

Important message from Speaker Boehner and Leader Pelosi

August 8, 2011

Dear Colleague:

As you know, since the 1820's thousands of young Americans have served as Pages in the House of Representatives. Until recent years, much of the work performed by Pages was absolutely essential to the smooth functioning of the House. For example, before e-mail and wide use of the internet, House Pages crisscrossed the congressional complex each day delivering countless messages and documents to Members, committees and leadership offices. At the same time, young people selected to serve as Pages – most often for a semester while high school juniors as well as during the summer – are afforded a unique educational experience that includes working with lawmakers and fellow Pages from across the country and observing legislative proceedings firsthand from their traditional posts at the rear of the House chamber.

With full appreciation for the part that Pages have played in the history and traditions of the House, we nevertheless agreed in 2008 that the time was right for a comprehensive review of the program. Accordingly, we asked a team of independent consultants to:

- Evaluate the quality of the Page experience for participants
- Assess the current need for services Pages have traditionally provided to the House
- Critique both daily management and longer term oversight of the program
- Develop an overall estimate of the program's annual costs

The study and resulting report were completed by two respected experts. Rick Shapiro, former president of the Congressional Management Foundation for nearly two decades, has a keen understanding of congressional operations. He teamed with William A. Weary, a highly regarded educational consultant on program development for public and private high schools and colleges.

Their extensive study identified a number of major challenges facing the Page Program along with recommendations for addressing those challenges. Several improvements to the program that were recommended by the independent review were implemented. Last summer, we commissioned a follow-up “snapshot” review, tasking the same team of consultants with measuring the current condition of the program against their 2008 findings in order to gauge the degree to which previously identified challenges had been successfully addressed. Thanks in part to the dedication of the Page Board and the Clerk of the House, as well as Page Program teachers and staff, the follow-up study made clear that oversight and coordination of the program has improved in recent years.

Despite these improvements, many of the serious concerns originally raised about the need for, and cost of, the Page Program remain. After careful consideration, we have determined that the Page Program should be terminated at the conclusion of the current summer term.

Although we are mindful of the special place their unique experience holds in the memories of the young Americans privileged to serve as Pages over the years, our decision to close the program reflects two current realities:

Changes in technology have obviated the need for most Page services

- Throughout most of the Page Program’s history, the young aides were often stretched to the limit delivering large numbers of urgently needed documents and other packages all over Capitol Hill – but today are rarely called upon for such deliveries, as most documents are now transmitted electronically.
- Dozens of Pages were once needed on the House floor to deliver a steady stream of phone messages to Members – but today are severely underutilized, as Members are typically contacted directly via BlackBerries and similar devices.

The program’s high costs are difficult to justify, especially in light of diminished benefits to the House

- The 2008 study identified total annual costs of the program in excess of \$5 million, not including capital costs associated with the Page dormitory and school.
- The study calculated per-Page costs for a two-semester school year of \$69,000-\$80,000 per year, depending on the size of each semester’s class.

Accordingly, after advising the members of the Page Board of our decision, we have jointly directed the Clerk of the House and other House officials to take the steps necessary to conclude the Page Program by August 31, 2011.

While the traditional mission of the Page Program has diminished, we look forward to working with Members of the House to find ways to enable America's young people to continue to engage in the important work of the Congress, in addition to the internships that most offices already sponsor. We also have directed the House Historian to prepare an official history of the Page Program as a lasting tribute to the Pages, Members and staff who have contributed so much to the program's success.

Sincerely,

John A. Boehner

Nancy Pelosi

Speaker

Democratic Leader