our eventual first Senate



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honoree was Majority Leader at the time – Senator Harry Reid, who not only talked the talk on the diversity but also walked the walk. He put personal skin in the game. Not only did he establish a new office dedicated to expanding diversity in Senate offices but he also spent his own personal money to fund internships for Howard University students. Some of those students have gone on to have key roles on Capitol Hill and in the private sector. Senators who followed Leader Reid included Senators Menendez, Gillibrand, Scott and Booker. Each of these Senators, regardless of state or party affiliation, actively worked to ensure their staff represented the diverse make-up of the country. Their outreach to diverse communities to find talent, in some cases bringing it back to the Hill from the private sector, was beyond laudable and should be emulated.

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We look forward to continued dialogue, and progress, on this subject and would respectfully request an in person meeting to further discuss our Six Simple Steps as a proposed solution to the current problem in the U.S. Senate.

Sincerely,

**MARCUS SEBASTIAN MASON**  
President