



# Who Congress Pays: Analysis of Lawmakers' Use of Intern Allowances in the 116th Congress

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## Executive Summary

- Congressional internships matter. These work opportunities are an expression of democratic citizenship that support the day-to-day operations of the federal legislature, train and socialize political novices to lawmaking, and provide a pipeline to paid employment and elective office.
- Before 2017, only 10 ten percent of congressional interns were paid. In 2018, Congress passed a bill specifying funds for lawmakers to pay their legislative interns. The bill allocated \$20,000 to each House office, and an average of \$50,000 for Senate offices, to be used towards stipends for DC interns. Prior to this legislation, there was neither formal policy nor resources designated to fund internships.
- Despite the importance of congressional internships, we know surprisingly little about the administration of these programs. There is no institution-wide recordkeeping about who interns on Capitol Hill, or in congressional districts. There is no information about whether these opportunities are allocated equitably to women, racial minorities, or students from less privileged backgrounds.
- Our report documents that most members of Congress used the funds to pay their interns. We examined how lawmakers used these funds and investigated who they hired. Specifically, we focused on the time period between April and September 2019, when all lawmakers first had access to these funds, and when they typically hire their largest cohorts of interns each year.
- We found White students were overrepresented in paid congressional internship positions. In addition, we found Black and Latino students were underrepresented in these same paid positions.
- From April to September 2019, interns in Congress were 76.3 percent White, 6.7 percent Black, 7.9 percent Latino, 7.9 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and .03 percent American Indian/Alaska Native.
- White students make up only 52 percent of the national undergraduate student population, but accounted for 76 percent of paid interns. Black and Latino students were underrepresented as interns. Blacks and Latinos make up 15 and 20 percent of the undergraduate student population, but accounted for 6.7 and 7.9 percent of paid interns, respectively.
- We found nearly 50 percent of paid interns attended or are currently attending private universities compared to only 25 percent of undergraduate students nationally. Meanwhile, a slight majority of paid interns attended public universities (51 percent); this percentage was significantly lower than the rate undergraduate students attended public universities nationally (74.4 percent).

- We found the average total stipend per intern was approximately \$1,986.75 in the Senate and \$1,612.53 in the House.
- These data suggest an unequal racial and economic makeup of legislative interns. Unequal access to congressional internships, especially those that are paid, in effect, disproportionately hands White students an important employment credential. This sets them on a career path to become political elites who hold considerable influence in the creation of public policy, and perhaps become elected officials themselves.
- We recommend Congress democratize the administration of congressional internships with more transparent hiring; promotion of remote internships; expanded funding for stipends; increased engagement with, and recruitment from communities of color; and prioritization of need-based applicants.

## Introduction: An Expanded Look

In July 2020, we released *The Color of Congress*, which documented the racial makeup of interns employed in the House of Representatives in Washington D.C.<sup>1</sup> For this report, we randomly surveyed over 100 House offices in July 2019 regarding whom they hired as interns. Approximately 60 percent of the House offices we surveyed cooperated (n=68). From these data, we were able to provide an overview of the racial demographics among House interns (n=295).

We found Whites were overrepresented among House interns, and Latinos were underrepresented. Specifically, Whites make up 52 percent of undergraduates nationally, but constituted 67 percent of interns. By contrast, Latinos make up 20 percent of undergraduates nationally, but constituted only 5 percent of House interns.

This inequality is largely shaped by White lawmakers, who are disproportionately overrepresented in Congress, and more than three times as likely to have employed a White intern than their non-White counterparts.

We did not find a statistical difference in the racial makeup of interns in the offices of White Democrats and White Republicans. In both groups, Whites made up over 75 percent of interns. To this end, it is mostly lawmakers of color who hire students of color for internships. These findings are troubling because congressional internships provide a pipeline to paid employment in Congress, and a pathway to elective office. As such, the underrepresentation of people of color in congressional internships contributes to their underrepresentation in other dimensions of our political system.

In this new report, we offer a more comprehensive examination of who Congress employs as interns. In 2018, Congress appropriated a special allowance for House and Senate members to pay their interns. Before this, there was neither formal policy nor resources designated to fund internships. If lawmakers paid their interns, it was at their own discretion and funded from their own general allowances for personnel and other business. However, as previous research from *Pay Our Interns* documents, most members of Congress did not pay their interns<sup>2</sup>.

In this report, we examined how lawmakers used the allocated funds and investigated who they hired. Specifically, we focused on the time period between April and September 2019 when all lawmakers first had access to these funds, and when they typically hire their largest cohorts of interns each year. We looked at who lawmakers hired as interns and whether they were paid directly from the lawmakers' intern allowances. These data are publicly reported and available as part of congressional payroll records. Overall, this approach provides an expanded look at who lawmakers hired as legislative interns in a more comprehensive and systematic way.

We examined over 8,000 pages of payroll data from every office in the House and the Senate. Specifically, we looked at how lawmakers spent these funds during this time period, how many interns they hired, and the amount they paid them. We also investigated the social backgrounds

of their interns. We examined their racial and gender backgrounds, as well as the universities where they matriculated. Altogether, we collected data for 3,841 interns. This data presented an unprecedented look at the social backgrounds of congressional interns, and the administration of this new program. Our findings for this report augment our previous research.

First, we found, again, that White students were overrepresented in paid congressional internship positions. In addition, we found Latino and Black students were underrepresented in these same paid positions. Our data show a small majority of interns were enrolled in public universities even though more students attend public universities nationwide. These data suggest an uneven racial and economic makeup of legislative interns. This inequality is particularly troubling because it is funded with taxpayer money.

Second, we found the average total stipend per intern was approximately \$1,986.75 in the Senate and \$1,612.53 in the House. Without complete data on the number of hours each intern worked, it is difficult to accurately estimate how much they earned per hour. However, we believe the average stipend is not nearly enough to cover living and working expenses in the DC area. These low stipends would require students to have economic support from their families or university, and possibly by working a second job or securing a loan.

These findings provide compelling evidence that there is much more work for Congress to do to ensure that congressional internships are accessible to underserved and marginalized student populations.

