



# WHO'S ON THE HILL?

STAFFING AND HUMAN CAPITAL IN  
CONGRESS'S LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEES

---

**BY CASEY BURGAT  
AND RYAN DUKEMAN**  
MARCH 2019





Free markets. Real solutions.

---

## **ABOUT R STREET**

The R Street Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, public-policy research organization (“think tank”). Our mission is to engage in policy research and outreach to promote free markets and limited, effective government. In addition to our D.C. headquarters, we have offices in Georgia, Texas, Ohio, Massachusetts and California, covering the Southeast, Central, Midwest, Northeast and Western regions, respectively.

We work extensively on both state and national policy, focusing on issues that other groups tend to neglect. Our specialty is tackling issues that are complex, but do not necessarily grab major headlines. These are the areas where we think we can have a real impact. We believe free markets work better than the alternatives. At the same time, we recognize the legislative process calls out for practical responses to current problems. Toward that end, our motto is “Free markets. Real solutions.”

---

## **INDEPENDENCE STATEMENT**

The R Street Institute is committed to producing high-quality research and educating federal, state and local policymakers. Facts, data and staff expertise drive our research. We do not and will not permit the interests of politicians, donors or any other third party to dictate R Street’s research or policy positions. While R Street may solicit input from any number of interested stakeholders, we are solely responsible for our research and related activities. Even where we agree with stakeholders and donors, R Street staff does not and will not represent, lobby or advocate on behalf of any third party.

### **R STREET INSTITUTE**

1212 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 900  
Washington, D.C. 20005  
(202) 525-5717 [feedback@rstreet.org](mailto:feedback@rstreet.org)  
[www.rstreet.org](http://www.rstreet.org)

© 2019 by the R Street Institute, Washington, D.C.

# FOREWORD

---

In 1885, future President Woodrow Wilson characterized congressional committees as “little legislatures,” responsible for dividing the vast workload of each chamber along specified, relatively autonomous, jurisdictions.<sup>1</sup> As Wilson alludes, each congressional committee is a world unto itself.

Over 130 years later, this characterization of committees is even more true. Each of the 45 House and Senate permanent, select and joint committees is wildly different from the others, not just in jurisdiction, history and impact but in capacity. Committees receive vastly different appropriations to carry out their work, have starkly different staffing levels to support members’ goals and vary enormously in how well they pay their staffs and consequently, how long those aides stay.

And yet, committees in Congress are often discussed as a singular institutional resource, particularly at the staff level. Committee staffs are nearly universally regarded as issue experts, and are assumed to earn higher salaries and serve longer tenures relative to personal office staffers. But, these assumptions are not always true. In fact, they rarely hold.

**Committee staffs are nearly universally regarded as issue experts, and are assumed to earn higher salaries and serve longer tenures relative to personal office staffers. But, these assumptions are not always true. In fact, they rarely hold.**

---

In an effort to better explain the often opaque worlds of congressional committees and their staffing capacity—and to corroborate and challenge their assumed

features—the R Street Institute created the “Committee Sheet Project.” During 2017 and 2018, we released one committee sheet each week that broke down each congressional committee’s jurisdiction; authorization; staffing levels; tenures; average salaries; and other important committee facts and features.

Along with the employment database used in their creation, these sheets provide the first comprehensive committee-by-committee look at the tenure, pay and the gender balance of their staffs.

But the individual committee sheets only tell part of the story. As we worked through the data, we quickly realized that committees differ in far more than jurisdiction and institutional clout. Their capacities vary greatly, as well. Some have expectedly large staffs; others predictably small. But, their staffing levels also experience large swings year over year. Some committees have a multitude of long-serving aides and pay very well; others are prone to shorter stints, as staffers quickly depart for employment elsewhere. Some have gender parity among their aides; some aren’t even close.

The point is that no two committees are alike. In fact, no two years within a single committee’s history look exactly the same. **As a result, those of us who study, follow and love Congress should resist the urge to paint congressional committees—and particularly their aides—with too wide a brush.**

It is our hope that the committee sheets and this accompanying report provide valuable insight into each of the individual House and Senate committees and their many varying capacity dynamics. We should also note that we haven’t yet answered every question asked of committee capacity but believe our efforts are an important first step toward a better understanding of congressional committees, their ability to execute the job expected of them and Congress as an institution.

**Casey Burgat**

Senior Governance Fellow, R Street Institute

**Ryan Dukeman**

Research Assistant, R Street Institute

---

<sup>1</sup> Woodrow Wilson, *Congressional Government* (Houghton Mifflin, 1885)

# INTRODUCTION

---

Did you know the House Committee on Homeland Security oversees border and port security but is not responsible for the nation's immigration policy (the Judiciary Committee is) or the borders between the United States and its neighbors (that's the Foreign Affairs Committee)? And based on the precise type of border security needed, the House and Senate Committees on Armed Services are likely to play major roles, too.

Yet, despite their hazy and overlapping jurisdictions, the congressional committee system is vital for effective congressional operations. By assigning its members into smaller work units with itemized issue areas, congressional committees afford members opportunities to simultaneously work through a daunting amount of legislative proposals and oversight demands.

Members of Congress also individually benefit from committee divisions of labor. Committee membership allows lawmakers to directly represent the needs of their district and constituents, as well as to develop proficiency and influence on committee matters.

Because of their targeted jurisdictions, committees are often viewed as sources of issue area expertise. Members are able to zero in on the gritty details of committee issues and ingratiate themselves with the legislative histories of their respective jurisdictions. This division of labor ultimately grants members outsized knowledge and influence when committee issues become factors before the full body.

For example, consider questions related to farm subsidies. In theory, at least, legislators who do not serve on the Agriculture Committee will be inclined to defer to members who do, knowing that committee members have been immersed in the topic while non-members are unlikely to have spent much time at all on the subject. The same dynamic occurs within each House and Senate committee.

For those most familiar with Capitol Hill, any issue-area expertise in committee offices largely stems from the staffers who support each committees' operations. After all, committee work is only one component of a member's job description; for committee aides, their panel's jurisdiction constitutes the bulk of their duties.

Because of this, conventional wisdom suggests that committee aides are generally the most substantively knowledgeable, most tenured and best compensated on the Hill.

These conventional wisdoms are largely true. But, are they true across committees, across time, across gender and across chambers? The short answer is: it depends.

To help answer these questions, we developed a **database of each of the congressional aides who have served on any of the House and Senate committees since 2001**. Using a mix of authoritative data sources, including raw compensation data from LegiStorm.com, we have **preliminary answers** to many **pressing congressional committee capacity questions**, such as:

- » Which committees **receive the most money** to do their work? How do individual **committee authorizations vary** over time?
- » Which committees' **aides** have the **longest congressional tenures**? What about **the shortest**?
- » Which committees **retain their staffs** the longest?
- » Which committees have the **best gender parity**, particularly with more senior, higher-paying positions?
- » What are the **average salaries** across committees? Does a professional staff member, for example, make more, on average, on certain committees or within a certain chamber?
- » What are the **pay gaps between men and women** on each congressional committee?
- » On which committees do the highest number of **lobbyists** serve?





## DATA AND METHODOLOGY

---

Data for this report come from an original dataset compiled between February and June 2018, and aggregated and analyzed in October and November. To create the dataset, we relied on LegiStorm’s “Committee Staff Directory” for each committee as of the date accessed. Basic information such as name, gender, title and office were pulled directly from LegiStorm. To create measures of tenure and pay, we analyzed LegiStorm’s payment records for congressional staff salaries in order to determine the start, end and restart dates of individuals’ employment in Congress (data which began in 2001), as well as their Fiscal Year 2017 congressional salary.

Aides who receive compensation from both a member’s personal office and from a congressional committee (e.g., interns, detailees, fellows, shared staff) and other temporary staff were excluded from the scope of the report, as their tenures are not typical of traditional Hill staff.

To classify staffers by position type (e.g., policy, communications, administrative, senior staff), the authors developed a classification scheme based on the job titles associated with each individual’s payment records.

Starting with each of the House committees and then moving to the Senate’s, each of these datasets was analyzed and published as a Legislative Branch Capacity Working Group *Committee Fact Sheet*. These are publicly available, and the authors welcome refinements and questions regarding data sources and analytical methodology.

# COMMITTEES OVER TIME

In the early 2000s, intense policy and governmental change meant that committee staff authorizations in the House and Senate followed a similar pattern.<sup>2</sup> In the House, total committee authorizations amounted to \$282 million in the 104th Congress (1995-96). That number steadily rose to a peak of \$396 million in the 111th Congress (2009-10), then decreased to a modern low of \$261 million in the 115th (2017-18). Since its peak funding levels in the 111th Congress, the House cut its own committee authorization by a staggering 34 percent in just eight years.

The Senate followed a very similar pattern. Total committee authorizations amounted to a low of \$166 million in the 106th Congress (1999-2000), rose to a modern high of \$305 million in the 111th under unified Democratic control of government during the first two years of the Obama administration and have since fallen to \$223 million for the 115th Congress. Although they have not fallen below initial levels like those of the House, in the four congresses since peak funding levels, the Senate has cut 27 percent of its committee authorizations.

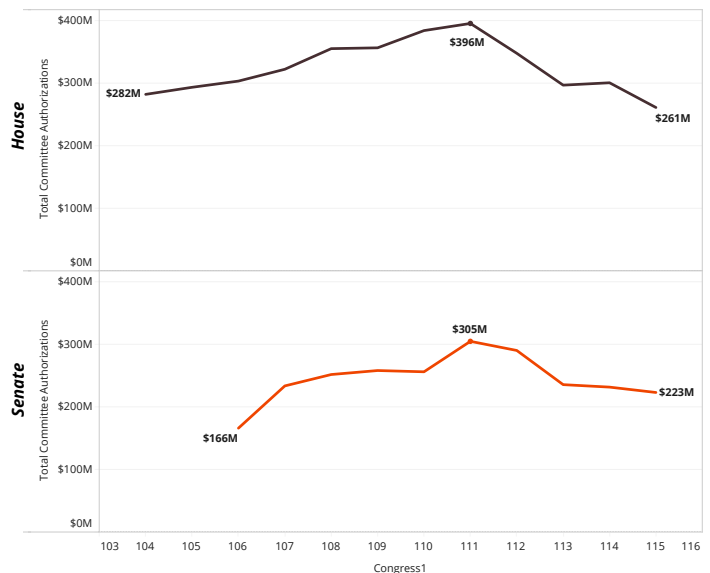
The main implication of these patterns is that as the size and complexity of the federal government has continued to grow, Congress has deprioritized spending within the offices most responsible for legislating and conducting Executive Branch oversight.

---

As the size and complexity of the federal government has continued to grow, Congress has deprioritized spending within the offices most responsible for legislating and conducting Executive Branch oversight.

---

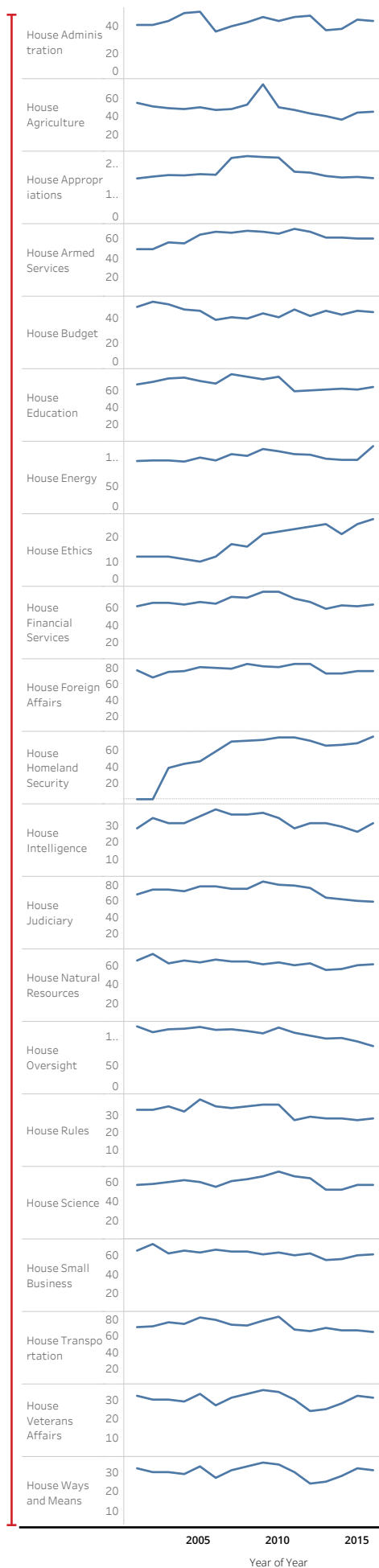
**Figure 1: Committee Authorizations by Chamber since 2001**  
*How Has Each Chamber's Committee Funding Changed Over Time?*



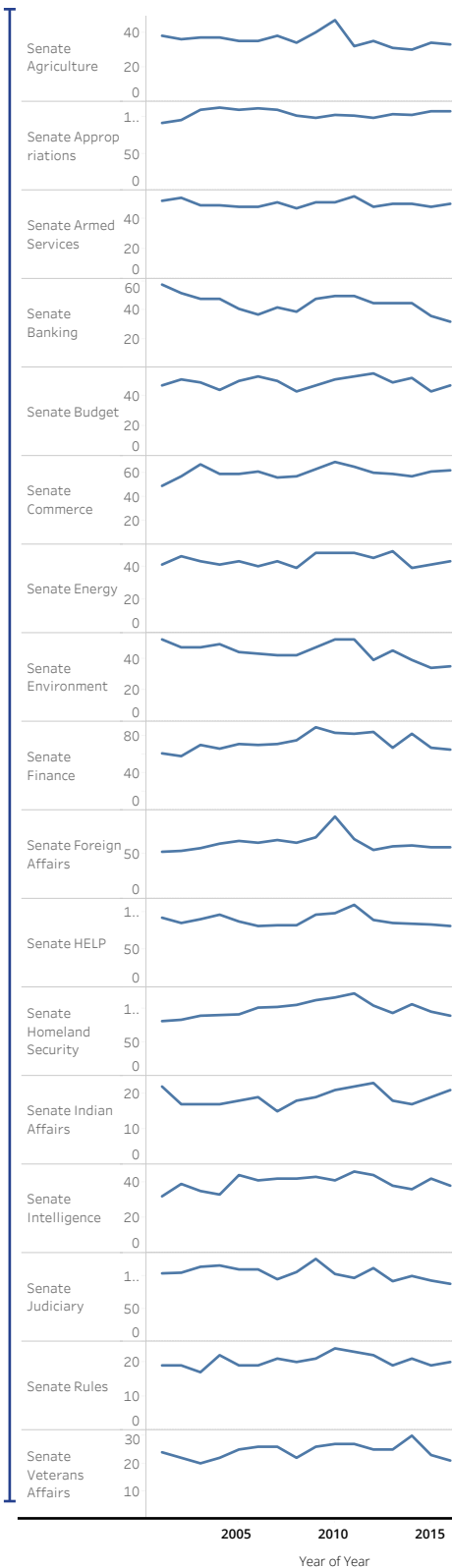
As a direct result of these cuts, committees have a **diminished ability to hire and retain top-tier policy and investigative staff**. More broadly, they **reduce Congress's ability to serve as a rigorous, independent check on the power of the Executive Branch**.

The 116th Congress features a divided government and a Democratic House intent on reasserting congressional checks and balances on the Trump administration. Because of Democratic pledges to investigate all matters of the Trump administration, many observers will pay close attention to the authorization levels of committees with subpoena power and jurisdictional authority over pertinent federal agencies. Increased levels—particularly for the Intelligence and Judiciary committees—will be a great indication of committee priorities to staff key positions in order to carry out effective investigations and oversight.

<sup>2</sup> Data were readily available for the 104th through 115th Congresses for the House and the 106th through 115th Congresses for the Senate. To account for inflation, all authorizations are calculated using constant January 2017 dollars.



**Figure 2:**  
**Total Committee Staffing Levels**  
**by Chamber Since 2001**  
*Committee Staff Levels, 2001-2016*



Understanding fluctuations in aggregate committee authorizations gives us indications of each chamber's commitment to strengthening or weakening committees but it does little to explain variation in the committees most affected by budget increases and cuts. In other words, not all committees' staffing levels were equally affected by total committee funding levels. In fact, despite chamber-wide cuts to committee authorizations, some actually increased their staffing levels.

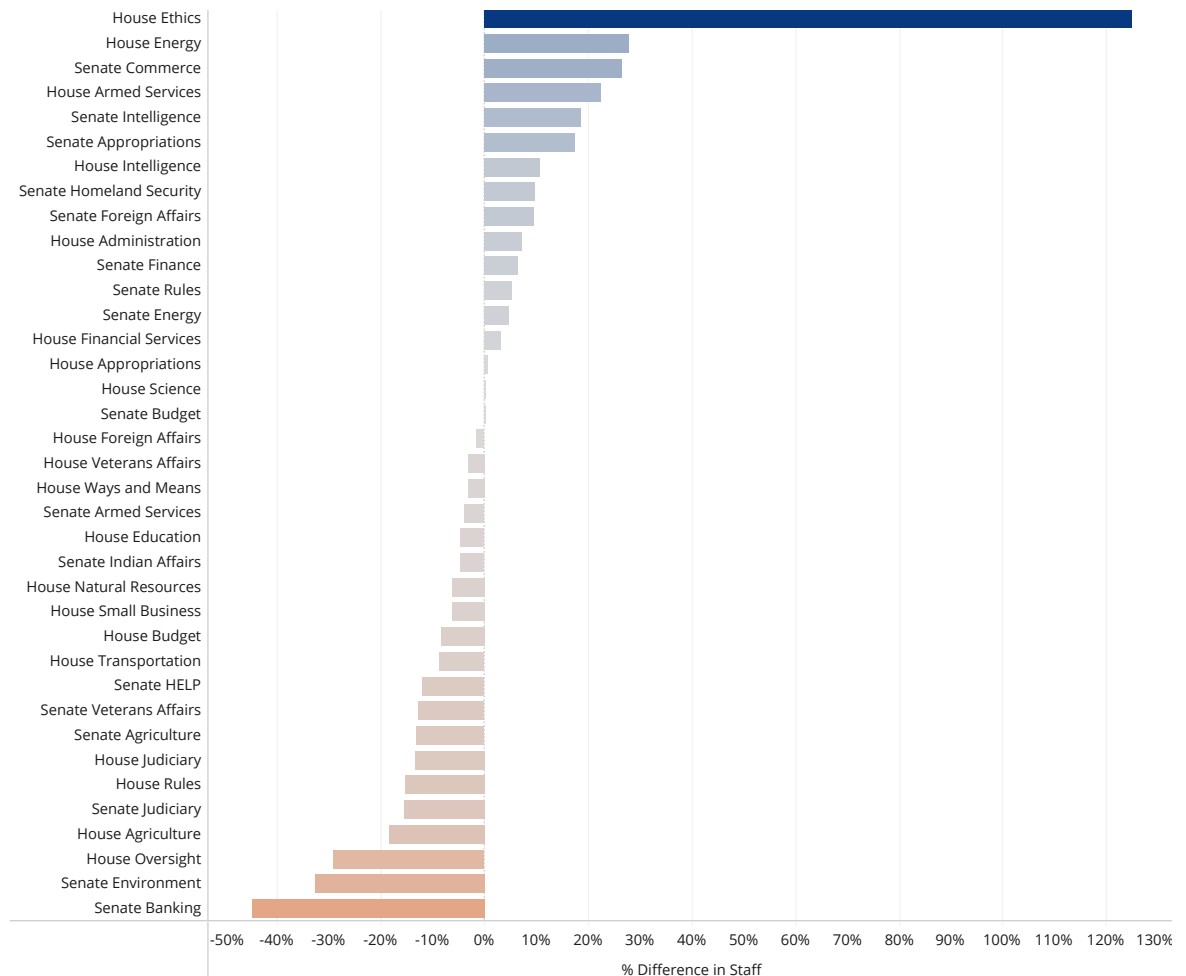
Before turning attention to important questions such as committee aide tenure, pay and demographic information for all congressional committees as of 2017, this report provides committee staffing levels for each committee from 2001 to 2016. As the series of sparklines in Figure 2 show, some committees have had essentially no change in staff in over 15 years of data covered, while others have seen major spikes or cuts to staffing levels. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the House Homeland Security Committee has seen the most dramatic change, rising from its creation in 2003 to over 80 staff members as of 2016. Over the course of the period studied, the most stable committees in terms of staffing changes have been the House Appropriations, House Science, Space and Technology and Senate Budget committees, each of which saw no real staff-level changes in 2016, as compared to 2001.

