



Testimony of Arturo Vargas, Chief Executive Officer
 NALEO Educational Fund
 To the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress
 Concerning Continued Support for Initiatives that Increase Diversity and
 Inclusion Throughout the Congressional Workforce

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† deceased

Chair Kilmer, Vice Chair Timmons, and Members of the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress: Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony at your first public meeting of the 117th Congress.

On behalf of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund, I write to thank the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress (SCOMOC) for your innovative and bipartisan work to advance effective solutions to make the U.S. House of Representatives more efficient and responsive to the American public. NALEO Educational Fund applauds the historic recommendations made by SCOMOC during the 116th Congress. In particular, we commend the Committee's recommendation to make the U.S. House Office of Diversity and Inclusion a permanent congressional office, a recommendation which was adopted by the U.S House of Representatives. As you continue your groundbreaking work, we urge you to continue to make the promotion of congressional workforce diversity and inclusion a top priority for your efforts to enhance the House's human resources, and for ensuring that Members of Congress benefit from the skills and talents a diverse workforce brings.

NALEO Educational Fund is the nation's leading nonprofit organization that facilitates the full participation of Latinos in the American political process, from citizenship to public service. Our Board members and constituency encompass the nation's more than 6,800 Latino elected and appointed officials, and include Republicans, Democrats and Independents.

In our testimony, we will highlight how inclusive workforces help legislatures function more effectively, and Congress still has significant progress to make toward a fully representative workforce. We will also provide information about NALEO Educational Fund's initiatives that support increased diversity and inclusion in the congressional workforce and throughout the federal government, such as Staff Up Congress, the Mirror America Project and our advocacy in support for the House Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

Inclusion Helps Legislatures Function Effectively

Congressional staff provide indispensable assistance and irreplaceable institutional knowledge that legislators need to meet their policymaking, oversight, and consistent service responsibilities. As the Congressional Management Foundation notes, "talented and experienced employees are the most valuable assets in any knowledge-based workplace, and Congress is one of the most important, complex and information-rich knowledge-based workplaces in the world."



Extensive research has shown that teams of capable, intelligent people with diverse personal characteristics work better than homogenous groups. A 2015 study by McKinsey & Company on the relationship between the level of diversity and company performance, observed that when people of varied backgrounds work together, they surpass groups with similar personal characteristics in recognizing broad ranges of needs and opportunities, brainstorming, and generating creative solutions to emerging problems.

Emerging research also provides increasingly conclusive evidence that inclusive teams make Members more effective policymakers. A 2018 study of congressional committees' work conducted by Josh M. Ryan, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Utah State University, determined that the more racially diverse the members of a committee were, the less likely it was that the committee's reports and other written products would include minority or dissenting views. According to this study's author, diverse perspectives help build legislative consensus, and therefore "efforts underway to further increase diversity in Congress are important in potentially contributing to a better functioning legislature."

In addition to positively influencing the speed and effectiveness of policymaking, inclusive legislative staff teams enhance Congress' legitimacy in the eyes of its constituents. Researchers consistently have found that diverse representation grows constituents' willingness to engage with government institutions. Therefore, inclusive staffing will tend to strengthen democracy by increasing voter participation and other civic activity.

Staff who reflect the diversity of Members' constituencies also are ideally equipped to anticipate and effectively address those constituents' concerns.

As partisan conflict has intensified, and increasingly impaired the ability of Congress to reach legislative compromises, Congress has found itself in ever more acute need of people who are willing and able to work together across dividing lines. Congress must improve its ability to reach consensus by actively pursuing greater inclusivity in staffing.

Congress Has Fallen Short on Inclusivity

Members of Congress and the workforce that powers the legislative branch do not yet reflect the diversity of the constituents for whom they work, and Congress has not yet held itself accountable in the same ways as it ensures that federal agencies and private employers promote and pursue inclusion. Congress must take concrete steps and remain open to new administrative approaches to make progress and demonstrate a meaningful commitment to diversity to its constituents.