## Methods

Congress does not monitor the race of its workforce in a systematic, reliable, and public manner. Although federal law requires that many federal agencies, government contractors, and private and non-profit organizations collect and disclose to the U.S Equal Employment Opportunity Commission employee race and gender demographic information, this law does not apply to the federal legislature<sup>3</sup>.

Congress does, however, publish its payroll records. These data contain the name, title, and salary for every congressional employee, including paid interns<sup>4</sup>. We used this information to collect more data about paid interns and their race, gender, and educational institutions.

From the list of people who interned in Congress between April and September 2019, Pay Our Interns researchers conducted an online search for photographs, social backgrounds, and past employment data of all interns. We obtained data from a variety of sources, including LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter. We collected racial demographic data for 96 percent of Senate interns and 95 percent of House interns. In addition, we collected gender demographic data for 99.4 percent of Senate interns and 99.6 percent of House interns.

## Administration of Intern Allowances

In 2018, Congress appropriated \$13.8 million for House and Senate members to pay their interns. In the House, each office received \$20,000. In the Senate, funding was allocated based upon state population; these offices received, on average, \$50,000. Funding was available to Senate offices in Fall 2018 and House offices in Spring 2019.

In the first year of this program, funding was exclusively for interns who worked in lawmakers' personal offices<sup>5</sup> in Washington, D.C. Beyond this stipulation, lawmakers had wide discretion in how to use these funds. There were no guidelines outlining how many interns lawmakers could hire or how much each intern should be paid. Furthermore, there was no requirement that lawmakers even use these funds (see appendix for Senate and House offices that did not have any paid interns).

We investigated how House and Senate offices used these funds between April and September 2019. This time period represents when lawmakers typically hire their largest intern cohorts of the year. We believe investigating this time period provides the best insight into understanding who lawmakers hire for internships, and their compensation.

During this initial period, 96 percent of senators and 92.5 percent of representatives used their allowances to hire interns. In the Senate, each office employed, on average, 15.8 paid interns. In the House, each office employed approximately 5.7 paid interns (Table 1). These internships generally lasted for approximately 30 workdays, or about 6 weeks (Table 2).

**Table 1: Overview of Paid Interns in the Senate and House**

	Senate	House
<b>Total number of offices that paid at least one of their interns</b>	96 (96% of offices)	406 (92.5% of offices)
<b>Number of paid Summer 2019 interns</b>	1,515	2,326
<b>Average number of paid interns per office</b>	15.8	5.7
<b>Average intern allowance per office</b>	\$29,661.68	\$9,204.51

The average total stipend per intern was \$1,986.75 in the Senate and \$1,612.53 in the House. The difference between intern compensation in the Senate and House is significant. The average Senate intern earned \$374 more than a House intern, a 23 percent difference (Table 2). While it is reasonable that Senate offices receive a larger appropriation for intern allowances, given that they represent larger constituencies, Senate and House interns should receive comparable compensation given their similar work responsibilities.

**Table 2: Average internship duration and stipend amounts for paid interns**

	<b>Senate Interns (minimum, maximum) n=1371</b>	<b>House Interns (minimum, maximum)</b>
<b>Average stipend for an internship</b>	\$1,986.75 (\$45, \$16,200)	\$1,612.53 (\$35, \$7,260)
<b>Average length of internship</b>	38 days (5 days, 175 days)	45 days (5 days, 123 days)
<b>Average length of internship (excluding weekends, holidays)</b>	30 days	32 days

## Who Gets Paid Internships?

Congress employed 3,841 paid interns between April and September 2019 (Table 1). We investigated who received these positions to understand if these paid opportunities were equitably distributed. We examined interns' racial and gender background, as well as the universities and colleges where these students matriculated. Overall, we found the people that lawmakers hired to be paid interns did not reflect the racial and economic diversity of the national undergraduate student population.

### Race

We researched the racial backgrounds of paid interns and found this population skewed heavily towards White. In summer 2019, paid interns were 76.3 percent White, 6.7 percent Black, 7.9 percent Latino, 7.1 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and .03 percent American Indian/Alaska Native (Table 3). We did not find significant differences in the racial makeup of paid interns between the House and Senate.

**Table 3: Racial makeup of paid interns in the Senate and House**

	Senate Interns - n (%) <sup>†</sup>	House Interns - n (%) <sup>‡</sup>
<b>White alone, non-Hispanic</b>	1,080 (76.4%)	1,706 (76.2%)
<b>Black or African American, alone</b>	94 (6.5%)	152 (6.8%)
<b>Hispanic or Latino</b>	106 (7.3%)	186 (8.0%)
<b>Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Other Pacific Islander, alone</b>	108 (7.4%)	155 (6.9%)
<b>American Indian and Alaska Native, alone</b>	6 (0.4%)	4 (0.2%)
<b>Two or More Races</b>	29 (2%)	35 (1.6%)
<b>Total</b>	1,452	2,238

<sup>†</sup> includes 96% of all paid interns; <sup>‡</sup> includes 95% of all paid interns

These findings present a more unequal portrait of the racial makeup of congressional interns than what we had previously found. In our last report, which was based upon a randomized sample of House offices, we found House interns were 67 percent White, 13 percent Black, 5 percent Latino, 10.5 percent Asian/Pacific-Islander, and 0 percent American Indian/Alaska Native. Noticeably, this past sample included paid and unpaid interns. When we examined who Congress exclusively paid to work during this same period, we found the population was noticeably Whiter. Specifically, White representation increased by 9 percent and Black representation decreased by 6 percentage points<sup>6</sup>.

We further analyzed these demographic data to evaluate if paid positions were equitably distributed. We used two metrics for analysis: the racial demographics of members of Congress and the national undergraduate student population.