Of particular interest, some committees show **a clear spike in staffing following the Democratic takeover of the House in 2006**. For example, while the **House Appropriations Committee increased its staff by roughly one-third under a Democratic majority** (a time during which major changes to federal spending were underway including the Recovery Act, the TARP program and the Affordable Care Act), staff levels decreased back toward historical norms under the post-2010 Republican majority.

While this and other correlations do not necessarily imply causation, the data offer an interesting and highly plausible narrative that **staffing levels can reflect the majority party's legislative priorities**. For example, while under the Republican majority, the House Financial Services Committee cut staffing levels from roughly 80 people to under 60 in just a few years, yet the House Small Business Committee staff was kept essentially the same.

**Figure 3**  
**Staffing Changes**  
**by Committee,**  
**2016 vs. 2001**

**Note:** House Homeland Security Committee is excluded from this analysis as it did not exist until 2003





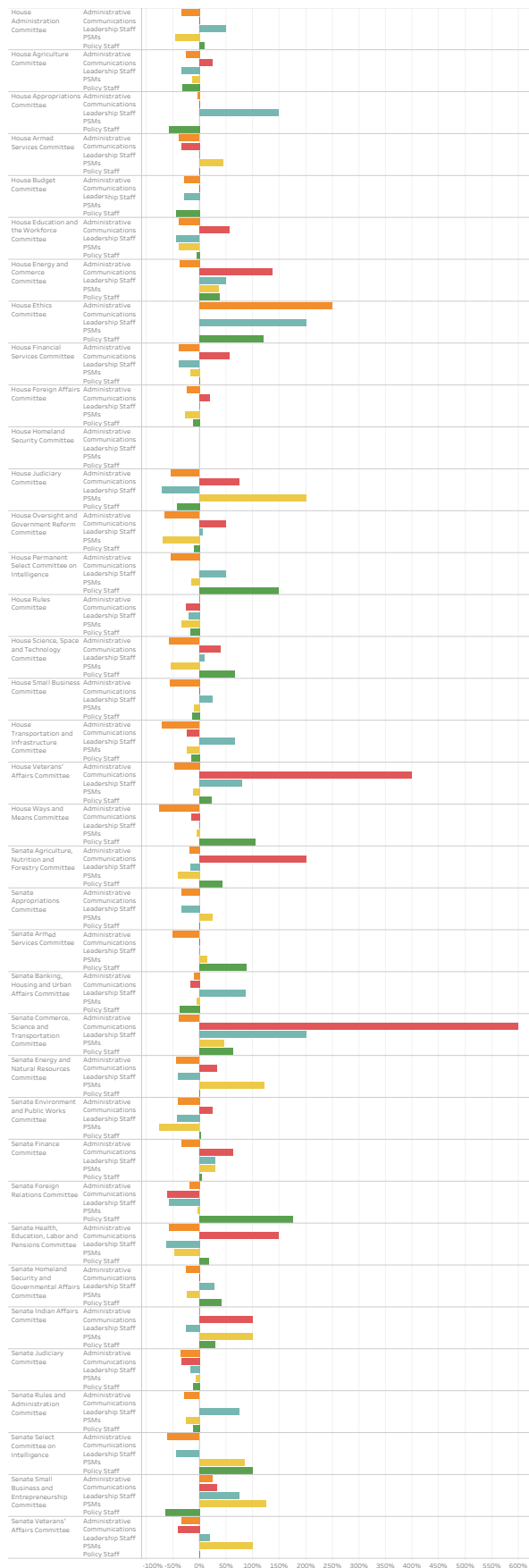
**Figure 4: Breakdown of Types of Staffers by Chamber Since 2001\***

**Change in Committee Staff Composition, 2017 vs. 2001**

Bar reflects % increase or decrease in count of staff members of the specified type, comparing 2017 to 2001.

NB: This view filters out the House Natural Resources and Senate Budget Committees due to differences in scale.

\*See Appendix for closer look.



In addition to providing patterns in staffing changes over the entire period studied, the data also show net changes, comparing 2016 staffing levels to those of 2001. **This view provides a different take, as it looks over a longer term and thus provides insight into broader institutional trends and priorities as reflected in areas of policy where the Hill has increased its human capital** (at least in terms of staff counts) versus where it has stagnated or declined. The House Ethics Committee, for example, experienced the greatest increase of staffing levels of all committees studied with a 124 percent growth in the number of staff. At the other extreme is the Senate's Banking Committee, the staff of which has shrunk by roughly 45 percent over the time studied.

Overall, 18 committees have increased staff counts, while 20 have decreased them. While such generalizations gloss over nuances in particular trends, committees that deal with national security and foreign affairs (e.g. House Armed Services, House/Senate Intelligence, Senate Homeland Security and Senate Foreign Affairs) as well as those that cover Budget and Administration Rules saw increases or essentially no change. On the other hand, the Senate Committees on Banking and the Environment experienced the greatest decrease in staff counts during the period.

Institutional and committee priorities are reflected not just in the *number* and *experience* of staff employed but the *types of staffers hired*, as well. Figure 4 details changes in the position types and shows the relative change in staffing compositions for each committee in 2017 versus 2001, across five staffer position types: administrative, communications, policy, professional staff members and senior staff. While personal offices in Congress have consistently shifted staffing balances away from DC or policy jobs and toward state/district or constituent service, **in most committees in Congress the opposite trend has occurred.** Comparing 2017 to 2001, staffing levels (excluding the House Homeland Security Committee, which did not exist until 2003), only two committees in all of Congress had a higher percentage of administrative staff in 2017 than in 2001: House Ethics and Senate Small Business. In both chambers, the percentage of staff positions committed to administrative tasks have declined by more than 30 percent.

**The relative portion of professional staff members (PSMs) also fell in both chambers during the period studied.** In the House, there are six percent fewer PSMs in 2017 than there were in 2001 and eight percent fewer in the Senate. Though unverified, we believe this trend has occurred because some committees have transitioned away from the catch-all “professional staff member” title in favor of more specified titles and responsibilities such as “counsel” and “legislative assistant.”

The expanded hiring of communications professionals signals that committees have turned to messaging campaigns rather than policy development as a valued committee output.

**During the period studied, both chambers’ committees experienced surges of over 30 percent in the proportions of committee aides tasked with *communications* titles and duties.** Given the increased number of communications outlets and the rise of social media technology as an important avenue to communicate the committee’s activity, this is an unsurprising development. Increases in communications positions also coincide with a decrease in legislative activity. Further, **the hiring of communications professionals signals that committees have turned to messaging campaigns rather than policy development as a valued committee output.**

Finally, the chambers differ dramatically in their relative portions of staff committed to legislative and policy titles. **While the House saw no rise in committee staff devoted to policy work, Senate committees increased their legislative capacity by about 17 percent** during the period studied. On the House side, committee hiring away from policy positions mirror personal office trends, in that personal staff proportions favor constituent service and communications roles at the expense of legislative positions. Such divestments from legislative staff are likely consequences of important legislation increasingly being written by party leaders independent of rank-and-file members and committees.

One outlier in this data is the Senate Budget Committee, which saw a 70 percent decrease in the share of professional staff members and a nearly 60 percent increase in the share of policy staff. These are, by far, the two largest shifts in all of Congress and may possibly be the result simply of the committee reclassifying existing staff, rather than an actual shift of this magnitude. This seems particularly plausible, given the high potential for overlap in staffers considered “policy” oriented and “professional staff members,” a common confounding factor in the data.

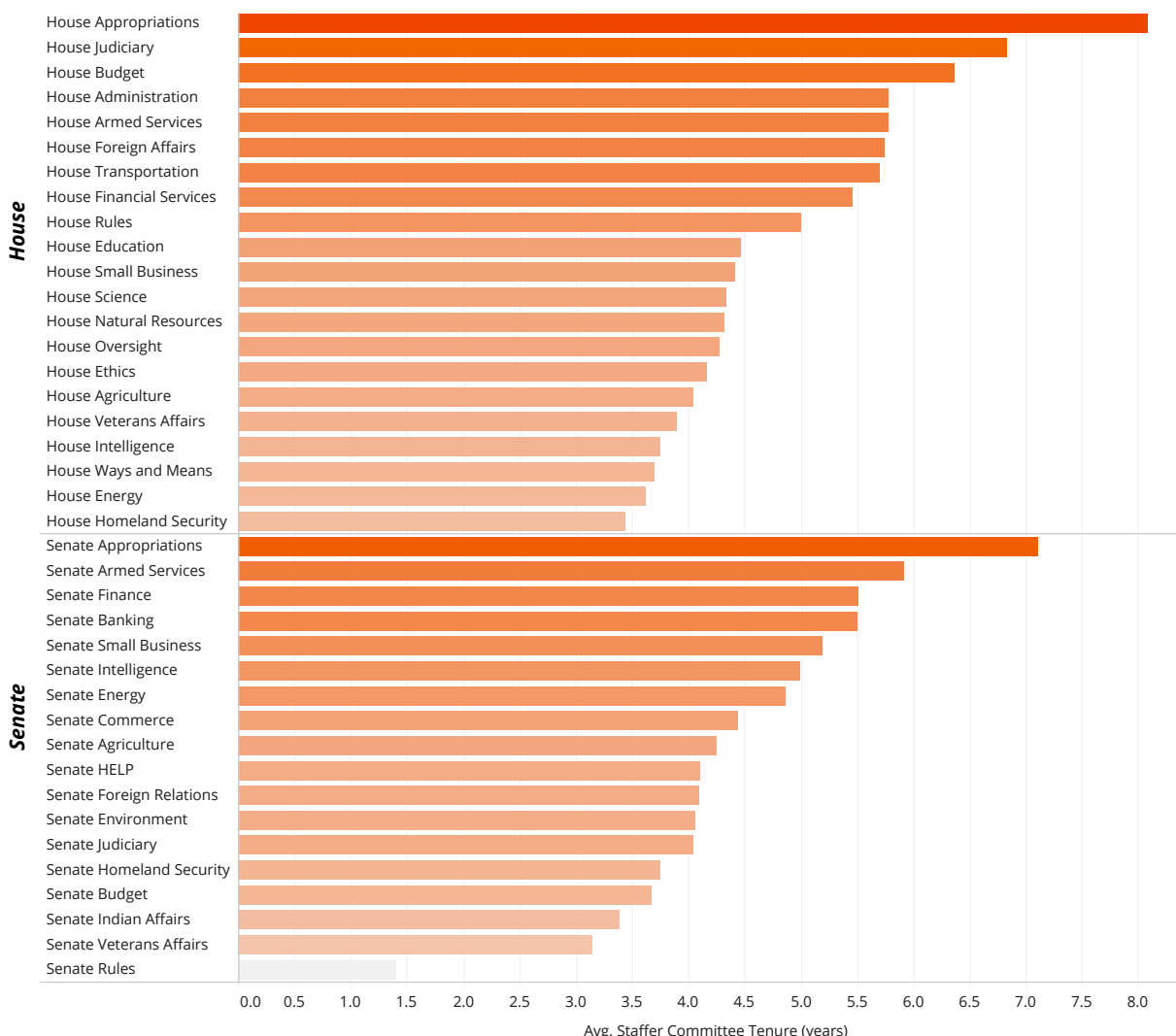


# COMMITTEE SNAPSHOTS

Figure 5 shows the average committee tenure—the amount of time a staffer has spent in his or her current committee—for staffers currently serving each congressional committee as of February 2018. We use this indicator as a proxy of issue area expertise relating to a committee’s jurisdictional responsibilities.

In both the House and Senate, **Appropriations committees lead the pack by a substantial margin**, with average committee tenures totaling over eight years for the House Appropriations Committee and over seven years for its Senate counterpart. These numbers align with the commonly held notion that the appropriations committees are among the most sought and influential posts on the Hill, as staffers in these roles tend to stay for longer than any other committee. In both chambers, the difference in average committee tenure between Appropriations and the next-highest-tenure committee is over a full year—by far the biggest marginal difference between any two places on each list.

**Figure 5: Committee Tenure**  
*Committee Tenure by Committee*





**Table 1*****Committees with longest average committee tenure***

Committee	
House Appropriations	8.1 yrs
Senate Appropriations	7.1 yrs
House Judiciary	6.8 yrs
House Budget	6.4 yrs
Senate Armed Services	5.9 yrs

**Table 2*****Committees with shortest average committee tenure***

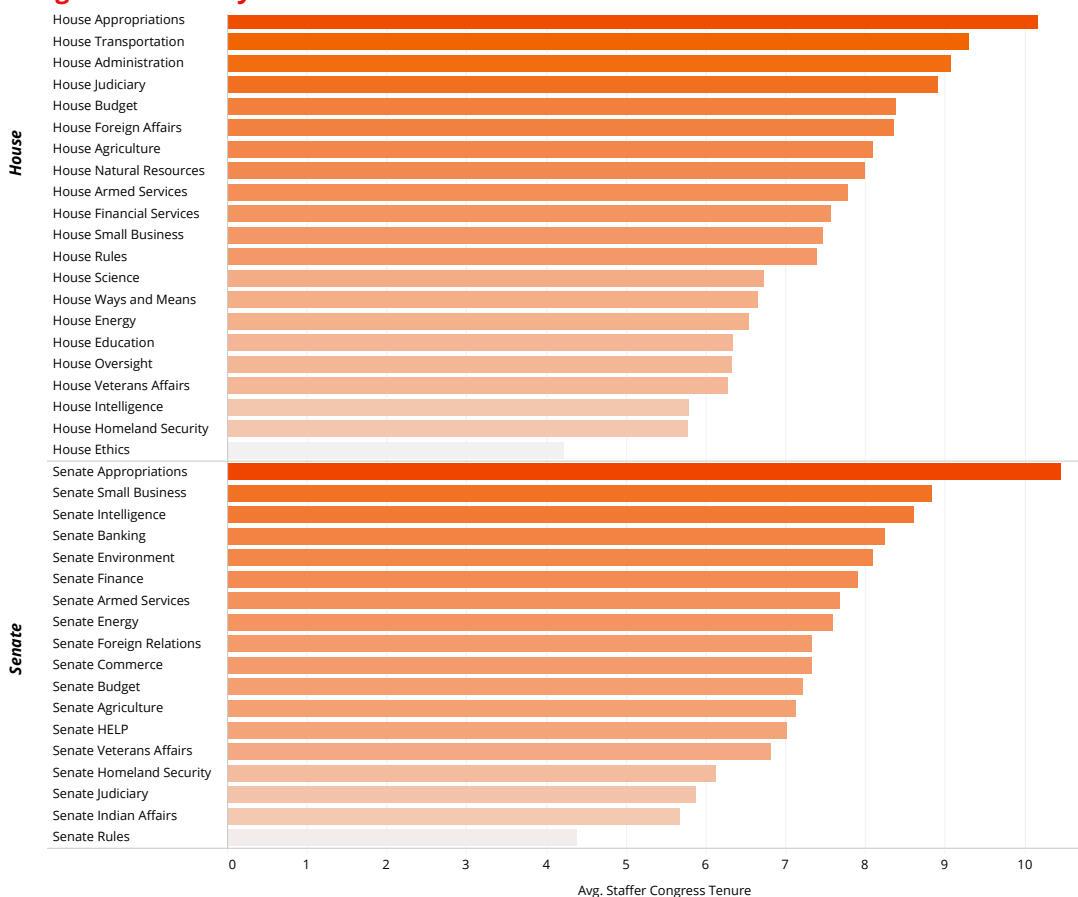
Committee	
Senate Rules	1.4 yrs
Senate Veteran Affairs	3.1 yrs
Senate Indian Affairs	3.4 yrs
House Homeland Security	3.4 yrs
House Energy	3.6 yrs

Looking across both chambers simultaneously (Table 1), the top five committees in Congress by average staffer committee tenure are, in order: House Appropriations, Senate Appropriations, House Judiciary, House Budget and Senate Armed Services. These committees range in average committee tenure from 5.9 years to 8.1 and all reflect posts traditionally viewed as competitive and highly sought after.

At the other end of the spectrum (Table 2), the bottom five committees in Congress by average staffer committee tenure are, in order: House Energy, House Homeland Security, Senate Indian Affairs, Senate Veterans Affairs and Senate Rules, whose staff members have been with the committee an average of just 1.4 years. In the case of House Homeland Security, this low ranking is understandable, given that the committee did not exist until 2003. This limits the theoretical amount of time a staffer could have possibly spent on staff. More striking, however, is Senate Rules, which at an average of just 1.4 years, is the only committee in all of Congress where the average staffer has been with the committee for less than three years. This makes it the lowest-ranked committee by a factor of more than two.

**Figure 6: Staffer Congressional Tenure**

***Congress Tenure by Committee***



Looking beyond committee tenure and analyzing staffers’ full tenure in Congress—that is, the total number of years served in any congressional office—provides a look at the committees that tend to attract the most seasoned Capitol Hill veterans and those that are skewed toward newer staffers. Here too, as the only committees in Congress whose staffers’ average tenure on the Hill exceeds 10 years, the appropriations committees in both Houses lead Congress by a significant margin. Senate Rules and House Homeland Security again come out at or near the bottom in their respective chambers, with Senate Rules staffers averaging just over four years in Congress and those of House Homeland Security averaging nearly six. The Ethics Committee sits at the bottom on the House side and in Congress as a whole, as its staffers have worked on the Hill for just slightly over four years on average.