Although there are few data available from official sources, available indicators universally show that the Congressional workforce is not representative of the population for which it works. In its 2019 report on House staff, Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies found that the U.S. House's percentage of Latino staff (12.2 percent) was significantly lower than the percentage of the Latino population in the country (18.3 percent). The disparity was even wider when compared to the percentage of Latinos in key roles such as chief of staff/deputy chief of staff, legislative director/deputy legislative director, and communications director/press secretary. While the study found that the U.S. House's percentage of Black staff was slightly higher than the overall share of Blacks in the United States, it also found that Blacks were underrepresented in the top positions of chief of staff/deputy chief of staff, legislative director/deputy legislative director, and communications director/press secretary. To address these disparities, it is essential that Congress

move swiftly and effectively to build a workforce that more closely resembles the nation's broad diversity.

Staff Up Congress and Advocacy on Diversity and Inclusion

NALEO Educational Fund recognizes that increasing Congressional workforce inclusivity will advance its mission of facilitating Latino participation in our nation's political life. In 2018, NALEO Educational Fund launched its Staff Up Congress, an initiative to increase the number of qualified staffers of color who desire to put their skills to work on behalf of the American people in the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. This nonpartisan initiative aims to grow the pool of candidates for senior positions; develop candidates' skills and networks; build a sustainable pipeline of candidates from entry level to chief of staff; and persuade hiring managers to actively consider, recruit and hire candidates in an inclusive manner.

Staff Up Congress conducts several leadership development academies and events tailored to junior and mid-level diverse congressional staff serving in various roles in bipartisan offices throughout both chambers. Since 2018, more than 110 congressional staffers of color have participated in Staff Up Congress. As of this writing, approximately 70 percent of staffers who have graduated from Staff Up Congress academies have been promoted within their office or have secured a more senior role in another congressional office.

In addition to providing leadership skills development to congressional staffers of color, NALEO Educational Fund is also supporting initiatives to increase congressional capacity to improve inclusive hiring practices. On December 12, 2018, we published [Best Practices for Fostering a Diverse and Inclusive Workplace in Congress](#). We also joined advocacy partners to encourage and support House leadership to establish the House Office of Diversity and Inclusion in the 116th Congress. We also supported its work by successfully advocating for increased funding for the Office in the FY2021 budget through our appropriations requests to members of the House Appropriations Legislative Branch Subcommittee.

The SCOMOC and Congressional Workforce Diversity

The SCOMOC's recommendation to make the House Office of Diversity and Inclusion permanent was a critical step which has helped ensure that House offices and staff are better equipped to recruit, hire, develop, promote and retain a diverse workforce. Since its inception at the outset of the 116th Congress, the House Office of Diversity and Inclusion has hired experienced bipartisan staff to lead the office and created a website where key resources for congressional staff and hiring managers are available, including job postings, model handbooks, resume reviews, and links to mental health resources. It also published a [2019 House Compensation and Diversity](#) study which highlights disparities in the demographic makeup of House office staff and presents key information on House compensation. We are encouraged about the progress made by the House Office of Diversity and Inclusion, and are working with Senate leadership in support of a similar permanent and bi-partisan office.

Conclusion

NALEO Educational Fund believes the SCOMOC's support for a permanent and bi-partisan House Office of Diversity and Inclusion have helped promote an extremely beneficial public dialogue about the role of that Office in strengthening the human resources of the House. We urge the SCOMOC to continue its support for the Office, and explore additional opportunities to foster inclusive hiring practices throughout the U.S. House of Representatives, including the

recommendations suggested in our Staff Up Congress Best Practices Guide. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony, and we look forward to continue our work with the Committee to help ensure that diversity and inclusion workforce practices help enhance the effectiveness of Members of Congress as leaders and as public servants.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Arturo Vargas', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Arturo Vargas
Chief Executive Officer