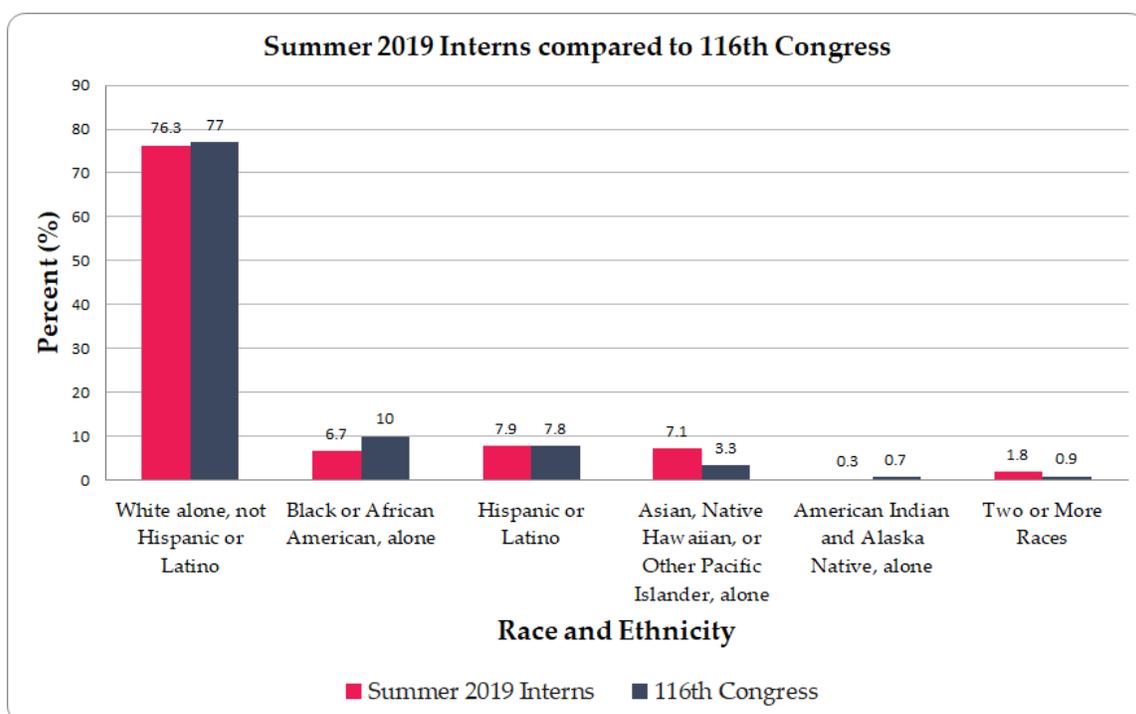
The racial demographics of lawmakers establish an important baseline for considering racial representation among paid interns. Although Whites are overrepresented as members of Congress (78 percent of lawmakers are White, compared to 61 percent of the national population), it is reasonable to expect that racial representation among their most junior employees would at least be similar, not worse.

Meanwhile, the racial makeup of the national undergraduate student population establishes a higher standard for what racial representation among paid interns should look like. The US undergraduate population is noticeably more racially diverse than the national population, and it is the pool from which lawmakers primarily recruit and hire their interns<sup>7</sup>. Using these two metrics, we found that students of color are underrepresented in paid internship positions in Congress.

The 116th Congress was the most racially and ethnically diverse ever. There were a record number of Black, Latino, Asian, and American Indian elected to Congress<sup>8</sup>.

In comparing racial representation among lawmakers and paid interns, we found noticeable differences. First, Black representation was lower among paid interns than lawmakers. For example, Black Americans constitute 10 percent of all members of Congress, but made up 6.7 percent of paid interns. In the House, where Black representation is greater among lawmakers (12 percent), we found only 6.8 percent of paid interns were Black. Second, Asian-Pacific Islanders were better represented as paid interns than as lawmakers. Asian-Pacific Islanders constituted 3.3 percent of lawmakers and 7.1 percent of paid interns. Third, we found the percentage of Whites and Latinos as lawmakers and paid interns was equal (Figure 1).

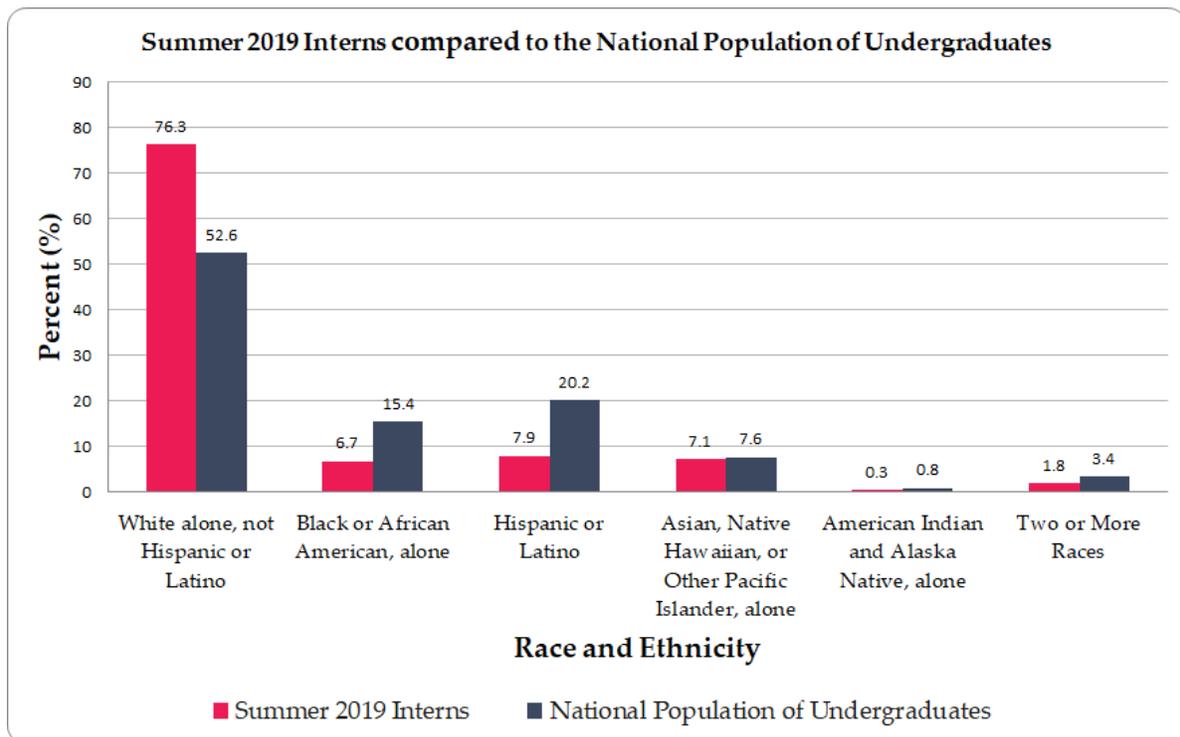
**Figure 1: Comparison of Summer 2019 Interns to 116th Congress**