In terms of tenure differences and the perceived prestige of a committee assignment, the trend is less clear when one looks at congressional tenures rather than committee tenures. Perhaps surprisingly, following the two appropriations committees, the committees with the second- longest average congressional tenures are Transportation and Infrastructure in the House (over nine years) and the Small Business Committee in the Senate (just under nine years). These differences and a potentially weaker correlation between committee prestige and congressional tenure than between prestige and committee tenure may also be explained by working conditions, self-selection among individuals of relative ambition, and the breadth and availability of non-Hill jobs that are open to a staffer looking to leave a particular committee.

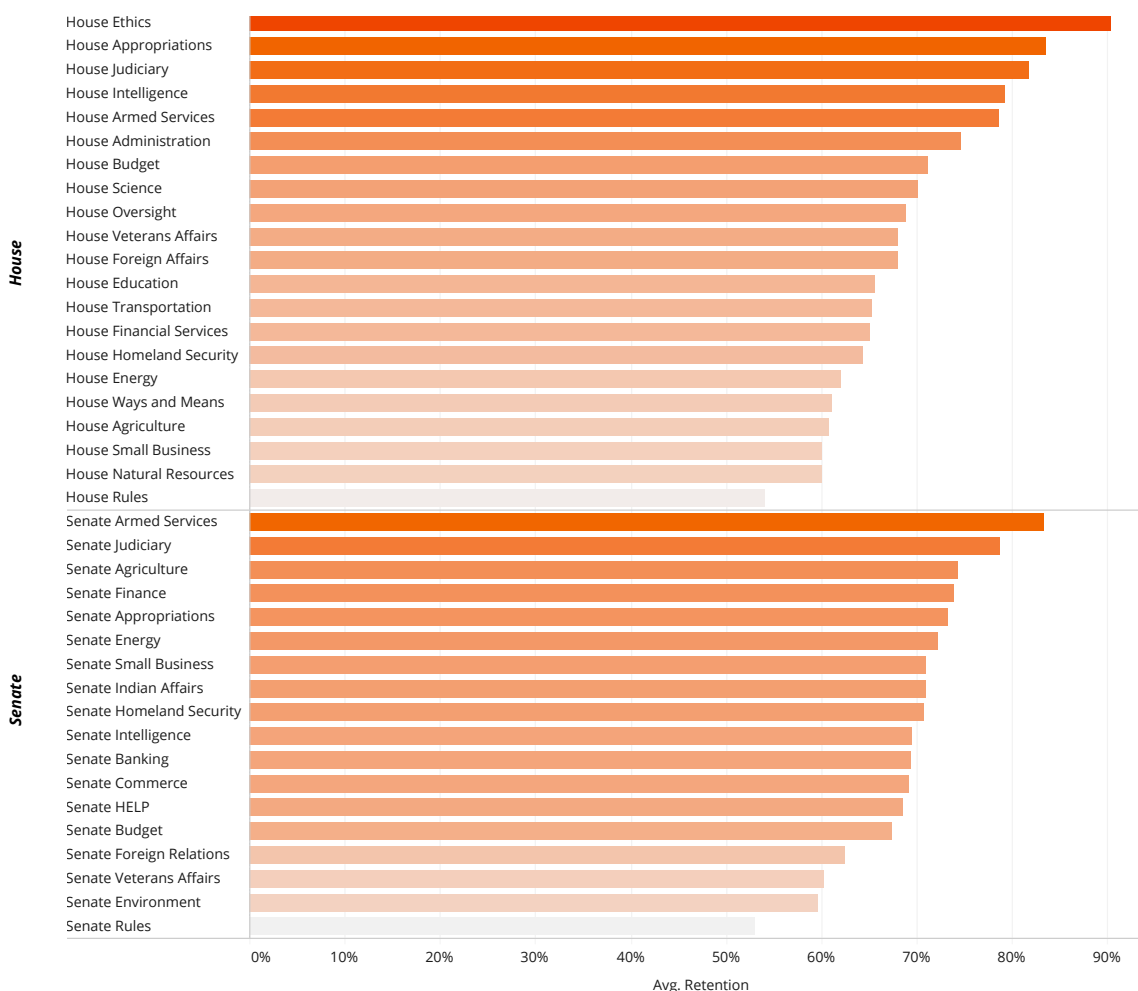
**Appropriations committees in both houses lead Congress by a significant margin ... in attracting the most seasoned Capitol Hill veterans.**



## Figure 7: Committee Retention

### *Which Committees Retain Their Staff the Longest?*

Retention is defined as ratio of committee tenure, i.e. how much of one's Hill career has been spent at their current committee



A last useful indicator of human capital and staff tenure included in this report is staff retention, here defined as the percentage of one's Hill career spent employed by a staffer's current committee (including any promotions or changes in role they have had while at the committee). For example, if a staffer served three years within their current committee and an additional two years within a member's personal office, her retention rate is 60 percent. This indicator allows comparisons—across committees and chambers—as to which committees best retain their staffers and their associated issue-area expertise.

There are several potential and insightful ways to interpret retention data. The first concerns desirability of a committee and can be seen as a reflection of its working conditions. For example, one possible reason the House Administration Committee ranks among the highest in the House for retaining its employees (roughly 75 percent of their Hill careers), while the Senate Rules Committee (its counterpart in the upper chamber) ranks lowest in all of Congress, could be that working conditions in one committee are much more favorable, enjoyable or conducive to a long period of service. Taken together, these measures of tenure tell a story about institutional priorities, desirable committee assignments and where Congress's staff expertise is allocated.

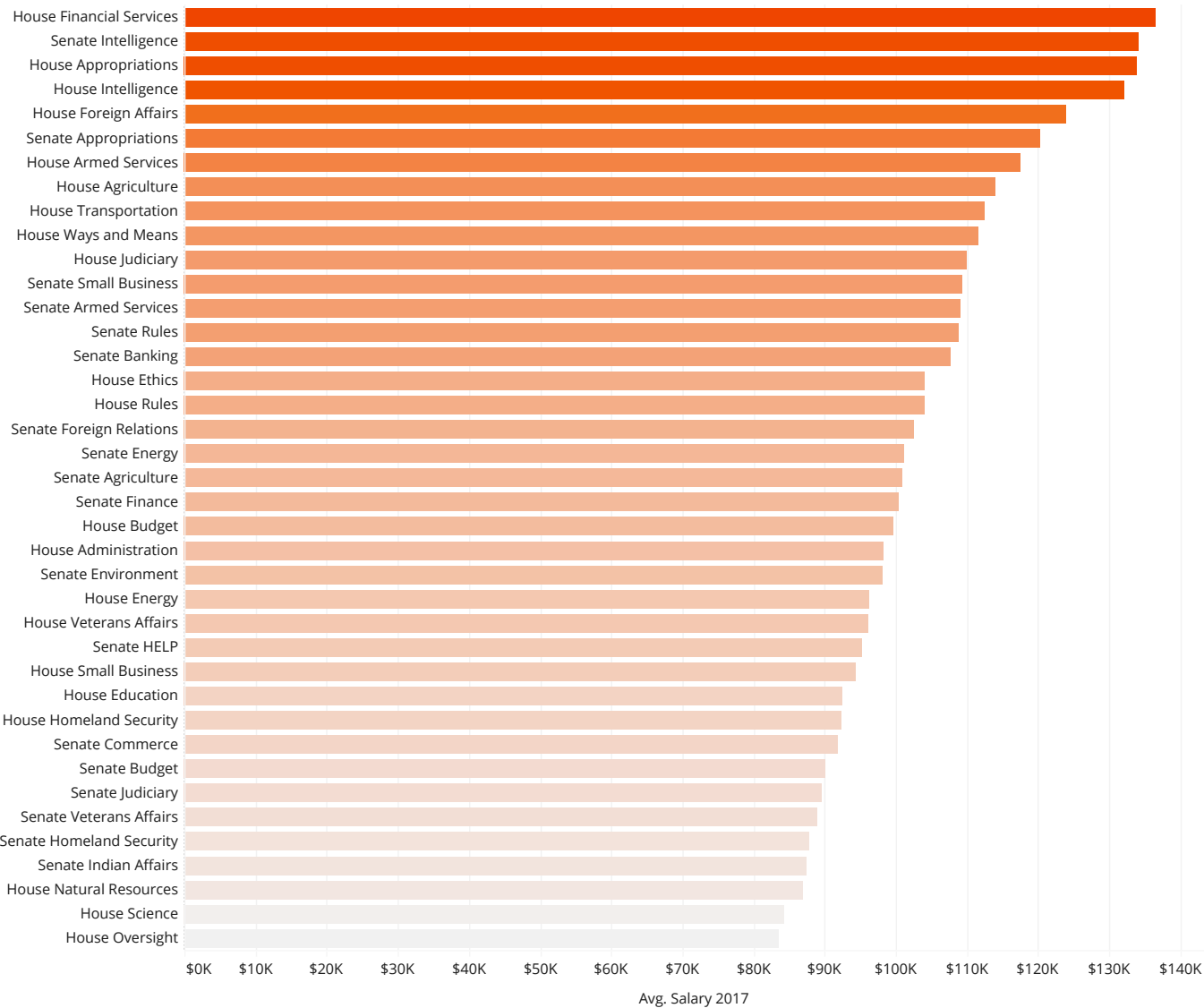
Interestingly, the House and Senate Rules Committees both rank lowest in their respective chambers on average staff retention, having employed their staffers for an average of roughly 54 percent of their Hill careers, compared to over 90 percent for the House Ethics Committee and nearly 85 percent for the Senate Armed Services Committee (which ranked highest in their respective chambers).

**Committees that can attract, train and retain top talent benefit from a deeper well of institutional knowledge and staffer-level expertise.** By contrast, although they may benefit from the innovative ways of thinking that can accompany an outside or less institutionally conditioned perspective, committees that cannot keep top staff **may simply not have the procedural, bureaucratic or substantive know-how to craft legislation, conduct effective oversight and perform other key functions of the legislative branch.** This is particularly true at a time in which nearly one-quarter of House members are freshmen—in one of the largest freshmen classes in generations. Staff provide key institutional memory and know-how that members and senators may not have on their own, and this allows for smoother committee operations and more effective legislating that benefits members of both parties. Understanding how such talent is allocated across committees, then, provides key insight into where Congress’s institutional priorities and most effective committee leadership may be found.

Committees that cannot keep top staff may simply not have the procedural, bureaucratic or substantive know-how to craft legislation, conduct oversight and perform key functions of the legislative branch.

**Committee Salaries**

**Figure 8: Average Salary by Committee**

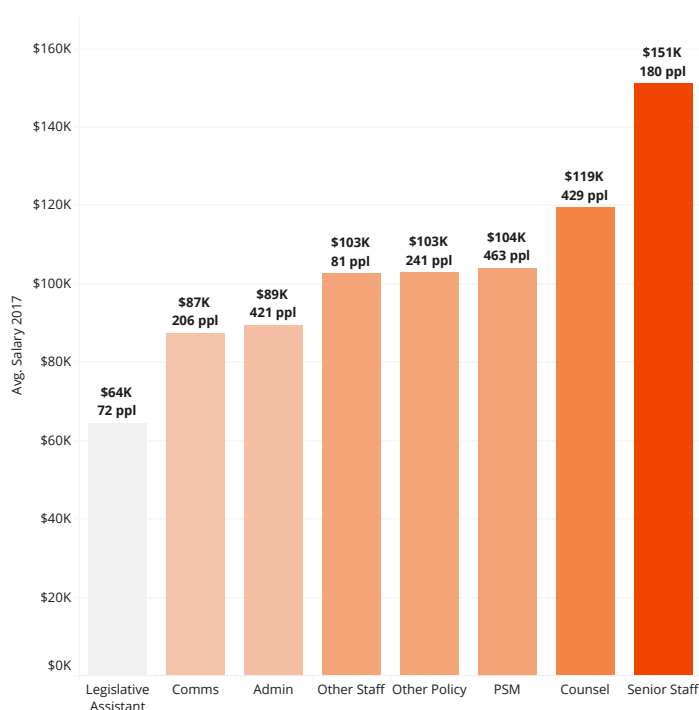


Perhaps surprising given that such information is publicly available, most people even on the Hill do not have a clear picture of average salaries across Hill offices or committees. This is because the data are released by payment, rather than by individual or committee. Our report therefore presents **the first comprehensive look at the House and Senate committees that pay their staff the best and worst on average.** This is achieved by aggregating payment-level data into individual and committee-level averages. As with tenures, pay across committees varies considerably.

The best-paying committee in all of Congress is the House Financial Services Committee, with an average 2017 salary of \$135,000. Rounding out the top-six best compensating committees are: the Appropriations and Intelligence committees of both chambers, as well as the House Foreign Affairs Committee. In the case of Financial Services, this may reflect the need for the committee to compete with substantially higher paying jobs in the private financial services industry. Or, in the case of Appropriations, it may reflect (in line with previous data discussed above) that some of the most-seasoned and experienced staff in all of Congress work in these committees and therefore can command the highest salaries.

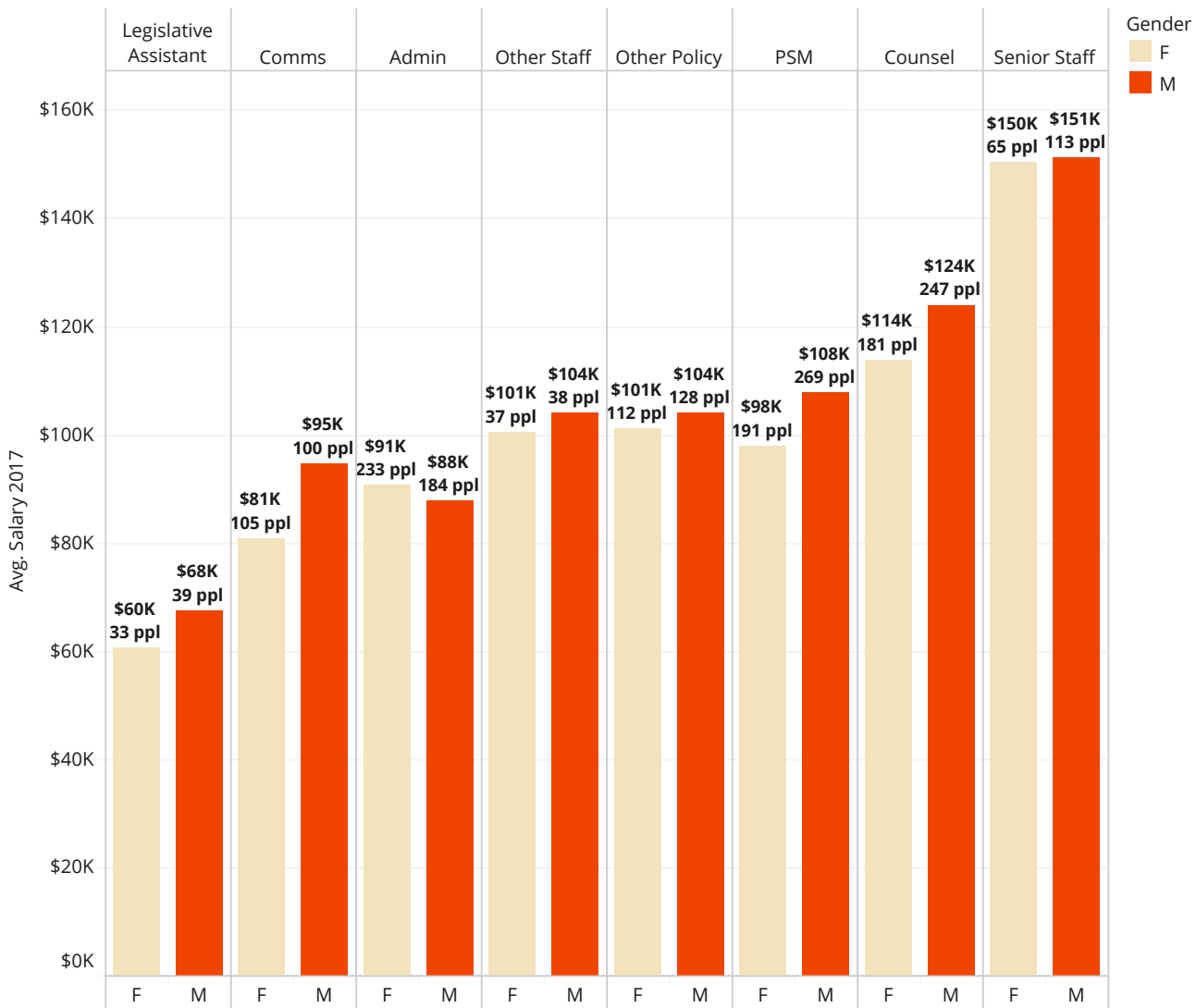
At the other end, the lowest paying committee in Congress is the House Oversight Committee, which pays staffers an average of about \$82,000 a year. Closely following House Oversight are the House Science Committee, House Natural Resources, Senate Indian Affairs, Senate Homeland Security (which also includes oversight responsibilities akin to those of the House Oversight and Senate Veterans Affairs). It is interesting to note that both chambers' primary government oversight committees, tasked with the critical function of overseeing and investigating the conduct of the Executive Branch, offered the least financial incentive to attract top Hill talent in a year in which one party had full control of the political branches. In light of this, these pay differentials may reflect larger political incentives for one party's congressional committees not to conduct rigorous oversight of its own party's executive branch. It will be interesting, then, as more data becomes available, to see whether oversight salaries increase in periods of divided government

**Figure 9: Average Salary by Position**



Aggregating the payment data also allows for a more comprehensive look at differentials in pay across positions. Unsurprisingly, senior committee staff command the highest salaries at an average of \$151,000, while committee Legislative Assistants pulled in \$64,000 in 2017. Communications staffers made slightly less than administrative staffers, at \$87,000 vs. \$89,000 on average.

**Figure 10: Average salary by Position by Gender**



Filtering the salary data by gender allows us to see the gender pay gap within each specific job. This helps to isolate the pay differential that is due to gender rather than title or experience more directly. Interestingly, senior staff had a gender pay gap of just \$1,000 in average salary, which is in line with our findings on the appropriations committees published last year. Women serving in administrative roles out-earned their male counterparts by roughly \$3,000 on average—the only category of committee job to do so. The biggest gender pay gap for any committee staff role was in communications, where, in 2017, male practitioners earned \$95,000 on average and women just \$81,000—a difference of \$14,000 or nearly 15 percent less on average.

