



The Rankin-Chisholm Rule: A “Rooney Rule” for the House of Representatives

With the large class of new House members -- including record numbers of women and of women of color – 2019 is the optimal time to establish a “Rooney Rule” requiring diverse interview slates for House staff hiring. Further, we believe it is fitting to name that new policy after pioneering members Jeannette Rankin and Shirley Chisholm. We propose that the **Rankin-Chisholm Rule** program include the following components:

- The decision-maker for top staff positions in personal offices, on committees, and in caucus leadership offices conducts an in-person interview with a slate of candidates from diverse perspectives and backgrounds on the basis of gender, race and other factors, including multiple women and people of color.
- This policy should be used to ensure equitable opportunities to consider candidates from underrepresented backgrounds including women of color.
- The House Office of Diversity and Inclusion conducts regular data and evaluation of how the program is working with annual reporting back to the offices and committees on progress.
- The House ODI provides technical assistance and support for the offices to implement the program.

The new House Office of Diversity and Inclusion adopted in the 116th Congress Rules Package under the leadership of Speaker Pelosi¹ could provide the oversight and structure to adopt and implement this program effectively.

We believe that a diverse interview slate requirement can and should apply to all Congressional hiring. The Senate Democratic Caucus adopted a Rooney Rule last year,² and the full House could similarly voluntarily adopt rules and policies to promote staff diversity through the new Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

The senior ranks of congressional staff do not adequately represent our nation’s diversity. A series of reports from the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies have shown that people of color are significantly under-represented in top Congressional staff positions. The Center’s most recent report focuses on the House of Representatives, finding that people of color, who make up 38 percent of the U.S. population, only hold 13.7% of top staff positions, such as chief of staff, legislative directors, communications

¹ <https://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/susan-jones/house-democrats-adopt-new-rules-new-select-committees-116th-congress>.

² <https://www.rollcall.com/politics/senate-democrats-adopt-new-staff-diversity-rules>.

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directors, and committee staff directors.³ And while women comprise about half of congressional staff, they are over-represented in administrative and constituent services jobs, and under-represented in more senior positions and those related directly to policymaking. For example, women hold only about a third of all chief of staff and legislative director positions, and women are below parity in all legislative aide positions.⁴

The “Rooney Rule,” an established best practice for increasing diversity in leadership, is one tool to address this gap as part of a comprehensive strategy. It requires a hiring manager to conduct an in-person interview with a diverse slate of candidates before making a final decision. This policy originally came from the 2001 settlement of a race discrimination case against the Coca-Cola Company, but took its name from a similar policy established by the National Football League a few years later.

Although in each case the driver was a concern about a lack of racial diversity, the diverse slate policy is a tool to address gender equity as well. Indeed, organizations we work with have adopted diverse slate requirements to identify strong talent from all communities and increase opportunity for women and people of color.

We encourage the House to adopt this requirement, and to consider renaming the rule to highlight the importance of considering gender and racial equity in diverse slate requirements. When the legal profession adopted a Rooney Rule policy, they renamed it the Mansfield Rule to honor a landmark member of the profession. In this case, we urge the House to name this the **Rankin-Chisholm Rule** to honor Jeannette Rankin and Shirley Chisholm -- two barrier-breaking House members that represent both parties.

We also urge a comprehensive approach. A diverse candidate slate requirement is more than a policy statement – it requires follow-through, including training and technical assistance for offices and hiring managers, accountability through collecting data and regular reporting, and a clear definition of diverse slate requirements.

When a diverse interview slate requirement comes with these broader components, it can be quite successful. For example, when Coca-Cola agreed to implement a “diverse candidate slate requirement” for filling senior leadership positions along with other reforms, the Company experienced a substantial increase in diversity in those senior management positions. Under its comprehensive diversity program, the NFL has reached historic numbers of black general managers and head coaches. Now widely recognized

³ <https://jointcenter.org/research/racial-diversity-among-top-house-staff-0>.

⁴ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/06/20/among-house-staff-women-are-well-represented-just-not-in-the-senior-positions/?utm_term=.c4508edcea8a.

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as a best practice, the diverse slates approach has been adopted by a number of major corporations and other organizations. By increasing diversity in leadership, private sector organizations benefit from increased innovation and better performance.⁵ We expect increased leadership diversity to have similar benefits for federal legislative offices.

Thoughtful and structured implementation can make the difference between an aspiration to increase hiring diversity on paper and a meaningful result in practice. Considering the impact of other management and hiring practices, workplace culture and leadership buy-in is essential to success. Building a robust pipeline in the feeder positions is critical -- as is ongoing measurement and accountability through data collection and reporting. Otherwise it becomes a "check the box" exercise, rather than a significant benefit to the organization's overall talent development program. In our experience, the Rooney Rule promotes a fair process consistent with both the letter and spirit of equal employment opportunity laws, but there are issues to consider. Good policy design, training and hiring manager guidelines are key to effective risk management in this area. The **Rankin Chisholm Rule** can be a best practice to build on the momentum for equity.

Our team is uniquely positioned to assist in the design and implementation of this program. Cyrus Mehri of Working IDEAL pioneered the Rooney Rule with Coca-Cola and the NFL. Cyrus and Working IDEAL CEO Pamela Coukos continue to advise clients in the private, non-profit and higher education sectors on diverse slate policy design, implementation support, legal review, and metrics to review progress. Rene Redwood of Redwood Enterprise was a member of the Coca-Cola Task Force who monitored that company's implementation of diverse slates and many other reforms. She is also the former director of the Presidential Glass Ceiling Commission. Jenny R. Yang of Working IDEAL served as a Commissioner and Chair of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Cynthia Richie Terrell is a longtime advocate of intentional actions to advance women's representation and leadership and directs RepresentWomen.

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⁵ <https://hbr.org/2013/12/how-diversity-can-drive-innovation>; <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-diversity-makes-us-smarter/>; <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/why-diversity-matters>