

It's Time to Put Equity Into Action

Focusing federal spending with an eye towards equity, justice and diversity for all.

As America continues to confront the challenges of racial inequality and lack of diversity and participation in places of power, Congress must play a leading role in addressing federal budget inequities. We can start by reexamining programmatic funding levels, revisiting our methodologies and including diverse voices and perspectives in our work. Voices from groups that have been historically marginalized, excluded from the discussion or oppressed must inform and inspire federal spending decisions so that Congress can begin to truly address historical and present-day injustices.

House Democrats have so far made important progress towards federal budgeting and spending that reflects America's diversity and affirms equity and justice for all, and we will continue to pursue this goal. But recent events have made clear that swift, comprehensive action is long overdue.

HAC Advisory Panel on Equity and Justice in Federal Spending

As part of her reform platform for House Appropriations Chair, Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz proposes establishing the **House Appropriations Committee Advisory Panel on Equity and Justice in Federal Spending**.

Proposed Structure

This Advisory Panel on Equity and Justice in Federal Spending will be a bipartisan, innovative body made of Appropriators, that will help reshape how the House Appropriations Committee has traditionally approached its work. The panel will provide insight, advice, and feedback to the Appropriations Committee Chair, 12 Subcommittees and the Full Committee to imbue the Committee with a fresh focus on issues of equity and justice in federal spending. Members of the panel will be appointed by the Chair of the Full Committee and will be selected with an eye towards inclusion and diversity.

Proposed Work of the Panel

The work of the advisory panel will begin with reviewing each of the 12 enacted appropriations bills to identify programs where spending levels or direction may require adjustment in order to increase equity and justice. The panel will comprehensively review federal programs for funding inequities in communities of color and historically marginalized communities. It will also include a review of programs like the HBCU Capital Financing program, Indian Health Services program and HSI funding, for example, to ensure equitable funding meets the needs of the program's targeted community.

The panel will rely on analysis of historical data and spending trends, budget forecasting and other tested spending methodologies, such as Majority Whip Jim Clyburn's 10-20-30 plan, to ensure that resources reach communities that have suffered the deepest inequities and injustices. In addition, the varied and unique perspectives of Members will be solicited to build upon these ideas and possibly develop new spending methodologies or tools that the Committee could employ. Using the advice of the panel, the Appropriations Committee will be more effective when trying to shape a federal budget that corrects for historic inequities, helps effect justice, and provides programs that benefit all communities, not just a privileged few.

Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles will help direct the panel's work and ensure that its purpose and vision is sustaining:

1. Serve Diverse Constituencies – The communities we serve are diverse. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, people of color, women, people with disabilities, and immigrants are some of the fastest growing segments of the population. Inequities often occur regardless of the socioeconomic standing of the targeted community. Adopting equity strategies when allocating federal spending will improve our ability to serve and protect those who have different experiences or backgrounds. In this way, we will make our government more democratic, more effective and more receptive to the viewpoints and needs of all the American people. This will help prevent Congress from leaving behind or excluding forgotten or marginalized communities from the table.

2. Increase Innovation – Increased creativity is another byproduct of capitalizing on differences. Historically, some of the most creative periods in civilization have emerged when people of different backgrounds have been fully included. America's energy and inventiveness have been attributed to the diversity of thought born from varied backgrounds. Incorporating different perspectives, life experiences, and ideas can result in new programs, services, and collaborations. Diversity in policy making has been the exception, and it will now be the rule.

3. Return on Investment – Much of, but not enough, of the private sector has started to figure out that investing in equity strategies can maximize program efficacy. Facilitating diversity and cultivating inclusion in the federal spending process then ensures that these programs are truly working for everyone, which ensures that taxpayer dollars are being spent optimally and fairly.

Broader Impacts

We will be making immediate change so that historically marginalized and oppressed communities receive their fair share of public resources from federal and state governments. This proposed federal appropriations advisory panel will be designed to be a meaningful step towards correcting historical imbalances in the investment of public resources. This panel will establish a precedent for future Congresses thereby ensuring that increased resources continue to be directed toward communities of color and marginalized communities.

The weight of centuries of systemic racism and the urgency of the current moment demand inclusive, bold new approaches. The old way of doing things must end. Voices from diverse communities and backgrounds must have a seat at the table and be in the room where decisions happen. This panel will be one of the many methods that Congress will use to build a bridge to a more equitable and just future for this nation.