**The only position category where women out-earned their male counterparts was administration. In all other categories, the gender pay gap benefitted men.**

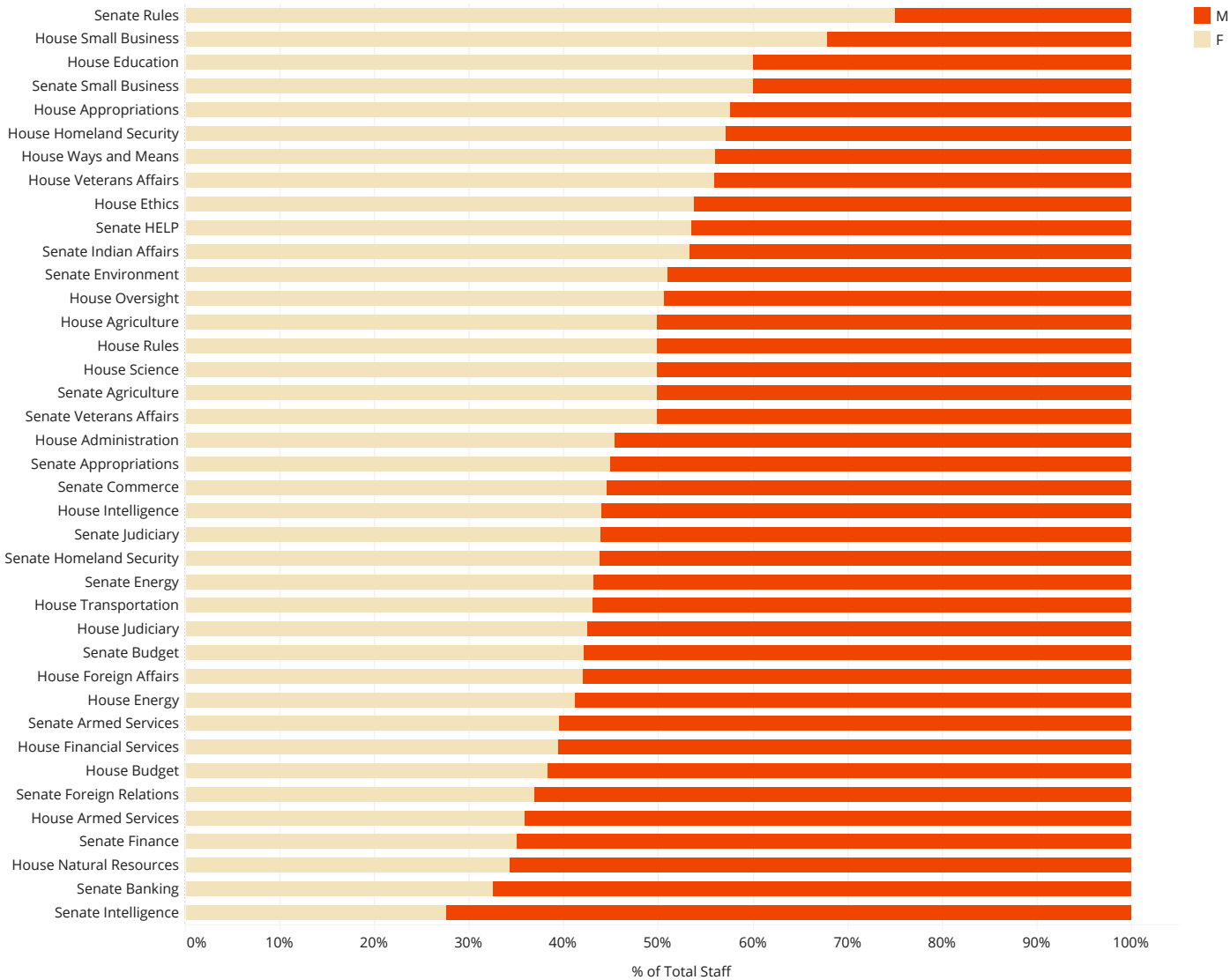
Table 3: Gender Balance by Chamber  
*Committee staff gender balance by chamber*

Committee	F	M
House	47.93%	52.07%
Senate	44.11%	55.89%

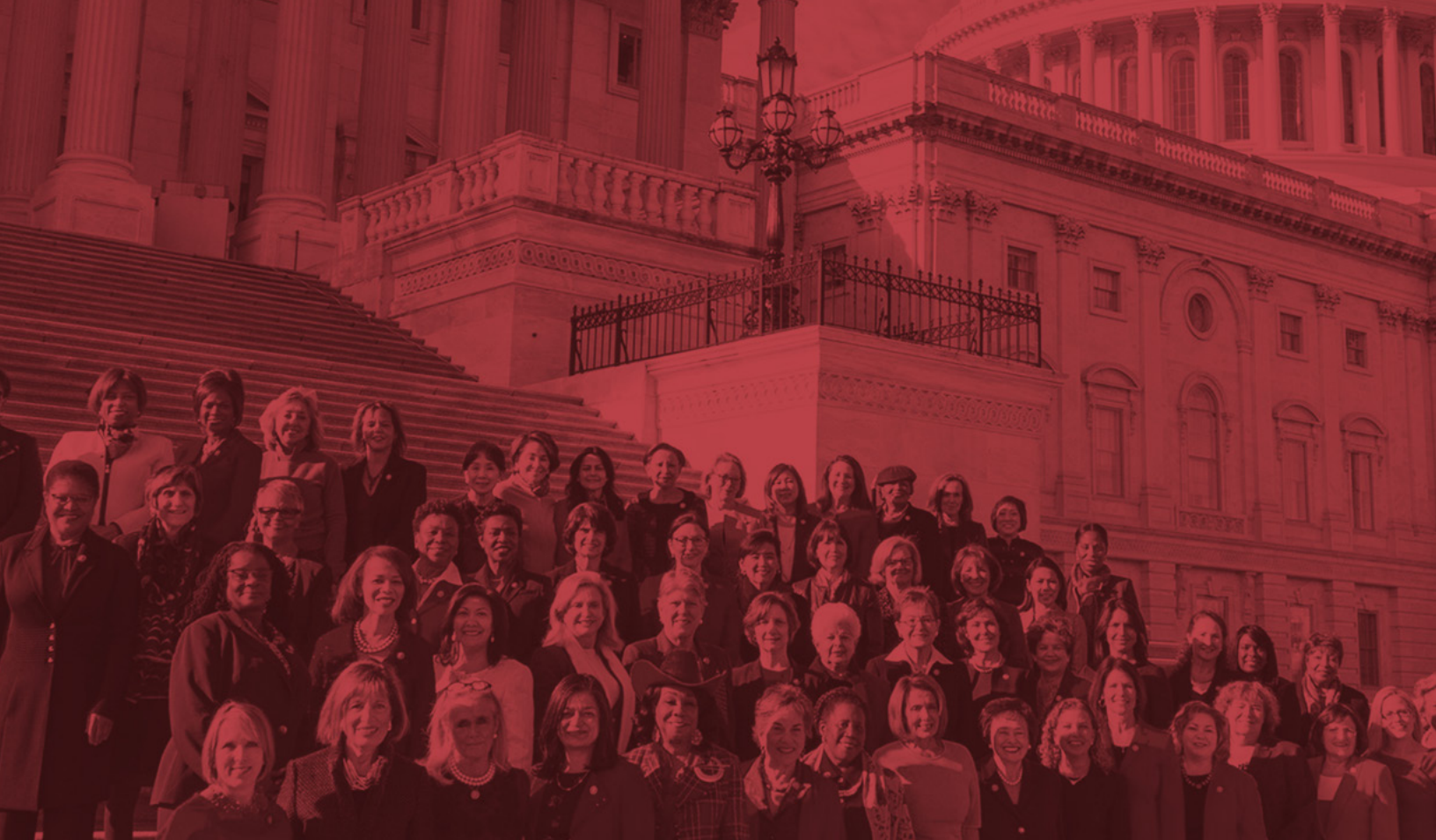
Nearly 56 percent of Senate committee staffers are male.

Providing greater context to gender-based analyses of committee staff, Table 3 shows the overall distribution of staffers by gender in each chambers’ committees. In the House, men represented roughly 52 percent of staffers, compared to roughly 48 percent for women. **Senate committee staff were far less equally balanced across genders, with men holding nearly 56 percent of committee staff roles** and women under 44 percent.

Figure 11: Gender Balance by Committee







The distribution of staffers across chambers, however, obscures significant differences in the gender composition of staff within each committee. **While nearly 75 percent of staffers on the Senate Intelligence Committee in 2017 were women, for example, the Senate Rules Committee was nearly the opposite, employing a staff that skewed nearly 75 percent male.** In between these extremes range committees of varying gender balances, with only five of the 38 committees studied having a roughly 50/50 balance: House Agriculture, House Rules, House Science, Senate Agriculture and Senate Veterans Affairs. Of the most prestigious committees on the Hill, many skewed extremely male in both the House and Senate. For example, **both chambers' Banking/Financial Services, Budget, Armed Services and Foreign Relations committee staffs were over 60 percent male and, in many cases, over 70 percent.** Many of the committees that skew female tend to deal with administrative matters, such as Senate Rules and House Ethics. One outlier to these very generalized trends is House Appropriations, perhaps the most prestigious committee assignment in that chamber, which skews in favor of women to the fourth-highest degree in all of Congress. Such skewed staff balances on committees affect both committee operations and the substance of policies considered and produced.

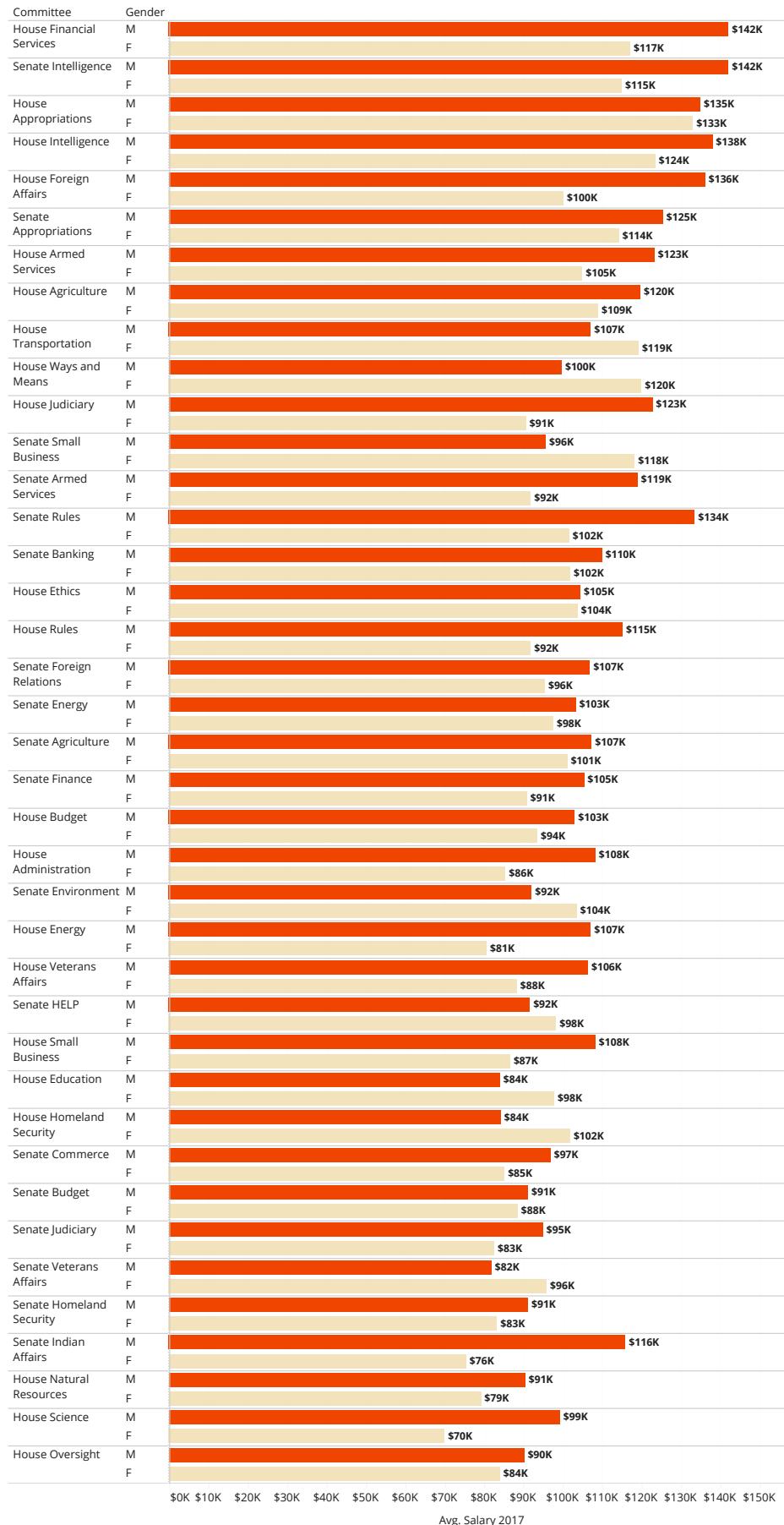
More gender-diverse committees would not only create a more equitable institution from the perspective of employment and recruitment but also a more equitable policymaking process for Congress as a whole.

---

Therefore, more gender-diverse committees would not only create a more equitable institution from the perspective of employment and recruitment but also a more equitable policymaking process for Congress as a whole.

**Figure 12: Gender Pay Gap by Committee**

*Average Salary by Committee Gender*



Our original dataset allows for a much more comprehensive look at pay disparities and in particular the gender pay gap than previous studies of Congress. Table 4 provides detailed figures that cover staff employed in 2017, average congressional salaries in that year for men and women, as well as the gender pay differential. Sorting the table by pay gap (as a percentage of average male salary), a picture quickly emerges of the vastly differing gender pay gaps that exist on the Hill in each committee. This creates substantially different experiences for women and men in different working environments.

Leading all of Congress is the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, where, in 2017, female staffers made an astonishing 35 percent less than their male counterparts. Thirty-one committees had a gender pay gap that favored men, with only eight committees paying female staffers more than their male counterparts. Of those eight committees, the largest gender pay gap was 24 percent on the Senate Small Business Committee, where women were paid an average of \$118,351 compared to \$95,725 for men.

**Table 4**

***Gender Pay Gap by Committee***

Positive value indicates men have higher average salaries than women; negative value indicates women have higher average salaries than men

That is to say the gender pay gap as % can be read as "Women make X% less than men."

Committee	Avg. Salary 2017 (M)	Avg. Salary 2017 (F)	Gender Pay Gap	Gender Pay Gap as %
Senate Indian Affairs	\$115,905	\$75,584	\$40,321	34.79%
House Science	\$99,266	\$69,942	\$29,325	29.54%
House Foreign Affairs	\$136,234	\$100,375	\$35,859	26.32%
House Judiciary	\$122,982	\$90,817	\$32,165	26.15%
House Energy	\$107,123	\$80,824	\$26,299	24.55%
Senate Rules	\$133,604	\$101,767	\$31,837	23.83%
Senate Armed Services	\$119,039	\$91,975	\$27,064	22.74%
House Administration	\$108,262	\$85,512	\$22,750	21.01%
House Rules	\$115,197	\$92,053	\$23,145	20.09%
House Small Business	\$108,278	\$86,614	\$21,664	20.01%
Senate Intelligence	\$142,234	\$115,031	\$27,204	19.13%
House Financial Services	\$142,216	\$117,195	\$25,021	17.59%
House Veterans Affairs	\$106,488	\$88,479	\$18,009	16.91%
House Armed Services	\$123,496	\$105,143	\$18,353	14.86%
Senate Finance	\$105,401	\$90,879	\$14,521	13.78%
Senate Judiciary	\$95,123	\$82,540	\$12,584	13.23%
House Natural Resources	\$90,534	\$79,243	\$11,291	12.47%
Senate Commerce	\$96,888	\$85,256	\$11,632	12.01%
Senate Foreign Relations	\$107,048	\$95,605	\$11,442	10.69%
House Intelligence	\$138,197	\$123,608	\$14,589	10.56%
House Budget	\$103,046	\$93,704	\$9,342	9.07%
Senate Appropriations	\$125,464	\$114,300	\$11,164	8.90%
House Agriculture	\$119,830	\$109,186	\$10,644	8.88%
Senate Homeland Security	\$91,162	\$83,371	\$7,791	8.55%
Senate Banking	\$110,119	\$101,900	\$8,218	7.46%
House Oversight	\$90,343	\$84,011	\$6,332	7.01%
Senate Agriculture	\$107,403	\$101,303	\$6,101	5.68%
Senate Energy	\$103,482	\$97,626	\$5,855	5.66%
Senate Budget	\$91,227	\$88,493	\$2,734	3.00%
House Appropriations	\$135,145	\$133,073	\$2,072	1.53%
House Ethics	\$104,538	\$103,816	\$722	0.69%
Senate HELP	\$91,762	\$98,404	(\$6,642)	-7.24%
House Transportation	\$107,239	\$119,452	(\$12,213)	-11.39%
Senate Environment	\$92,247	\$103,639	(\$11,392)	-12.35%
House Education	\$84,038	\$97,851	(\$13,813)	-16.44%
Senate Veterans Affairs	\$82,050	\$95,879	(\$13,829)	-16.85%
House Ways and Means	\$99,733	\$120,043	(\$20,310)	-20.36%
House Homeland Security	\$84,428	\$101,830	(\$17,402)	-20.61%
Senate Small Business	\$95,725	\$118,351	(\$22,625)	-23.64%

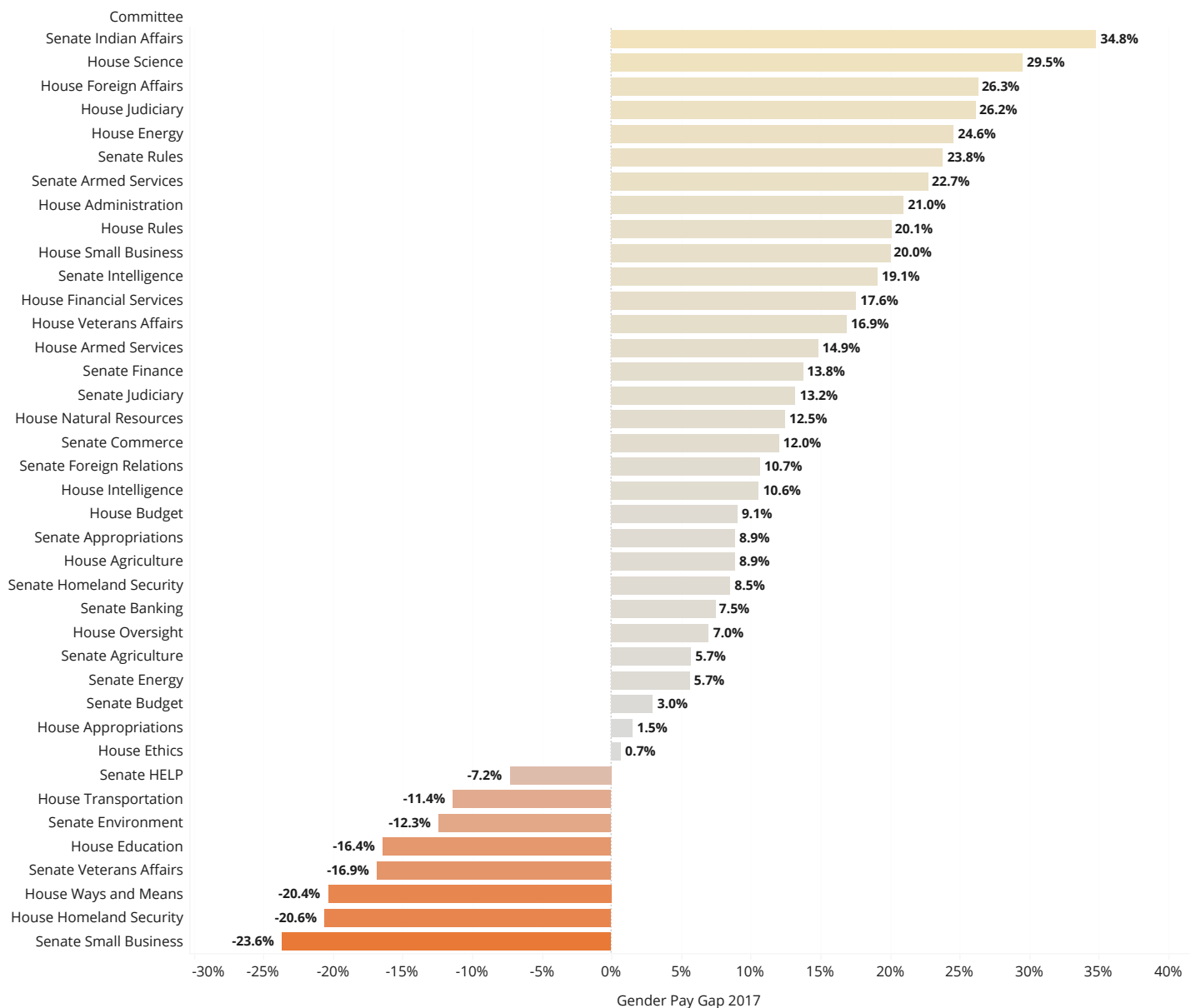
Avg. Salary 2017 (M), Avg. Salary 2017 (F), Gender Pay Gap and Gender Pay Gap as % broken down by Committee.

