

**Written Testimony of Alexiaa Jordan, Next Generation National Security Fellow, Center
for New American Security
Before the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress
Re: Diversity and Congressional Capacity
March 25, 2021**

Good morning, my name is Alexiaa Jordan. I am a Next Generation National Security Fellow with the Center for New American Security, a Policy Analyst with the Lincoln Network; and I am a former staffer in the Illinois state legislature. Thank you for allowing me to speak today. I am honored to be on this panel and to discuss strengthening Congressional staff capacity, by expanding competent diversity.

Last year, there were millions of black, asian, hispanic, non-traditional, physically impaired, and female graduates. There are more than enough talented young professionals who are willing to commit to public service and could help Members of Congress by serving as staff.

If you or other Members' are struggling to find young economists, technologists, and engineers, I promise you: they are out there. I am one of them and I know that many of my peers would be thrilled to have the chance to serve. But many people are unable to access these opportunities. And unfortunately, the internships and clerkships are not realistic options for many people, since these roles have traditionally not provided any pay.

I research and analyze governance and national security issues. Over the past year, I have studied the work and recommendations of the Cyberspace Solarium Commission, the National Security Commission on AI, and White House panels. A common finding is that the government does not have enough talent to fill critical sector jobs that will make us safer or more competitive in the future.

I appreciate that your Committee appreciates this problem too. During the 116th Congress, the Select Committee on the Modernization of the Congress held hearings on this topic and issued recommendations to improve staff diversity. I urge you to continue focusing on this critical issue in the 117th Congress. As you do so, here are a few recommendations to consider:

One of the most crucial national security issues for me is who is in the room with Members of Congress making decisions on important topics like these. As a citizen, I have to trust that the best people are with you making decisions that impact my life; as a professional I know how critical multiple voices are when making decisions.

First, I want competent diversity. Gender and race are not the only measures for diversity. I don't want a childless 20-something telling me about childcare. I want a mom, with kids, to help us support childcare legislation. Medicare reform policy for example generally isn't something you need to think about until you have an aging relative. Similarly, I don't want an inexperienced Manhattanite informing agricultural policy and only reading CRS reports to find out what farmers in Iowa need. Efforts to promote staff diversity should consider a broad spectrum of differences to ensure that Members of Congress can draw up on expertise needed to address the broad range of issues you confront every day.

Second, to get this diversity of thought, it is critical to discuss the 302(b) allocation for the legislative branch. Increasing the resources available for Congressional offices to pay and retain staff is necessary to be able to make you better elected officials, to help you better check the executive branch, and to retain staff who may otherwise be forced to leave the Hill for the private sector due to the burden of student loans or other financial responsibilities.

Third, group think is dangerous. I encourage you and other members to work to recruit staff from a diverse range of schools and communities. High recruitment at the Ivy League and big 10 schools creates an elitists exclusion. You can hire a liberal and a conservative from Harvard, but you're only including people who could access Harvard. There is just as much value in the construction worker from West Virginia or a trade professional who cares about supply chain issues. You are losing out if you only hire recent students from a small group of universities.

Fourth, promoting diversity among your staff is necessary to address the national security threats of today and tomorrow. In recent years, the public has watched as Members of Congress have been required to work on highly technical issues, from cybersecurity to information technology innovations. Ensuring that Congressional offices can attract expertise from the private sector and academia to advise Members about these issues is necessary for Congress to fulfill its oversight and legislative responsibilities.

Last, I encourage you and other members of Congress to recognize that improving diversity of thought and background among Congressional staff is not a partisan or ideological issue. As we saw with the last election, partisan votes are NOT divided along stereotypical race or socioeconomic lines. This means, ALL members and political advisors from all parties need to open their ears, arms, and positions to folks that agree with their mission -- regardless of how they look.