Next, we compared the racial demographics of the summer 2019 interns and the national undergraduate population. As mentioned above, congressional offices primarily recruit and hire from this population. In addition, the national undergraduate population is noticeably more racially diverse than the national population. For these reasons, to evaluate racial representation, we compared the racial makeup of paid interns to the national undergraduate student population, rather than the national population overall.

First, we found White students are overrepresented as interns using these metrics. White students make up only 52 percent of the national undergraduate student population, but accounted for 76 percent of paid interns. Second, Black and Latino students were underrepresented as interns. Blacks and Latinos make up 15 and 20 percent of the undergraduate student population, but only accounted for 6.7 and 7.9 percent of paid interns, respectively. Third, we found Asian-Pacific Islanders were equally represented as paid interns (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Comparison of Summer 2019 Interns to National Population of Undergraduates<sup>9 10 11</sup>**



## Gender

We found women were slightly better represented among paid interns than men (Table 4). While women are significantly underrepresented as lawmakers (24 percent of total members), they are better represented as staff members<sup>12,13</sup>. In addition, women represented 57 percent of undergraduate students nationally<sup>14</sup>.

**Table 4: Gender makeup of paid interns in Senate and House**

	Senate Interns - n (%) <sup>†</sup>	House Interns - n (%) <sup>*</sup>
<b>Male</b>	661 (44%)	1,127 (48.7%)
<b>Female</b>	845 (56%)	1,189 (51.3%)
<b>Total Number of Interns</b>	1,506	2,316

<sup>†</sup> includes 99.4% of all paid interns; <sup>\*</sup> includes 99.6% of all paid interns

## Colleges and Universities

We investigated the different types of colleges and universities attended by paid interns. We found students who attended private universities were better represented in Congress than students at public universities relative to the number of students attending each type of university nationally (Table 6). Although a slight majority of paid interns attended public universities (51 percent), this percentage was significantly lower than the rate undergraduate students attended public universities nationally (74 percent). This finding is particularly concerning, and suggests an additional barrier that reduces access to Congress

**Table 5: Number of universities attended by paid interns**

<b>Total Number of Unique Schools</b>	620
<b>Number of Private Universities</b>	347
<b>Number of Public Universities</b>	264
<b>Foreign Universities</b>	9

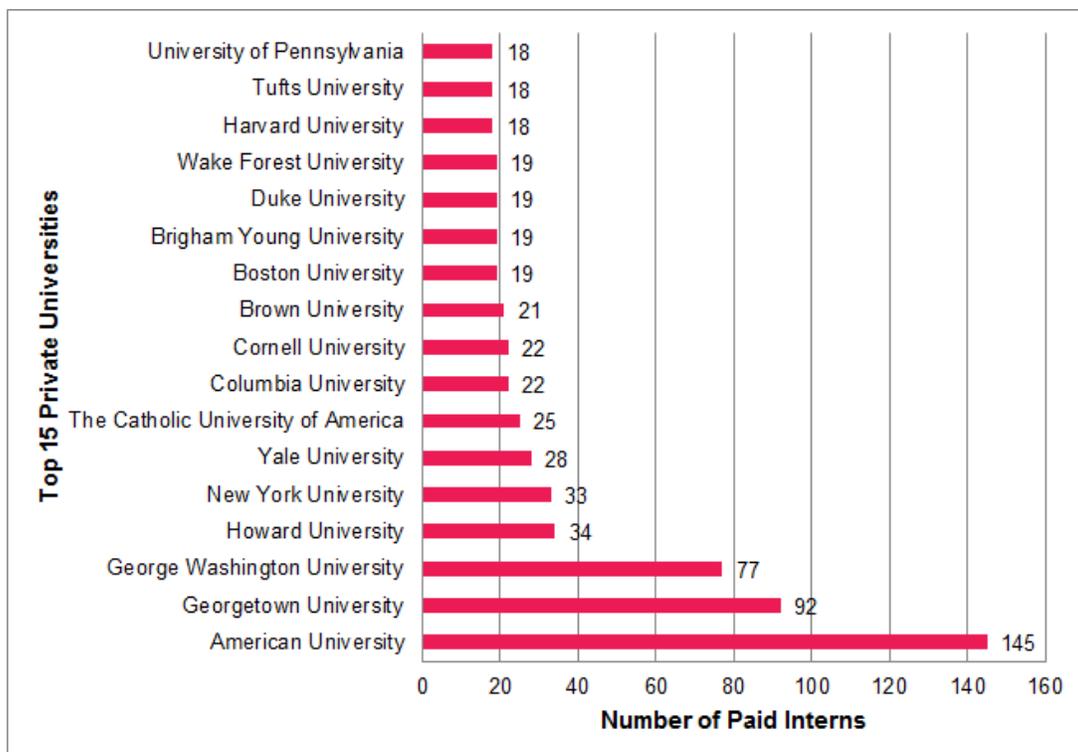
**Table 6: Type of universities attended by paid interns<sup>15</sup>**

	Senate 2019 Paid Interns (n=1,330)	House 2019 Paid Interns (n=2,028)	National Population of Undergraduate Students
Attended or are currently attending <b>private universities (%)</b>	625 (47%)	1,024 (50.5%)	25.6%
Attended or are currently attending <b>public universities (%)</b>	705 (53%)	1,004 (49.5%)	74.4%