## Vastly differing gender pay gaps across congressional committees create substantially different experiences for men and women working in some of Congress's most important institutions.

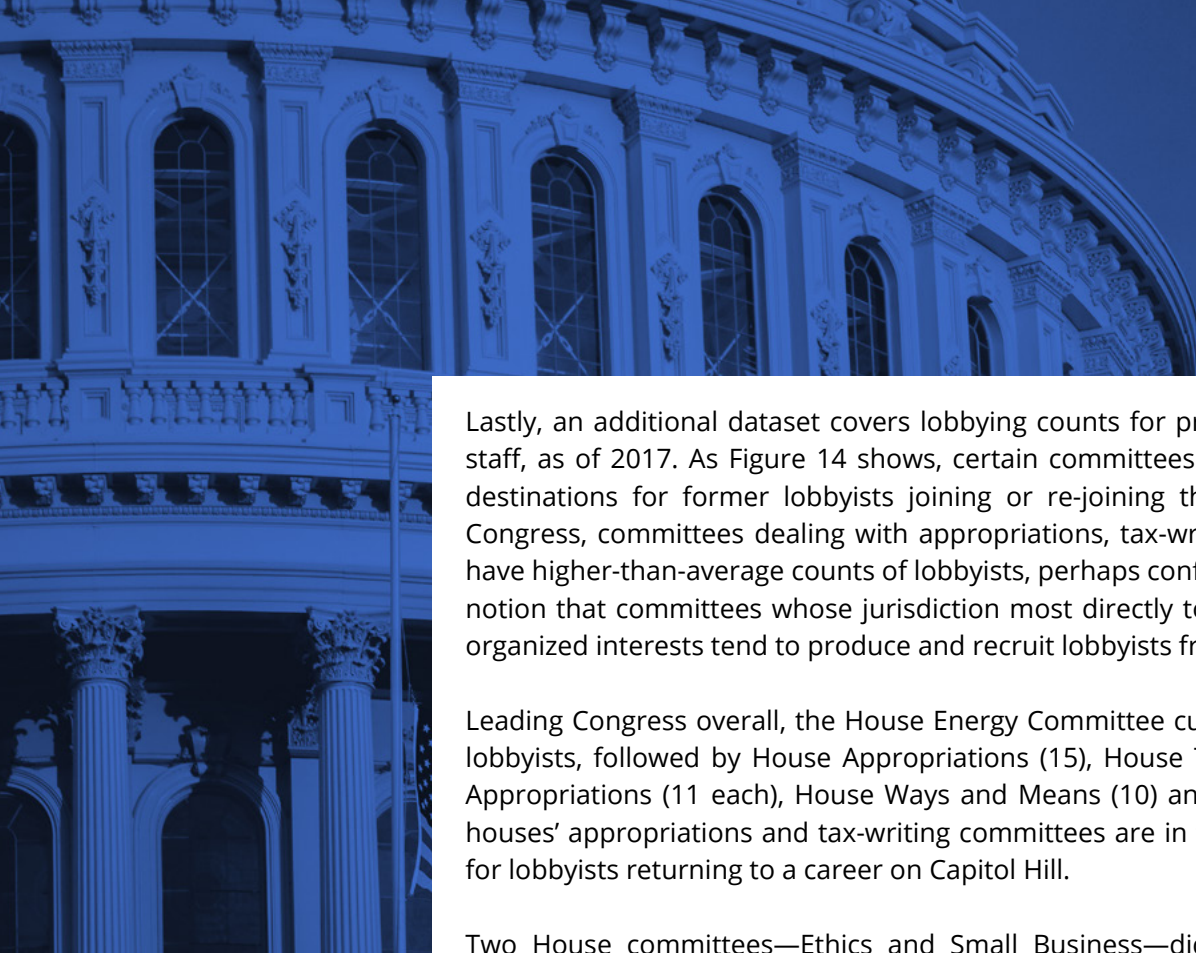
As Figure 13 shows, the most equal committees in Congress in terms of average pay were the House Ethics Committee and the House Appropriations Committee, which paid women 0.7 percent and 1.5 percent less than men on average, respectively. While it remains to be determined by future investigations what the causes of these disparities are, possible ones include the types of jobs for which men and women are hired, the experience and qualifications of men and women in various equivalent roles and/or outright pay discrimination. Nevertheless, this table and figure present **the most comprehensive look to date at gender pay gaps in congressional committees** and we hope they will shed light on the causes and consequences of pay inequity in the ability of Congress to recruit, retain and fairly compensate highly talented individuals of all backgrounds.

**Figure 13: Gender Pay Gap by Committee**

Positive value indicates men have higher salaries than women; negative value indicates women have higher average salaries than men. That is to say, the gender pay gap as % can be read as "Women make X% less than men."







Lastly, an additional dataset covers lobbying counts for presently serving committee staff, as of 2017. As Figure 14 shows, certain committees prove much more regular destinations for former lobbyists joining or re-joining the Hill. In both houses of Congress, committees dealing with appropriations, tax-writing and financial services have higher-than-average counts of lobbyists, perhaps confirming the “revolving door” notion that committees whose jurisdiction most directly touches business and other organized interests tend to produce and recruit lobbyists from those fields.

Leading Congress overall, the House Energy Committee currently employs 17 former lobbyists, followed by House Appropriations (15), House Transportation and Senate Appropriations (11 each), House Ways and Means (10) and Senate Finance (9). Both houses’ appropriations and tax-writing committees are in the top tier of destinations for lobbyists returning to a career on Capitol Hill.

Two House committees—Ethics and Small Business—did not employ any former lobbyists in 2017.

As the relative size of each colored group of blocks in the cartogram shows, the House employs 42 percent more former lobbyists than the Senate, at 115 versus 81 in the upper chamber.

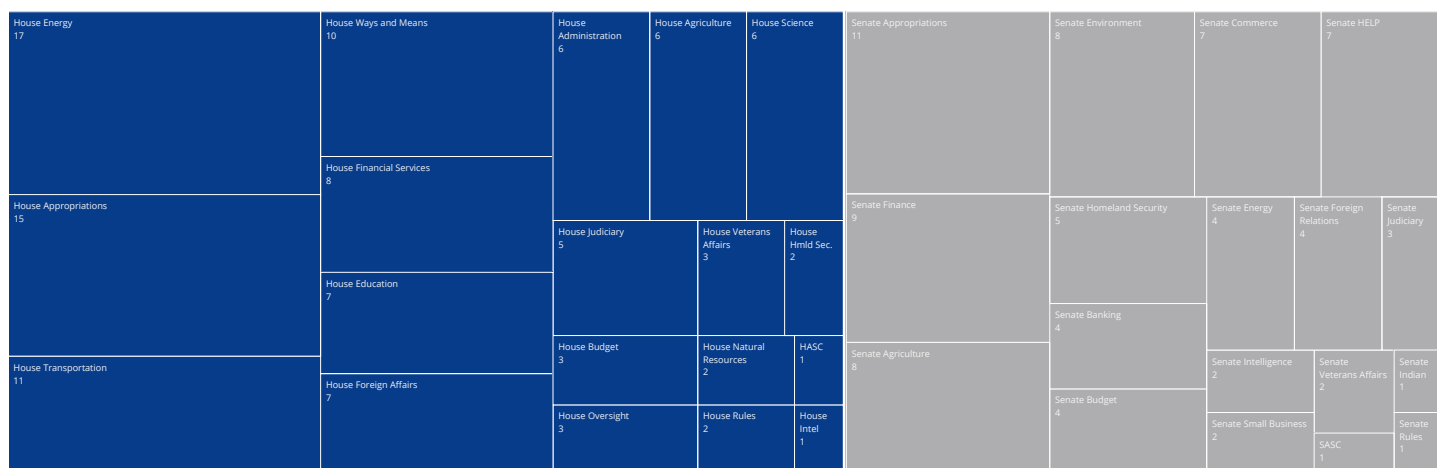
**Figure 14: Lobbyist**

***Which Committees Employ the Most Former Lobbyists?***

Graph shows 2017 absolute lobbyist count for each committee (i.e. actual number of individuals, rather than as a % of that committee’s staff).

**Note:** House Ethics and House Small Business employed 0 former lobbyists in 2017 and are therefore not shown

**Note:** The box with no label represents the Senate Armed Service Committee, which employed 1 former lobbyist in 2017





# CONCLUSION

---

Beyond the specific conclusions presented in each section above, several cross-cutting takeaways emerge with particularly relevant implications for public policy and congressional staff:

1. Many of the most **prestigious committees** do, in fact, tend to **attract staffers with the most congressional experience** and retain them for longer periods, once recruited. Other committees seem to serve more as congressional pit-stops rather than places for staffers to stake out a career on the Hill.
2. For many congressional committees, **recruiting experienced staff has proven difficult**, which leads to a void in experience that may negatively impact committee operations.
3. **Congress's priorities can be seen in the evolution in the number and types of staffers employed by the committees over the last 15+ years.** For example, the House Ethics Committee employed 120 percent more staffers in 2016 than in 2001, while the Senate Banking Committee staff level was cut by almost 45 percent in the same period.
4. In both chambers, **committees decreased the proportion of staff assigned to administrative roles and significantly increased the proportion of staff in communications positions.**
5. **In the House, more staffing resources have been spent on leadership or senior staffers, with no tangible increase in policy staffers. On the Senate side, committees have increased the number of policy and legislative committee aides by nearly 20 percent.**
6. **Average salaries differed substantially across committees**, from a low of just over \$80,000 per year for House Oversight to a high of nearly \$140,000 for House Financial Services (the lowest and highest-paying in Congress, respectively). Many committees seen as prestigious, or which compete most directly with more lucrative private-sector opportunities, pay staffers significantly more than committees that do not, which leads to a **wide divergence in compensation between staffers.** Therefore, if the leadership of a committee wishes to recruit more qualified individuals to staff positions, it **must compete not only with outside opportunities but also with other Hill positions that may offer a substantial bump and more prestige.**
7. Both houses' committee staff **skew in aggregate toward men**, the House at 52 percent and the Senate more imbalanced at 56 percent.
8. These chamber-level differences, however, obscure **vast differences in the gender balance among staffers at the committee level.** For example, while the Senate Intelligence Committee skewed nearly 75 percent in favor of women, on the Senate Rules Committee, the opposite was the case (the two were the most gender-imbalanced committees in Congress, in favor of women and men, respectively, in 2017). **Of the 38 congressional committees studied, only five could be considered nearly balanced in 2017** (less than a five percentage point advantage for one gender or the other).
9. **Gender imbalances on the Hill are not just limited to staff composition but also significantly impact pay.** 31 of 38 committees studied paid male staffers more on average than female staffers in 2017, while just seven committees paid women more. In some cases these differences were extreme: the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, for example, paid men 35 percent more than women, while the House Homeland Security Committee paid women 21 percent more than men.
10. These differences are not just a result of men and women holding different positions on committee staff, as **pay disparities are also observable at the position level.** Male communications staffers, for example, made nearly 15 percent more than women holding the same types of positions, while men and women in senior staff roles were paid almost exactly the same on average.

By leveraging the most comprehensive look to date at the demographics, human capital and compensation of Hill staffers across all of Congress's committees, we hope this report helps shed an important light on aspects of congressional staffing previously driven largely by anecdotal evidence. We look forward to ongoing conversations about gender pay equity, human capital development, congressional capacity, staff retention and congressional salaries in the future.

---

**Casey Burgat** is Governance Project senior fellow with the R Street Institute, where he researches and writes about congressional capacity and ways to make the First Branch of government work better.

**Ryan Dukeman** is a research assistant at the R Street Institute, supporting research in the Governance program and Legislative Branch Capacity Working Group.

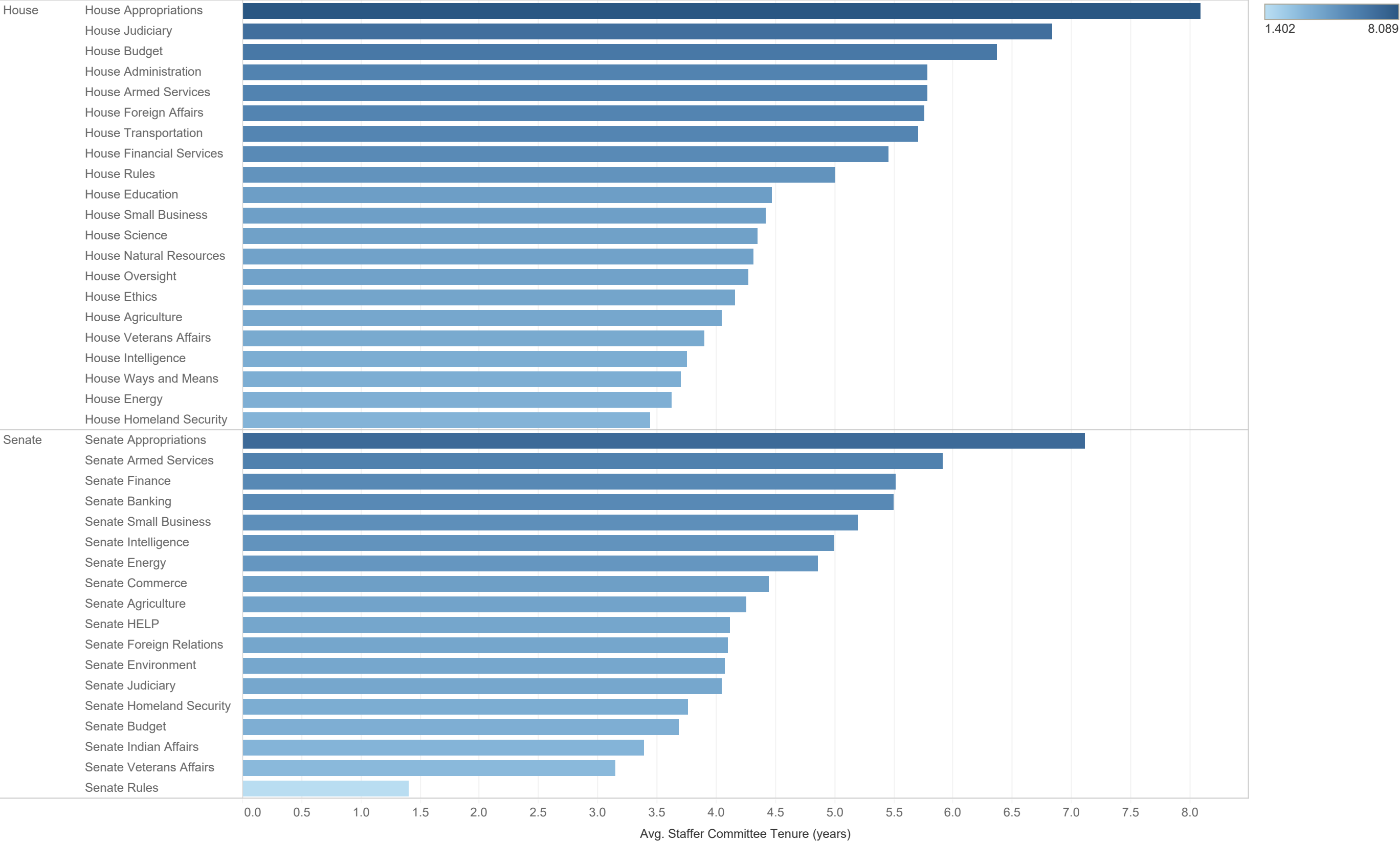
**R STREET INSTITUTE**

1212 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 900  
Washington, D.C. 20005  
(202) 525-5717 [feedback@rstreet.org](mailto:feedback@rstreet.org)  
[www.rstreet.org](http://www.rstreet.org)

# APPENDIX

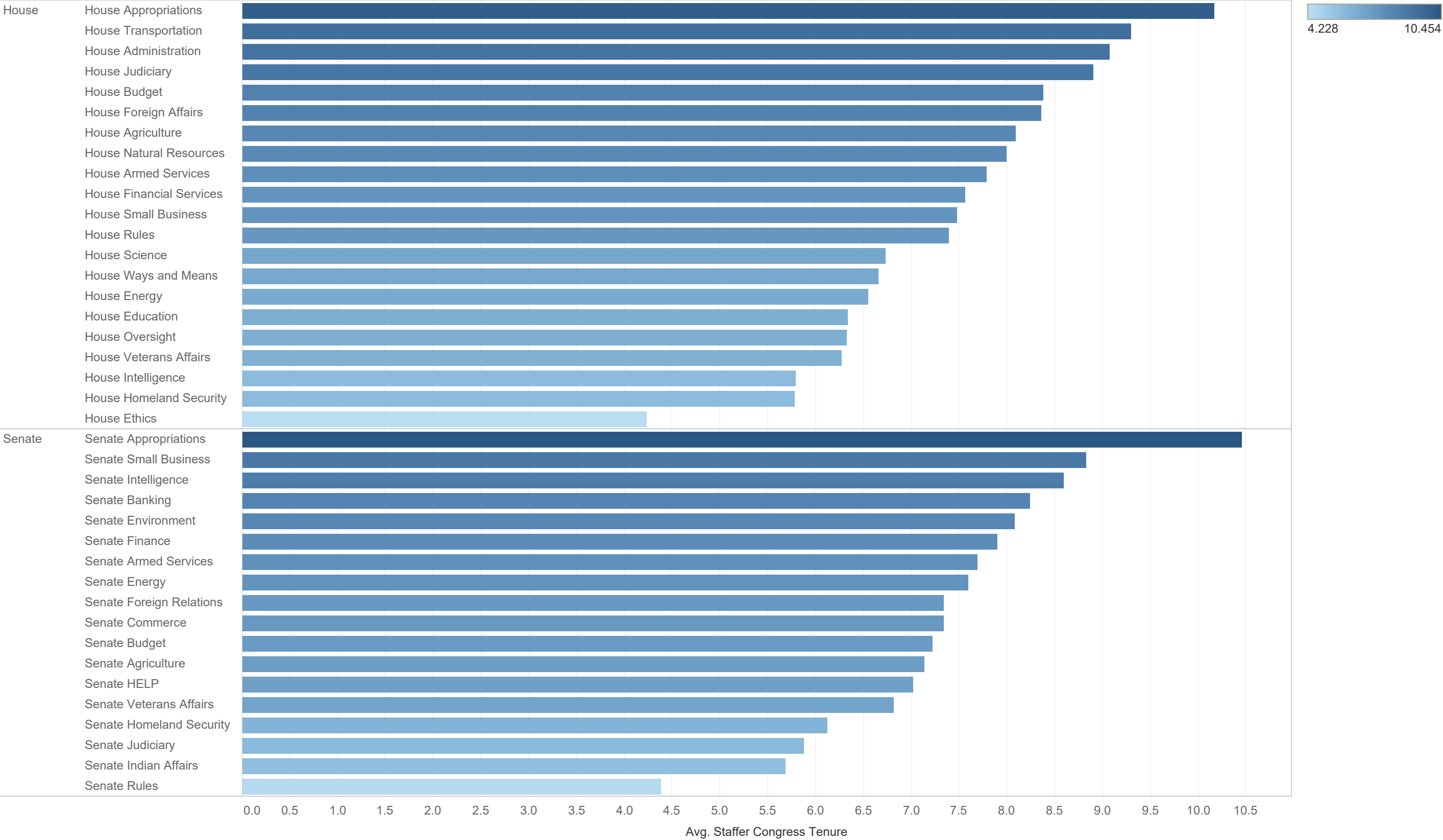
---

Committee Tenure by Committee



Average of Staffer Committee Tenure for each Committee broken down by Master Chamber. Color shows average of Staffer Committee Tenure.

Congress Tenure by Committee



Average of Staffer Congress Tenure for each Committee broken down by Master Chamber. Color shows average of Staffer Congress Tenure.



# Committees with Longest Average Committee Tenure

Committee	
House Appropriations	8.1 yrs
Senate Appropriations	7.1 yrs
House Judiciary	6.8 yrs
House Budget	6.4 yrs
Senate Armed Services	5.9 yrs

Average of Staffer Committee Tenure broken down by Committee. The view is filtered on Committee, which keeps the Top 5 by Average of Staffer Committee Tenure.

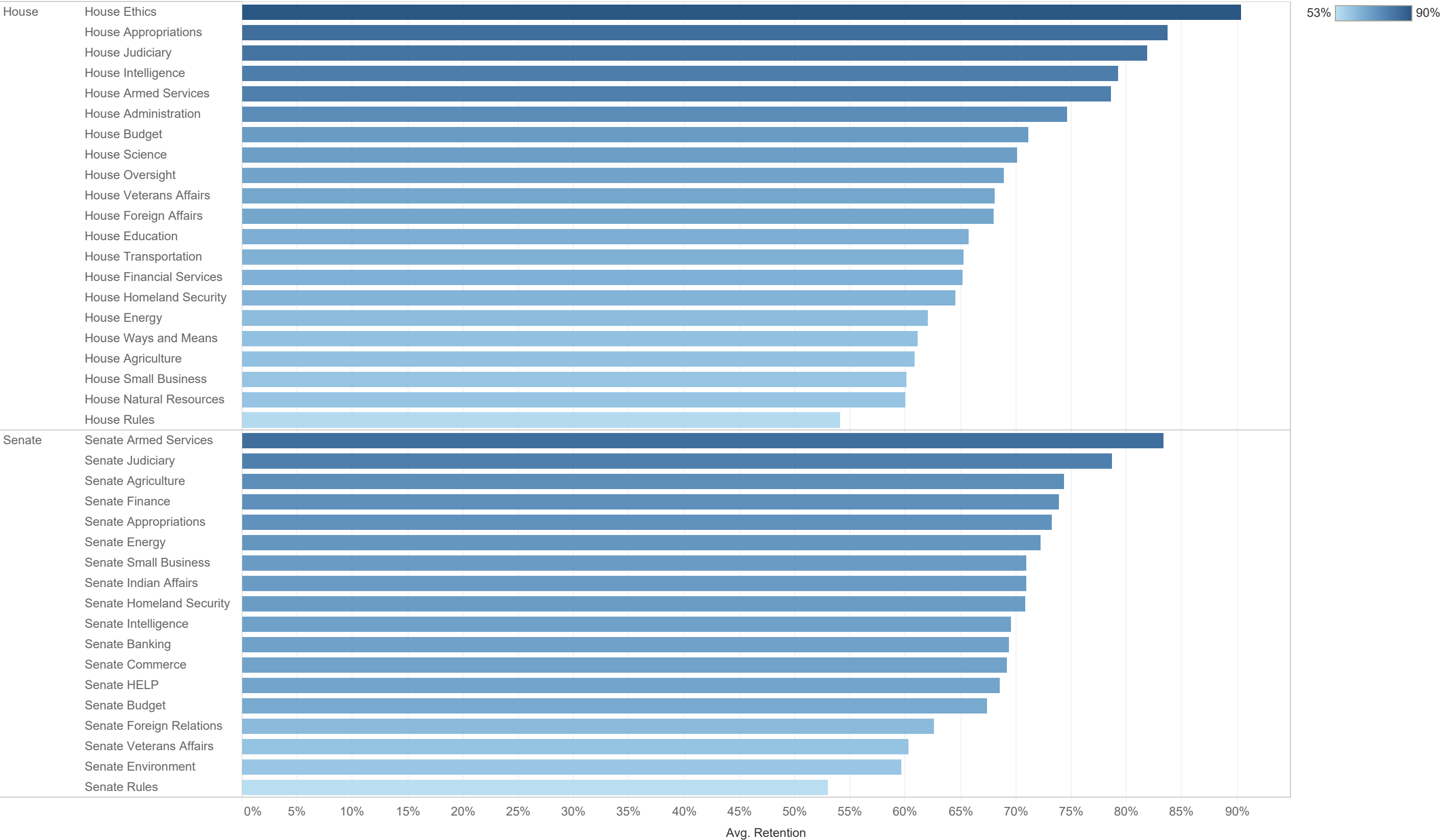
# Committees with Shortest Average Committee Tenure

Committee	
Senate Rules	1.4 yrs
Senate Veterans Affairs	3.1 yrs
Senate Indian Affairs	3.4 yrs
House Homeland Security	3.4 yrs
House Energy	3.6 yrs

Average of Staffer Committee Tenure broken down by Committee. The view is filtered on Committee, which keeps the Bottom 5 by Average of Staffer Committee Tenure.

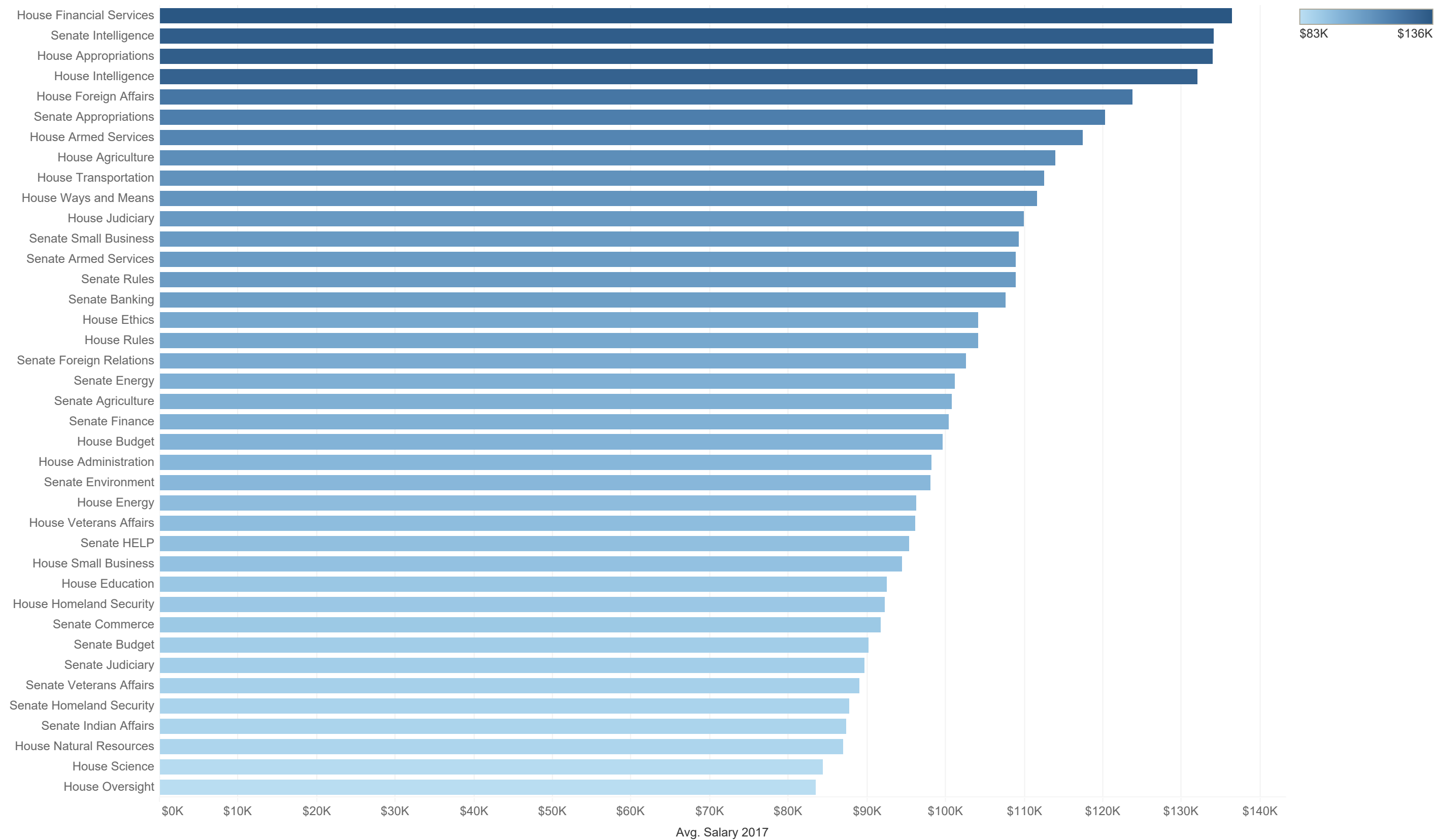
# Which Committees Retain Their Staff the Longest?

Retention is defined as ratio of committee tenure to congress tenure, i.e. how much of one's Hill career has been spent at their current committee



Average of Retention for each Committee broken down by Master Chamber. Color shows average of Retention.

# Average Salary by Committee



Average of Salary 2017 for each Committee. Color shows average of Salary 2017.

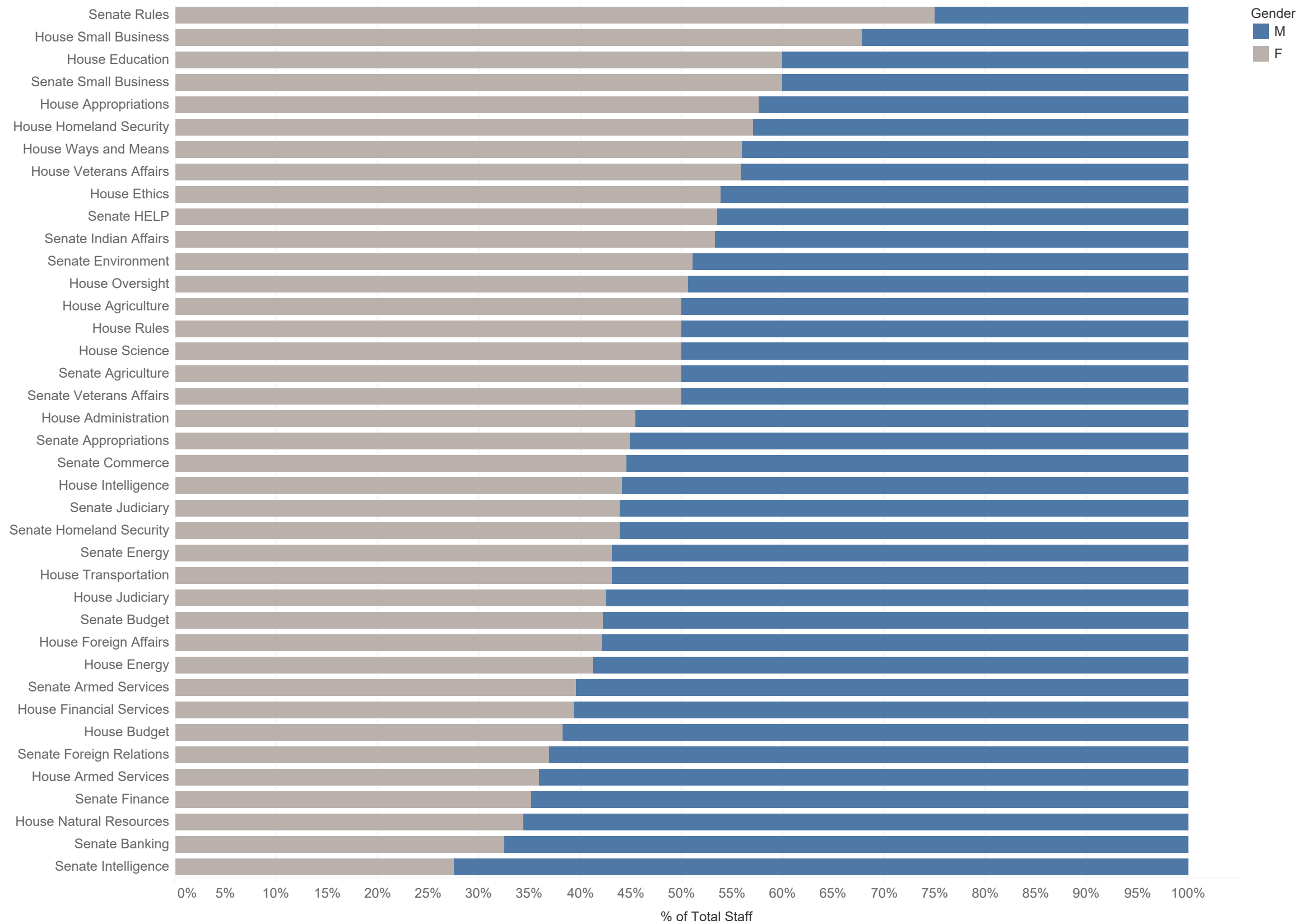
# Committee Staff Gender Balance by Chamber

	F	M
House	47.93%	52.07%
Senate	44.11%	55.89%

% of Total Staff broken down by  
Gender and Chamber.



# Gender Balance by Committee



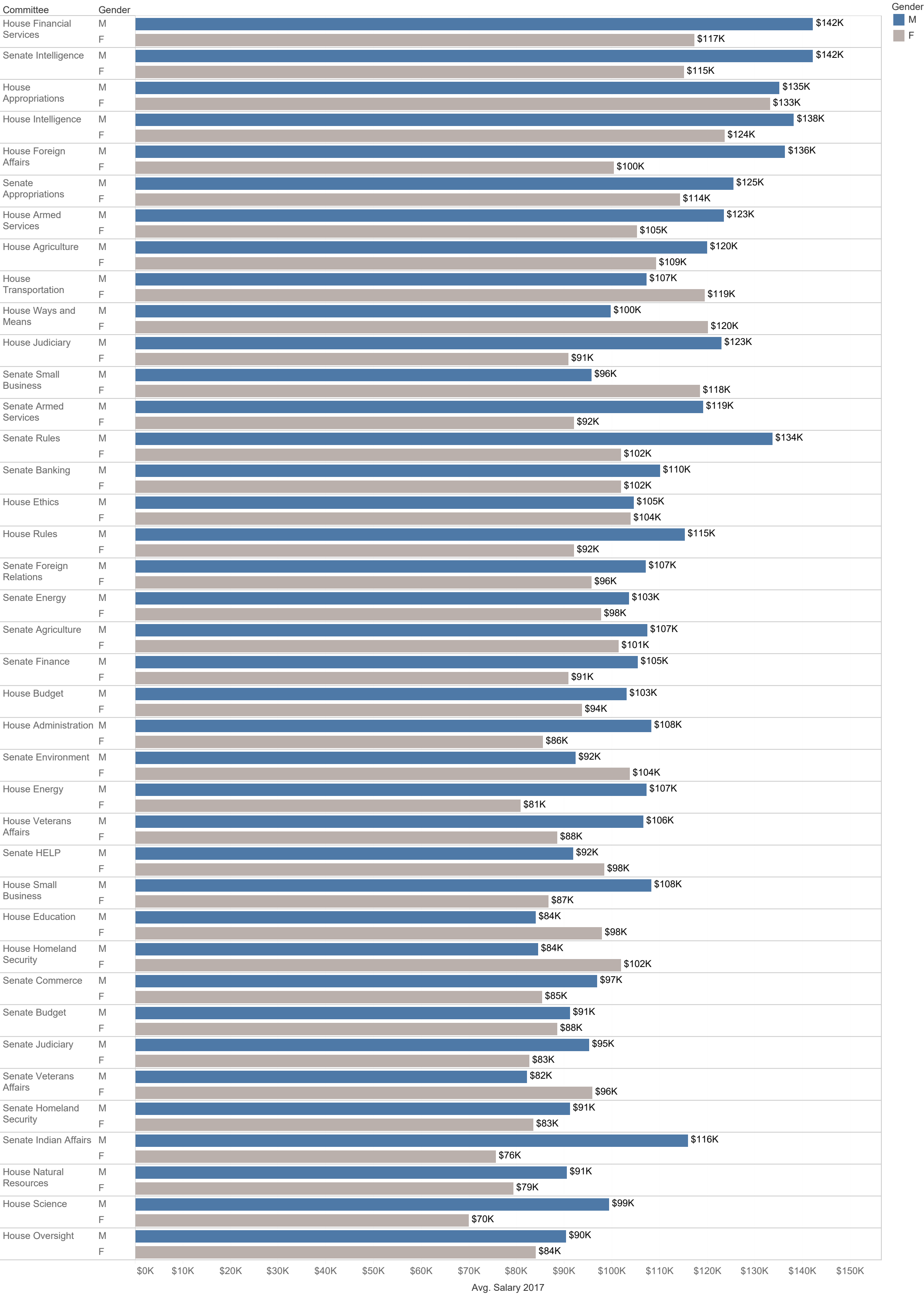
% of Total Count of Gender for each Committee. Color shows details about Gender.