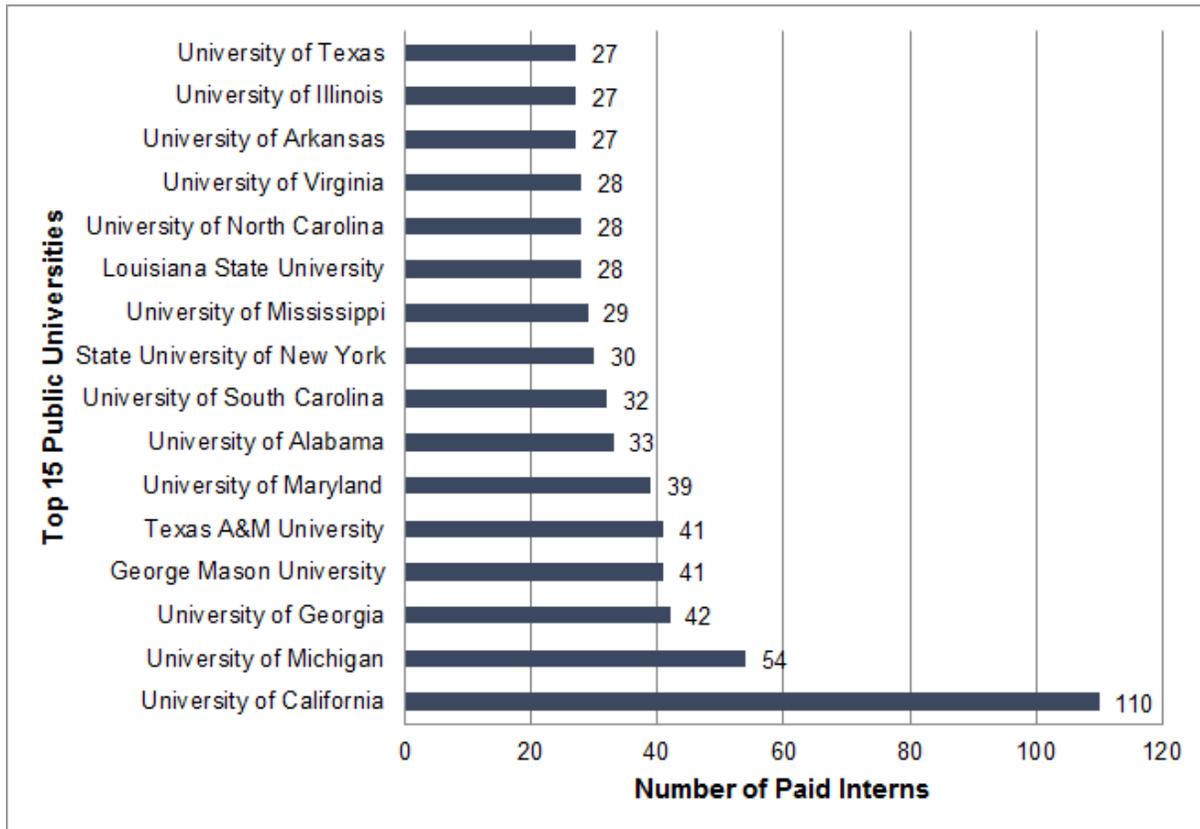
The economic and racial composition of private and public universities are noticeably different. For example, the top private universities disproportionately enroll students from economically privileged backgrounds<sup>16</sup>. We found many of these schools, which enroll more students from the upper end of the income distribution than from the lower end, were among the top schools where paid interns attended.

Additionally, White and Asian students are better represented at top private universities than Black and Latino students. This difference might also explain why White students are overrepresented among paid interns. To be certain, more research is needed to understand the economic backgrounds of paid interns. However, analyzing the educational institutions paid interns attend does provide insight into how racial and economic inequality is reproduced through congressional hiring.

**Figure 3: Top 15 Private Universities most attended by paid interns**



**Figure 4: Top 15 Public Universities most attended by paid interns**



Hiring from private universities helps credential a privileged class of students who can participate in government. As mentioned above, private universities have a skewed student population, which is noticeably whiter and more affluent than the general population. In addition, these schools often provide greater assistance for students to help secure competitive internships, as well as financial assistance to them while they are working.

For example, in our previous study, we interviewed a number of students enrolled at selective private universities who mentioned that their stipends were supplemented by their schools. Furthermore, a number of private universities have housing available for their students in Washington, D.C. These arrangements can sometimes save students money and reduce the time and uncertainty of finding housing in a new city. In this way, access to Congress may be easier for students enrolled at private universities.

Congressional employment should not be used to create a favored class of students. Every student should have equal access and opportunity to work in Congress. The paid internship program creates an amazing opportunity for Congress to increase racial representation within its halls. Lawmakers can realize this potential by expanding their recruitment efforts to hire students from historically Black colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, and tribal colleges.

## Who Hires Whom?

This study corroborates our previous report, which found lawmakers disproportionately hired interns of their same racial background at significantly higher levels than other races. We found this association to be strongest among Latino and Asian senators, and Black and Latino representatives. It is important to note that without lawmakers of color, the racial diversity among paid interns would decrease significantly.

Lawmakers of color employ 33.5 percent of interns of color, although they only make up 24 percent of members of Congress. This pattern is even greater among representatives. For example, lawmakers of color in the House employ 46 percent of all paid interns of color, even though they only constitute 26 percent of House members. Overall, the unequal racial makeup of paid interns is primarily driven by White lawmakers, who are disproportionately represented in Congress, and mainly hire White interns.

We found Republicans in both the House and Senate are more likely to hire White interns. For example, Republican senators were 3.9 times more likely to hire White interns than Democratic senators. This pattern was the same in the House. On the other hand, Democrats are more likely to hire interns of color.

Democrats in both the Senate and House hire more interns from private universities than Republicans. For example, Democratic senators are 2 times more likely to hire an intern from a private university than Republican senators. In addition, Democratic representatives are 1.8 times more likely to hire an intern from a private university than Republican representatives.