## Average Salary by Gender by Chamber

	M	F
House	\$111K	\$101K
Senate	\$105K	\$96K

Average of Salary 2017 broken down by Gender and Chamber.

Average Salary by Committee by Gender



Average of Salary 2017 for each Gender broken down by Committee. Color shows details about Gender. The marks are labeled by average of Salary 2017.

## Gender Pay Gap by Committee

Positive value indicates men have higher average salaries than women; negative value indicates women have higher average salaries than men

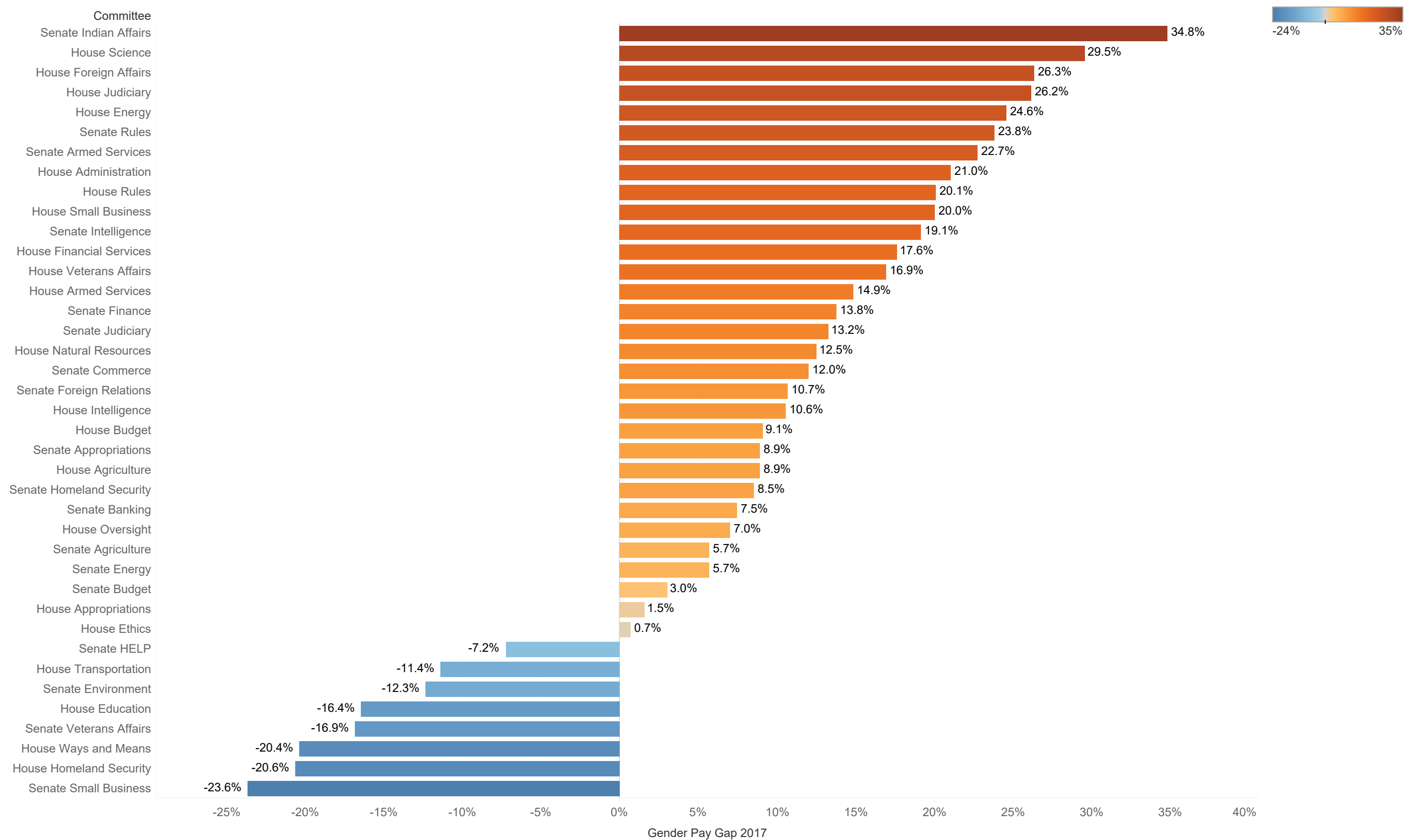
That is to say, the gender pay gap as % can be read as "Women make X% less than men."

Committee	Avg. Salary 2017 (M)	Avg. Salary 2017 (F)	Gender Pay Gap	Gender Pay Gap as %
Senate Indian Affairs	\$115,905	\$75,584	\$40,321	34.79%
House Science	\$99,266	\$69,942	\$29,325	29.54%
House Foreign Affairs	\$136,234	\$100,375	\$35,859	26.32%
House Judiciary	\$122,982	\$90,817	\$32,165	26.15%
House Energy	\$107,123	\$80,824	\$26,299	24.55%
Senate Rules	\$133,604	\$101,767	\$31,837	23.83%
Senate Armed Services	\$119,039	\$91,975	\$27,064	22.74%
House Administration	\$108,262	\$85,512	\$22,750	21.01%
House Rules	\$115,197	\$92,053	\$23,145	20.09%
House Small Business	\$108,278	\$86,614	\$21,664	20.01%
Senate Intelligence	\$142,234	\$115,031	\$27,204	19.13%
House Financial Services	\$142,216	\$117,195	\$25,021	17.59%
House Veterans Affairs	\$106,488	\$88,479	\$18,009	16.91%
House Armed Services	\$123,496	\$105,143	\$18,353	14.86%
Senate Finance	\$105,401	\$90,879	\$14,521	13.78%
Senate Judiciary	\$95,123	\$82,540	\$12,584	13.23%
House Natural Resources	\$90,534	\$79,243	\$11,291	12.47%
Senate Commerce	\$96,888	\$85,256	\$11,632	12.01%
Senate Foreign Relations	\$107,048	\$95,605	\$11,442	10.69%
House Intelligence	\$138,197	\$123,608	\$14,589	10.56%
House Budget	\$103,046	\$93,704	\$9,342	9.07%
Senate Appropriations	\$125,464	\$114,300	\$11,164	8.90%
House Agriculture	\$119,830	\$109,186	\$10,644	8.88%
Senate Homeland Security	\$91,162	\$83,371	\$7,791	8.55%
Senate Banking	\$110,119	\$101,900	\$8,218	7.46%
House Oversight	\$90,343	\$84,011	\$6,332	7.01%
Senate Agriculture	\$107,403	\$101,303	\$6,101	5.68%
Senate Energy	\$103,482	\$97,626	\$5,855	5.66%
Senate Budget	\$91,227	\$88,493	\$2,734	3.00%
House Appropriations	\$135,145	\$133,073	\$2,072	1.53%
House Ethics	\$104,538	\$103,816	\$722	0.69%
Senate HELP	\$91,762	\$98,404	(\$6,642)	-7.24%
House Transportation	\$107,239	\$119,452	(\$12,213)	-11.39%
Senate Environment	\$92,247	\$103,639	(\$11,392)	-12.35%
House Education	\$84,038	\$97,851	(\$13,813)	-16.44%
Senate Veterans Affairs	\$82,050	\$95,879	(\$13,829)	-16.85%
House Ways and Means	\$99,733	\$120,043	(\$20,310)	-20.36%
House Homeland Security	\$84,428	\$101,830	(\$17,402)	-20.61%
Senate Small Business	\$95,725	\$118,351	(\$22,625)	-23.64%

Avg. Salary 2017 (M), Avg. Salary 2017 (F), Gender Pay Gap and Gender Pay Gap as % broken down by Committee.

# Gender Pay Gap by Committee

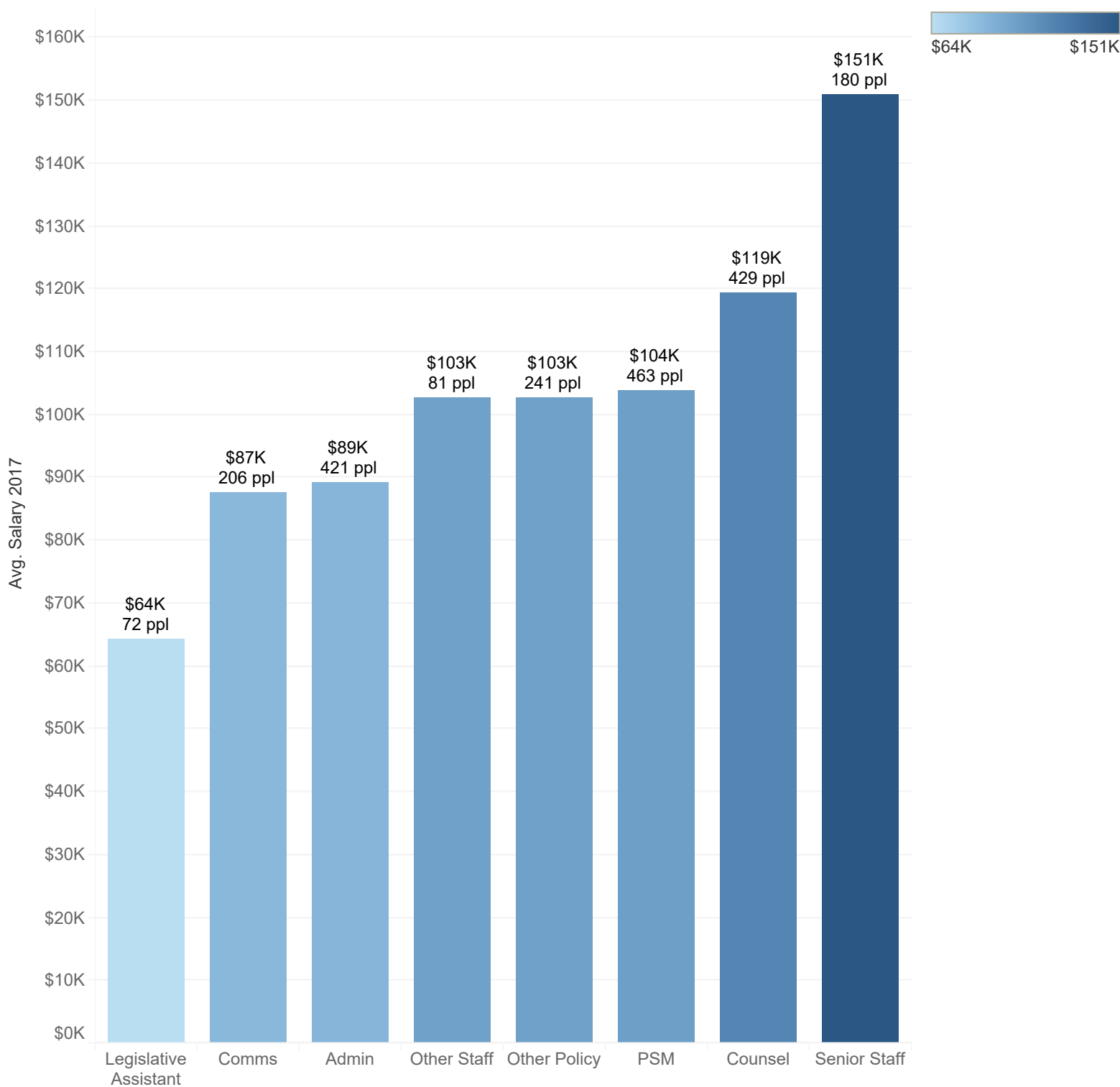
Positive value indicates men have higher average salaries than women; negative value indicates women have higher average salaries than men  
That is to say, the gender pay gap as % can be read as "Women make X% less than men."



Gender Pay Gap as % of Avg. Male Salary 2017 for each Committee. Color shows Gender Pay Gap as % of Avg. Male Salary 2017. The marks are labeled by Gender Pay Gap as % of Avg. Male Salary 2017.

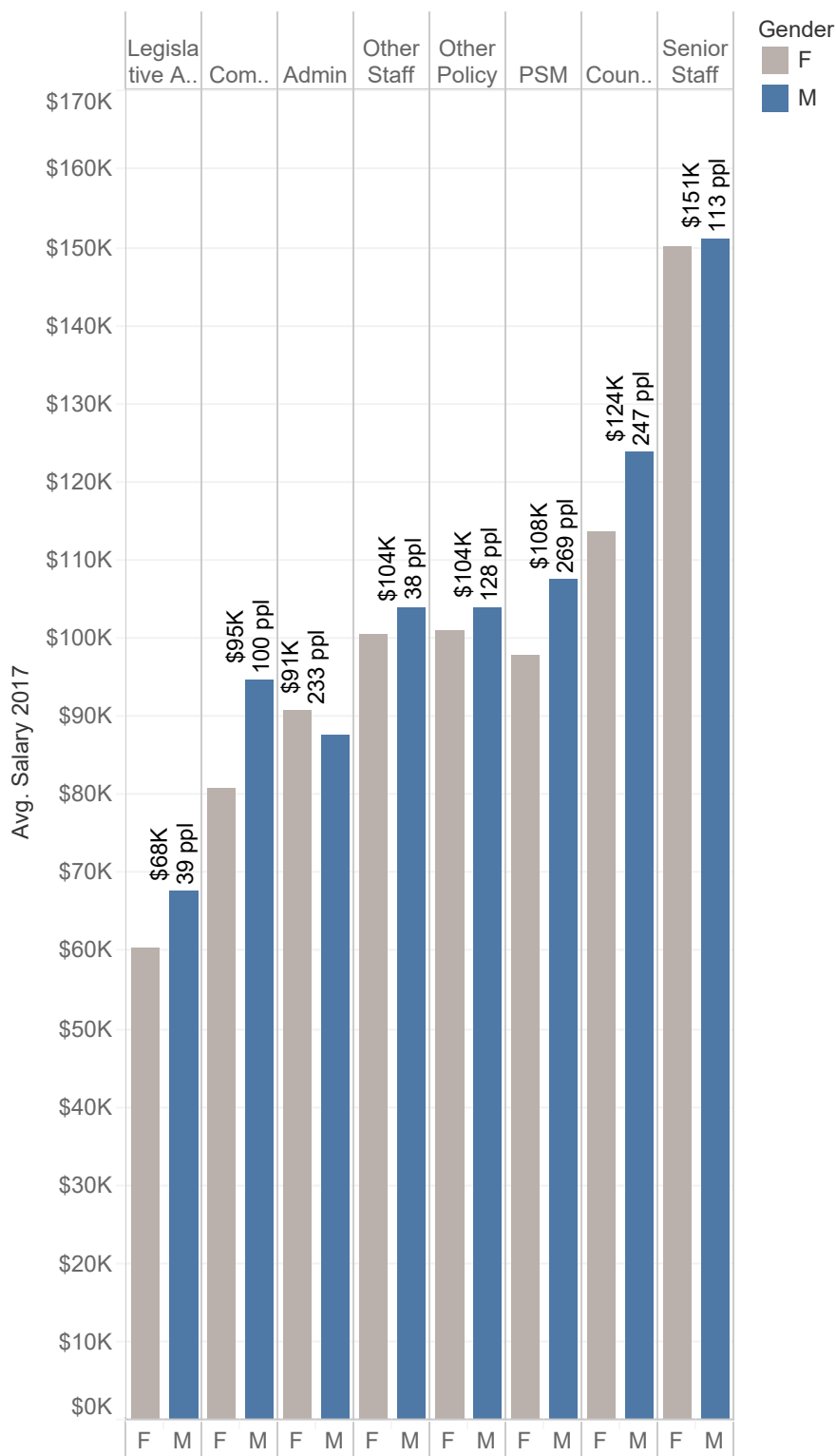


# Average Salary by Position



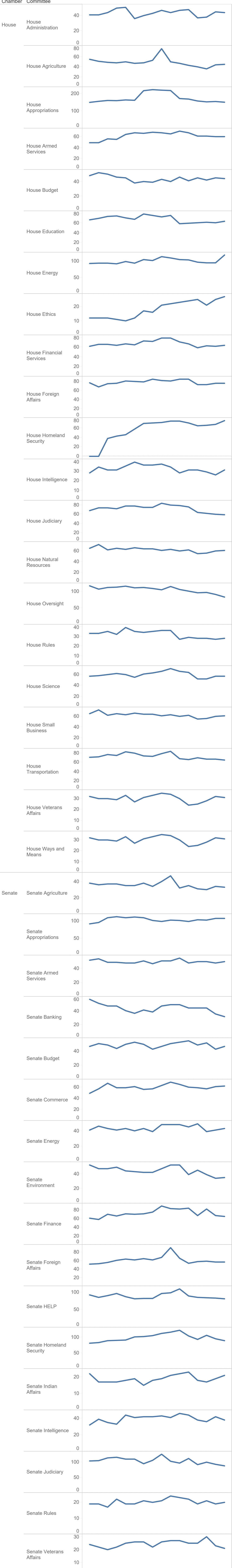
Average of Salary 2017 for each Position ID. Color shows average of Salary 2017. The marks are labeled by average of Salary 2017 and count of Committee. The view is filtered on Position ID, which excludes Null.