## Stipend Analysis

Paid interns earned an average total stipend of \$1,986 in the Senate and \$1,612 in the House (Table 2). We analyzed payroll data for differences in intern compensation. There were some differences in compensation by political party and by the racial identity of members of Congress. For example, Democratic senators paid their interns more than Republican senators by an average of \$381.41 per internship. There were no significant differences between parties in the House (Table 7).

**Table 7: Average stipend amounts by political party**

	Senate Average Stipend Amount	House Average Stipend Amount
<b>Republican member</b>	\$1,774.97	\$1,585.43
<b>Democratic member</b>	\$2,156.38	\$1,617.41
<b>Difference</b>	\$381.41*	\$31.98

\* denotes  $p < 0.05$

We also found female representatives paid their interns more than male members by an average of \$152.56 per internship. There were no significant differences between male and female senators (Table 8).

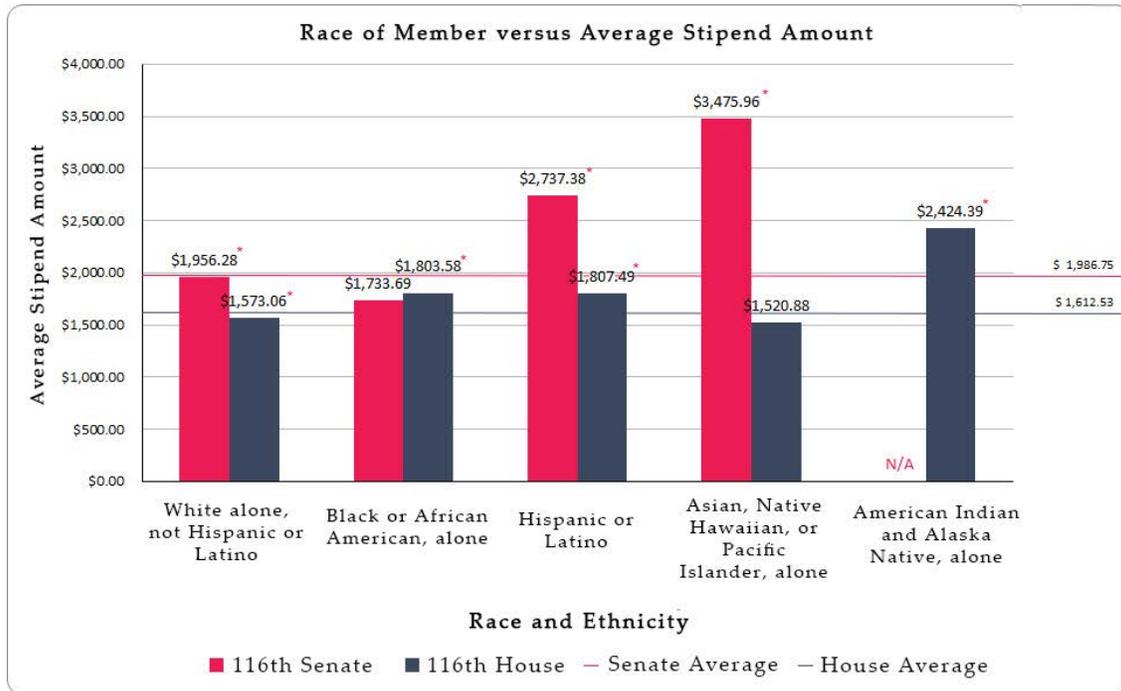
**Table 8: Average stipend amounts by gender of member**

	Senate Average Stipend Amount	House Average Stipend Amount
<b>Male member</b>	\$2,004.64	\$1,566.80
<b>Female member</b>	\$1,936.34	\$1,719.36
<b>Difference</b>	\$68.30	\$152.56*

\* denotes  $p < 0.05$

We found some important differences in intern compensation according to the race of a lawmaker. For example, Latino senators paid their interns significantly more than non-Latino members by an average of \$772.03 per intern. In addition, Asian senators paid their interns significantly more than non-Asian members by an average of \$1,515.74 per intern. In the House, American Indian and Alaska Native representatives provided the most generous average stipend amounts (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Race of Congressional member compared to the average stipend amount they paid**



While we did find some noticeable differences in overall intern compensation, we believe these stipends are not nearly enough to cover the costs of living and working in Washington, D.C. Other congressional internship programs provide interns with significantly higher stipends. For example, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI) provides summer interns with a \$3,125 total stipend (Table 9). In addition, this program covers the cost of housing and round-trip transportation to Washington, D.C.<sup>17</sup>

**Table 9: Stipend Amounts of External Internship Programs**

Internship Program	Stipend Amount
Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies (APAICS)	\$2,500
Congressional Black Caucus Foundation (CBCF)	\$3,000
Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI) Summer	\$3,125
Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI) Fall and Spring	\$3,750
Congressional Hispanic Leadership Institute	\$2,000

We also analyzed payroll data to understand how much each intern earned per day and per hour. Unfortunately, congressional payroll data and the idiosyncratic ways Senate and House offices report this information do not allow us to calculate this information in a reliable and accurate manner. Congressional payroll records detail the length of employment, but not the number of hours an intern worked.

Assuming an intern worked a standard 8-hour workday, we found that, on average, an intern earned \$81.13 per day in the Senate and \$37.01 per day in the House. According to our calculations, this would mean an hourly rate of \$10.14 in the Senate and \$4.62 in the House (Table 10). We should note these intern allowances are defined as stipends, and not meant to fully compensate individuals for their work.

**Table 10: Average internship duration and stipend amounts for paid interns**

	<b>Senate Interns (minimum, maximum) n=1,371</b>	<b>House Interns (minimum, maximum) n = 2,305</b>
<b>Average stipend for an internship</b>	\$1,986.75 (\$45, \$16,200)	\$1,612.53 (\$35, \$7,260)
<b>Average length of internship<sup>18</sup></b>	38 days (5 days, 175 days)	45 days (5 days, 123 days)
<b>Average length of internship (excluding weekends, holidays)</b>	30 days	32 days
<b>Average stipend for an intern per day</b>	\$81.13 (\$9.03, \$618.18)	\$37.01 (\$3.28, \$175)
<b>Average per hour given an 8 hour workday</b>	\$10.14 (\$1.13, \$77.27)	\$4.62 (\$0.41, \$21.88)

# Recommendations

## Data Transparency

Congress has much work to do around data transparency. While Congress has published a list of interns who are getting paid through the fund, they have not released the names of interns who are not getting paid. We know, based on anecdotal evidence, there is still a contingent that is not. Congress is allowed to do this because they have exempted themselves from all labor laws and regulations, for which they hold other agencies and businesses accountable.

Thankfully, there has been some progress. After the release of *The Color of Congress* report, Representative Pete Aguilar (CA-31) successfully included an amendment in the 2021 Legislative Branch budget bill that directs the Chief Administrative Office to collect demographic data on interns (which is currently not done).

## Increased Allocation

The average total stipend amount per intern of both the House (\$1,612.53) and the Senate (\$1,986.75) is not sufficient enough to travel to and live in DC. These stipends do not cover the minimum cost of living in the DC area, which is \$4,438 for a Senate internship and \$6,514 for a House internship<sup>19</sup>. The stipend amount must increase. The only way that will happen is if the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch increases the current allotment from \$25,000 per office to a larger amount.

The \$25,000 is barely enough to cover stipends for interns working in DC. In 2020, rules were changed to allow members to use \$10,000 from their \$25,000 fund to pay interns in their district offices thanks to a dear colleague letter led by Reps. Chrissy Houlahan (PA-6) and Rodney Davis (IL-13) alongside Pay Our Interns Action Fund (POIAF). Allowing members to pay their district interns is positive because it increases access to opportunities for interns who cannot afford to travel to DC. However, the letter also asked that overall funds be increased so that funds would not have to be stretched thin. This is even more reason why funds should be increased this year.

## Remote Use

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic wiped out a majority of internships in Congress. One of the barriers was that House Administration policies did not allow interns to telework. After enough pressure from congressional offices and outside organizations, the House Administration modified the rules so that paid interns are now authorized to have House-issued devices to work remotely.

Currently interns are only able to work remotely in cases of a disaster or an emergency; that is why there is a new push led by Reps. Pramila Jayapal (WA-7) and Ilhan Omar (MN-5) to make the rules permanent<sup>20</sup>, so offices can have remote interns even after Congress resumes operations as they were pre-pandemic.

We strongly urge Congress to adopt these rules. Remote internships allow a greater pool of applicants to apply for congressional internships, since they are not limited by the high costs of living in Washington, D.C.

## **Recruitment/Advertising**

Congressional offices must be more intentional and dedicated in conducting outreach to minority-serving institutions and public colleges in their districts, so we can have more racially and socio-economically diverse intern classes. Moving forward, congressional offices can use as a model the State Department Student Internship Program Act, introduced in the House by Representative Joaquin Castro (TX-20), and its companion bill, introduced in the Senate by Senators Cory Booker (NJ) and Tim Scott (SC). The bill focuses on ensuring the State Department pays all their interns, but it also mandates the Department conduct outreach to minority-serving institutions.

## **Committee Funding**

Committees should have dedicated funding to compensate interns the same way personal offices do. Thankfully, here, too, there is progress. After the release of *The Color of Congress*, Representative Pete Aguilar (CA-31) successfully included an amendment in the 2021 Legislative Branch budget bill that requests the Diversity and Inclusion office and the CAO look into whether offering intern allowance for committees would lead to a greater diversity of interns. We look forward to seeing the findings of their study<sup>21</sup>.

## Conclusion

This report comprehensively examined racial representation among paid interns in the Senate and House. We found, again, that students of color are underrepresented. The underrepresentation of racial minorities among interns presents an important public issue that demands the attention of lawmakers. Now that Congress is paying a significant portion of their interns, they must ensure compensation is provided equitably.

Equity in the administration of paid internships means ensuring students from all racial backgrounds are equally paid for their work. It also means prioritizing the hiring of students from less privileged backgrounds, who otherwise would not have the opportunity to work in Congress. Importantly, to reach these goals, Congress must adopt more transparent hiring practices that comply with the spirit of federal workplace law.

Congressional internships provide students with an unmatched lesson in democratic lawmaking. These experiences are often a prerequisite for full-time paid employment in Congress. However, uneven access to congressional internships, especially paid ones, credentials a primarily White and privileged group as political elites, many of whom will exert considerable influence in creating public policy, and some of whom will go on to become elected officials themselves. Internships are especially important opportunities to increase civic engagement, especially among communities of color. Internships may only last for a few weeks or months, but the lessons students learn and the experiences they acquire while working at the highest levels of representative government, will stay with them for a lifetime.

For these reasons, Congress must democratize the administration of congressional internships with more transparent hiring, promotion of remote internships, expanded funding for stipends, increased engagement with and recruitment from communities of color, and prioritization of need-based applicants.

## About the Authors



**Dr. James R. Jones** is an Assistant Professor at Rutgers University-Newark. He received his Ph.D. in Sociology from Columbia University in 2017. He is a leading expert on congressional staff diversity. He has authored two groundbreaking policy reports on racial representation among congressional staff. In 2015, he wrote a policy report that documented the underrepresentation of racial minorities in top staff positions in the Senate, for the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. In 2020, he authored *The Color of Congress*, which analyzed racial representation among House interns. His research demonstrates that racial minorities are underrepresented in both top and junior staff positions on Capitol Hill.

Dr. Jones is currently completing his first book, *The Last Plantation*, which investigates racism in the congressional workplaces and foregrounds the career experiences of Black staffers. He is a former congressional intern.

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**Tiffany Win** is the lead statistician at Pay Our Interns and an experienced quantitative researcher. She received her BA in Mathematics and Statistics from Boston University in 2014. She has experience in multiple research fields ranging from political science to neurophysiology. She collaborated with Dr. James R. Jones as the lead statistician for *The Color of Congress*, the first quantitative report analyzing the demographics of congressional interns.