# Average Salary by Position and Gender



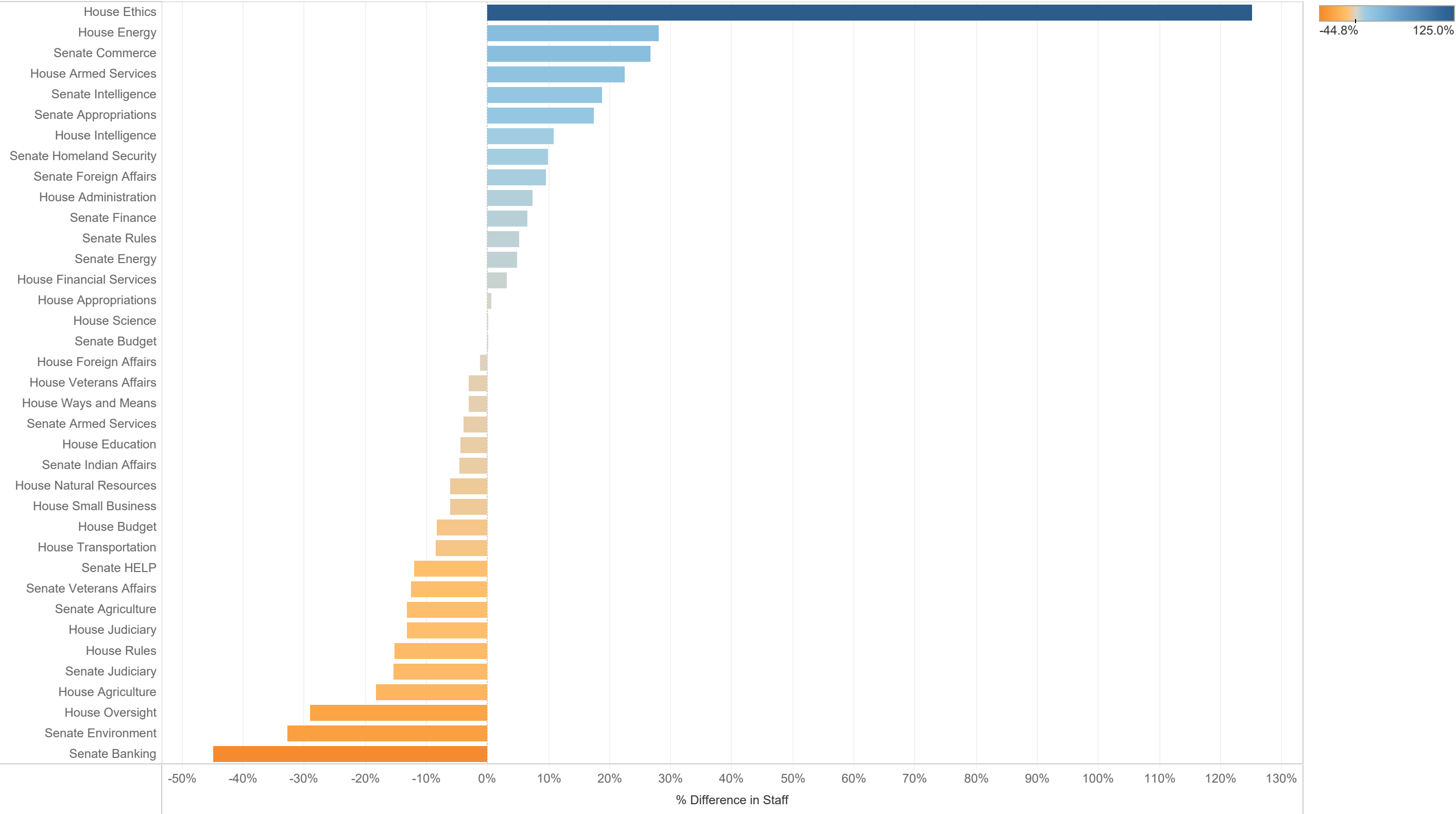
Average of Salary 2017 for each Gender broken down by Position ID. Color shows details about Gender. The marks are labeled by average of Salary 2017 and count of Committee. The view is filtered on average of Salary 2017, Gender and Position ID. The average of Salary 2017 filter keeps non-Null values only. The Gender filter keeps F and M. The Position ID filter excludes Null.

Committee Staff Levels, 2001-2016



# Staffing Changes by Committee, 2016 vs. 2001

Note: House Homeland Security Committee is excluded from this analysis as it did not exist until 2003



% Difference in # Staff for each Committee broken down by Year Year. Color shows % Difference in # Staff. The view is filtered on Committee and Year Year. The Committee filter excludes House Homeland Security. The Year Year filter keeps 2001 and 2016.

# House Homeland Security Staffing Changes, 2016 vs. 2003

By 2016, House Homeland Security staff levels had doubled from initial 2003 levels

---

House Homeland Security	100.0%
-------------------------	--------

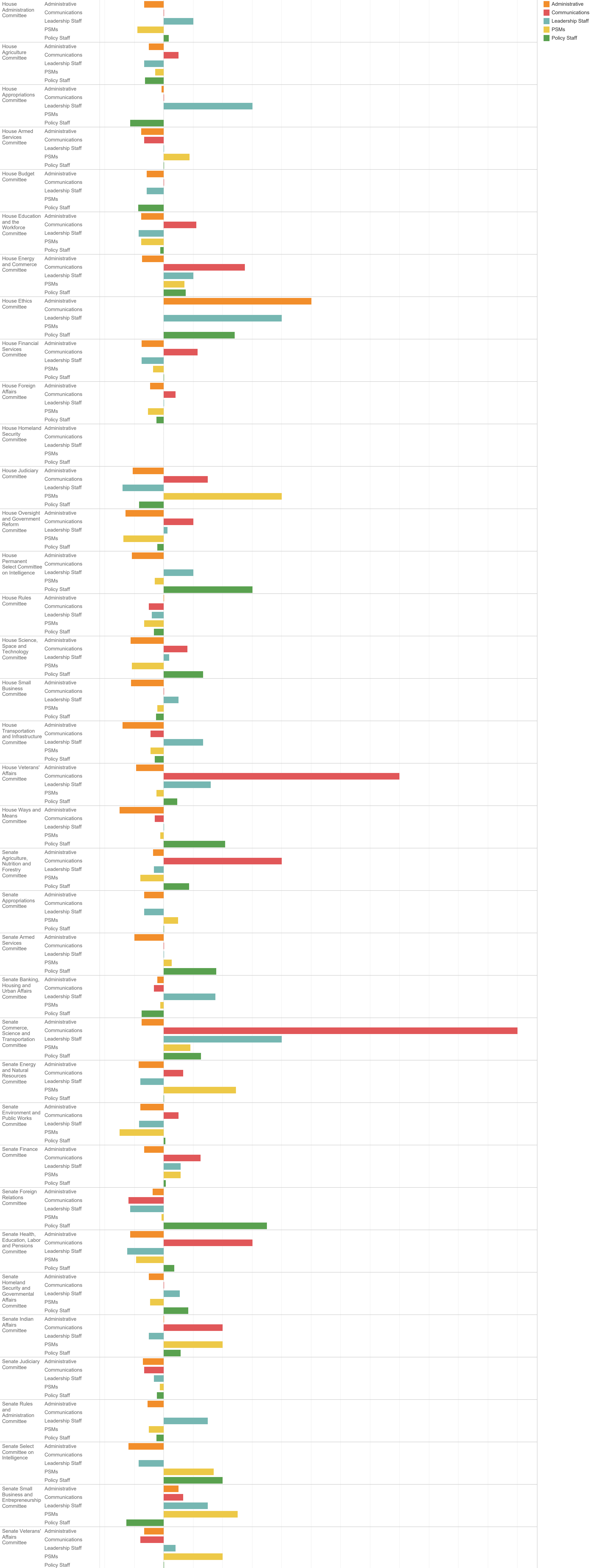
---

% Difference in # Staff broken down by Year  
Year vs. Committee. The view is filtered on  
Committee, which keeps House Homeland  
Security.

Change in Committee Staff Composition, 2017 vs. 2001

Bar reflects % increase or decrease in count of staff members of the specified type, comparing 2017 to 2001

NB: This view filters out the House Natural Resources Committee and Senate Budget Committee due to differences in scale



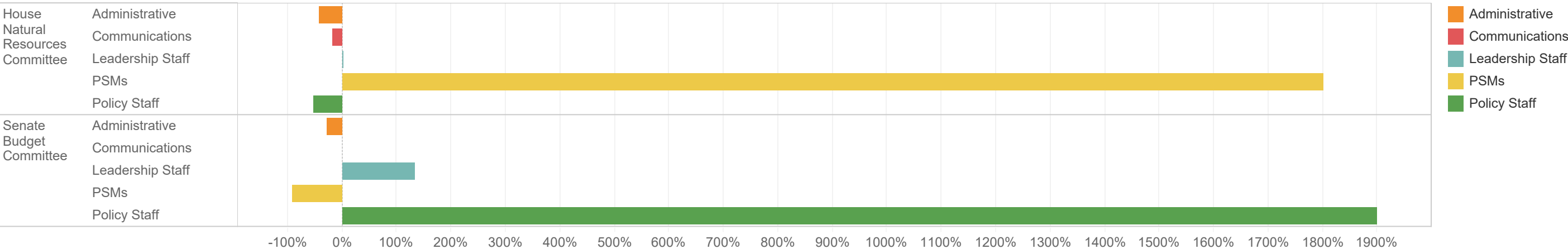
Administrative, Communications, Leadership Staff, Policy Staff and PSMs for each Committee broken down by Year. Color shows details about Administrative, Communications, Leadership Staff, Policy Staff and PSMs. The data is filtered on Year, which ranges from 2001 to 2017. The view is filtered on Committee, which excludes House Natural Resources Committee and Senate Budget Committee.



# Change in Committee Staff Composition, 2017 vs. 2001 (2)

Bar reflects % increase or decrease in count of staff members of the specified type, comparing 2017 to 2001

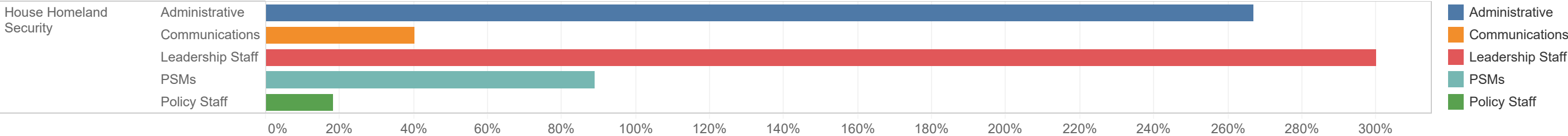
NB: This view only includes House Natural Resources and Senate Budget Committees due to different magnitudes of scale from other committees



Administrative, Communications, Leadership Staff, Policy Staff and PSMs for each Committee broken down by Year. Color shows details about Administrative, Communications, Leadership Staff, Policy Staff and PSMs. The data is filtered on Year, which ranges from 2001 to 2017. The view is filtered on Committee, which keeps House Natural Resources Committee and Senate Budget Committee.

# House Homeland Security Change in Committee Staff Composition, 2017 vs. 2003

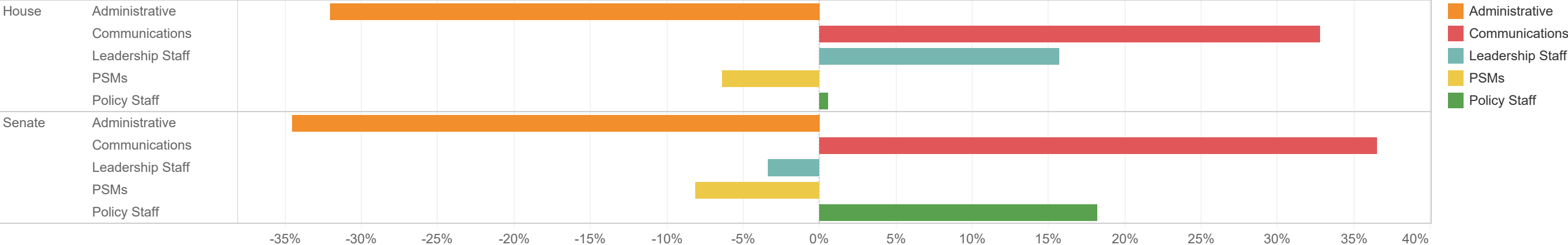
Bar reflects % increase or decrease in count of staff members of the specified type, comparing 2017 to 2003



Administrative, Communications, Leadership Staff, Policy Staff and PSMs for each Year broken down by Committee. Color shows details about Administrative, Communications, Leadership Staff, Policy Staff and PSMs. The view is filtered on Committee, which keeps House Homeland Security.

# Change in Chamber Staff Composition, 2017 vs. 2001

Bar reflects % increase or decrease in count of staff members of the specified type, comparing 2017 to 2001



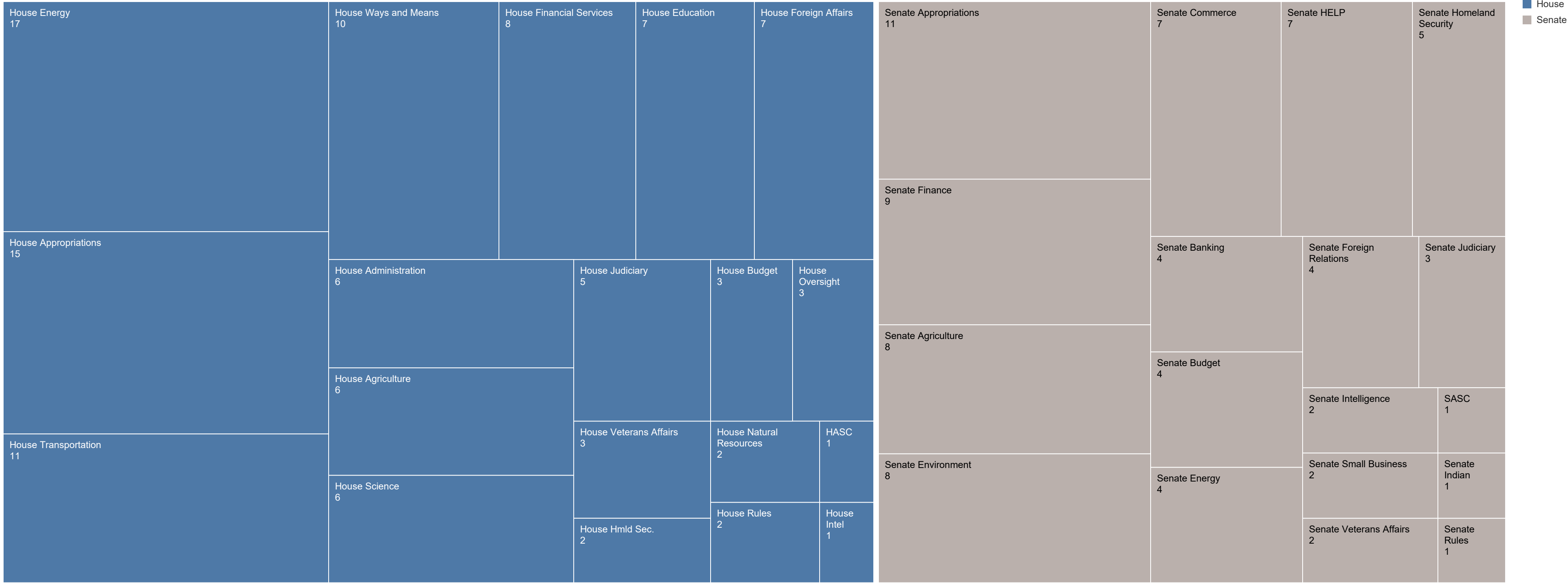
Administrative, Communications, Leadership Staff, PSMs and Policy Staff for each Chamber broken down by Year. Color shows details about Administrative, Communications, Leadership Staff, PSMs and Policy Staff. The data is filtered on Year, which ranges from 2001 to 2017.

Which Committees Employ the Most Former Lobbyists?

Graph shows 2017 absolute lobbyist count for each committee (i.e. actual number of individuals, rather than as a % of that committee's staff)

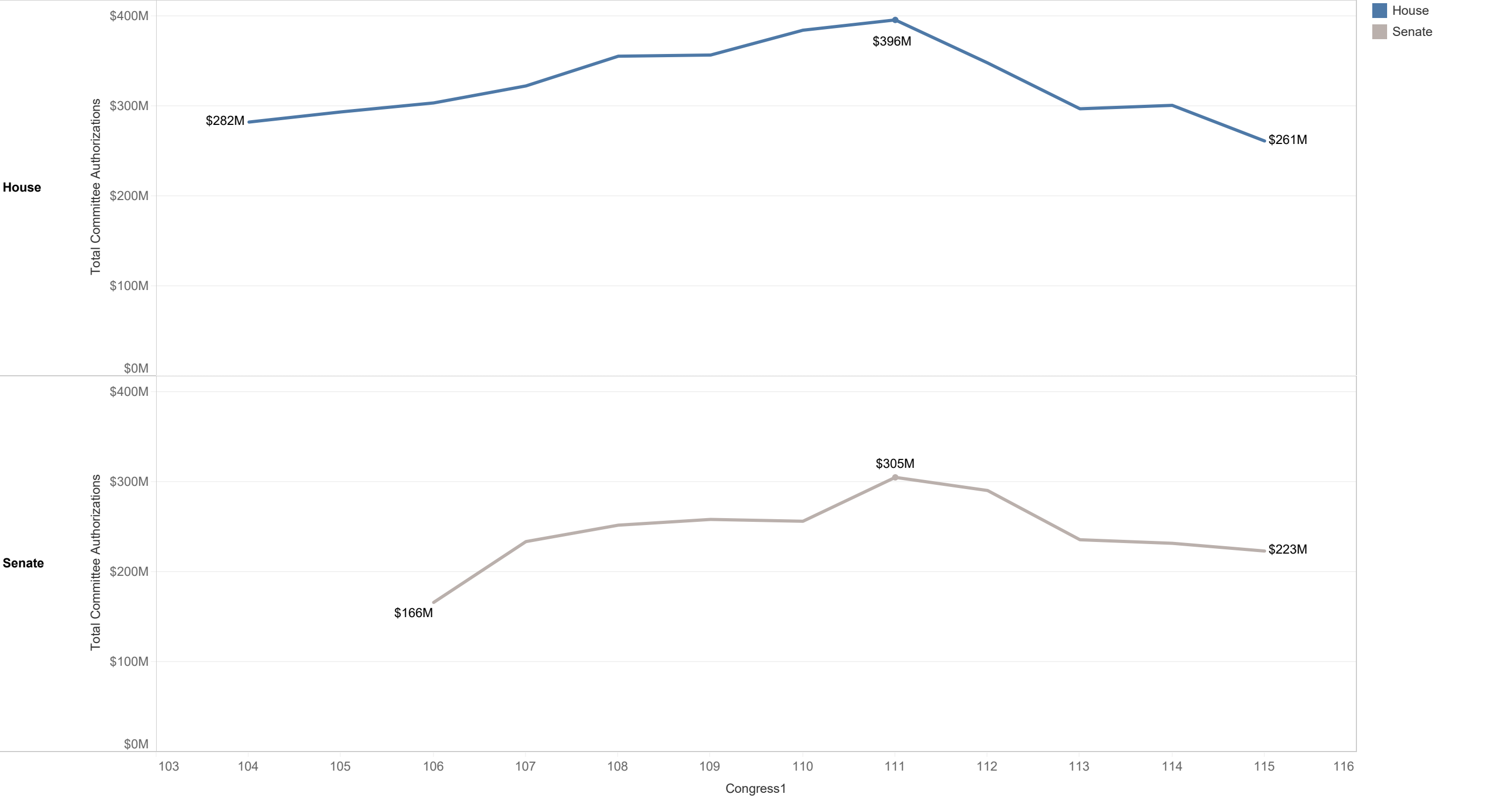
Note: House Ethics and House Small Business employed 0 former lobbyists in 2017 and are therefore not shown

Note: The box with no label represents the Senate Armed Services Committee, which employed 1 former lobbyist in 2017



Committee and sum of Lobbyist Count. Color shows details about Chamber. Size shows sum of Lobbyist Count. The marks are labeled by Committee and sum of Lobbyist Count.

How Has Each Chamber's Committee Funding Changed Over Time?



The trend of sum of Authorization for Congress1 broken down by Chamber1. Color shows details about Chamber1.