**Carlos Mark Vera** is the Co-Founder and Executive Director of Pay Our Interns. Originally from Colombia, Carlos was raised in California, but moved to Washington, D.C. to attend American University. While at AU, Carlos was an unpaid intern at the White House, the European Parliament, and the House of Representatives. He knows firsthand the struggles of trying to survive while interning for free. Under his leadership, Pay Our Interns successfully convinced Congress to pass more than \$48 million in funding for interns, and has helped nonprofits, companies, and presidential campaigns create their internship programs.

Carlos' efforts on Capitol Hill led him to be named a Forbes 30 Under 30 Honoree, Echoing Green Fellow, Camelback Ventures Fellow, a Top 20 Changemaker by NBC Latino, and an Aspen Ideas Fellow. He has been featured in the *Washington Post*, NPR's *All Things Considered*, the *New York Times*, CNN, and the *Atlantic*. He has also written for the *Washington Post*, *Teen Vogue*, *USA Today*, and NBC Latino. Carlos proudly served in the Army Reserve as a mechanic for 8 years

## About Pay Our Interns

Pay Our Interns is a 501(c)(3) non-profit founded in 2016 and led by two formerly unpaid interns of color. It is the nation's only organization fighting to ensure all students—especially Black, Latinx, and Native American students—have equitable access to professional career paths through the implementation of paid internships countrywide. Pay Our Interns (POI) seeks to ensure individuals from all backgrounds are represented across industries impacting their communities, and develop pathways for advancement. In doing so, POI creates a more equitable workforce, more diverse leadership, and a more just world.

In June 2017, they released a report titled, "Experience Doesn't Pay the Bills," providing a policy roadmap for Congress to address the issue of unpaid internships in Congress. Based on this report, in 2018, POI convinced a group of bipartisan legislators to convene and pass \$14 million in funding for paid congressional internships. The fund was increased to \$17.3 million the following year. Since then, they have created guidelines targeting congressional offices on how to operationalize equitable internship programs. Their work has led to the creation of over 10,000 paid internships. POI is headquartered in Washington, D.C. For more information visit [www.payourinterns.org](http://www.payourinterns.org) or contact us at [info@payourinterns.org](mailto:info@payourinterns.org)

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## Appendix

<b>Total Senate Offices (Collected July 2019)</b>	100
<b>Number of Senate offices that paid their interns with intern allowances</b>	96
<b>Number of Senate offices that did not pay their interns</b>	4

<b>Total House Offices (April to September 2019)</b>	439*
<b>House offices that paid their interns with intern allowances</b>	406
<b>House offices that did not pay their interns</b>	33

\* Two House seats (NC-03 and NC-09) were vacant during this time.  
Non-voting members were included in this report.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Jones, James R. . 2020. "The Color of Congress: Racial Representation among Interns in the Us House of Representatives." Vol. Washington DC: Pay Our Interns.

<sup>2</sup> Vera, Carlos and Daniel Jenab. 2017. "Experience Doesn't Pay the Bills: Why Paid Internships Are a Must in Congress." Washington D.C.: Pay Our Interns

<sup>3</sup> Pub. L. No. 88-352, 78 Stat. 253 1964; 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-16 (2014). Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in employment practices. Federal law requires private employers with over 100 employees and federal contractors with more than 50 employees to report workforce data to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to assist with enforcement, self-assessment by employers, and research. The Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972 extended these reporting requirements to federal executive agencies.

<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, Congress does not collect information about unpaid interns or interns who receive stipends from external organizations.

<sup>5</sup> This is only true for the House. Funding in the Senate could be used for DC or district offices.

<sup>6</sup> The differences in racial makeup between the two studies are also due to the differences in sample size and the willingness of House offices to participate in our first study.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). Digest of Education Statistics, 2018 (NCES 2020-009), Chapter 3.

<sup>8</sup> Bialik, Kristen. 2019. "For the Fifth Time in a Row, the New Congress Is the Most Racially and Ethnically Diverse Ever." Pew Research Center February 8. (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/02/08/for-the-fifth-time-in-a-row-the-new-congress-is-the-most-racially-and-ethnically-diverse-ever/>).

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS), "Fall Enrollment in Colleges and Universities" surveys, 1976 and 1980.

<sup>10</sup> Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), "Fall Enrollment Survey" (IPEDS-EF:90).

<sup>11</sup> IPEDS Spring 2001 through Spring 2019, Fall Enrollment component.

<sup>12</sup> Burgat, Casey. 2017. "Among House Staff, Women Are Well Represented. Just Not in the Senior Positions." The Washington Post, January 20. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/06/20/among-house-staff-women-are-well-represented-just-not-in-the-senior-positions/>)

<sup>13</sup> Manning, Jennifer E. 2020. "Membership of the 116th Congress: A Profile." Vol. Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). Digest of Education Statistics, 2018 (NCES 2020-009), Chapter 3.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2018 and Spring 2019, Fall Enrollment component.

<sup>16</sup> Leonhardt, David. 2017. "America's Great Working-Class Colleges." The New York Times January 18. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/18/opinion/sunday/americas-great-working-class-colleges.html>).

<sup>17</sup> For Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute Internship eligibility and program details see <https://chci.org/programs/congressional-internship-program/eligibility-program-details/>

<sup>18</sup> For this analysis, we filtered out internships that were shorter than a full work week (5 days) in order to minimize variance.

<sup>19</sup> Glasmeier, Amy K. Living Wage Calculator. 2020. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. (<https://livingwage.mit.edu>.) The minimum cost of living was calculated by adjusting for a standard 5-week Senate internship and a 7-week House internship. These estimates include food, medical, housing, transportation and miscellaneous expenses, and taxes.

<sup>20</sup> Goba, Kadia. "Lawmakers call for congressional interns to have work-from-home option." Axios. 19 February 2021. (<https://www.axios.com/lawmakers-interns-telework-diversity-917a77b4-e5d4-4cb1-b3ecd9bb96596e66.html>.)

<sup>21</sup> H. Rept. 116-447 - Legislative Branch Appropriations Bill, 2021. (2021). (<https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/116th-congress/house-report/447>)