The Lugar Center and Georgetown University's McCourt School Unveil New Bipartisan Index Rankings for the first year of the 116th Congress

Republicans Outscore Democrats in Senate, while Democrats Prevail in the House; Scores Show a Continued Undercurrent of Cooperation between Rank and File Members.
May 12, 2020

For immediate release

For more information contact:

Ruth McBain ruth.mcbain@georgetown.edu
Dan Diller dan@thelugarcenter.org
Jay Branegan jay@thelugarcenter.org
Phone: (202) 816-3333

WASHINGTON, DC — The Lugar Center and the McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown University today jointly released their new Bipartisan Index rankings of members of Congress for 2019 (the first year of the 116th Congress). The non-partisan tool measures the degree to which Senators and Representatives work across party lines on legislation.

“Many functions and decisions within Congress remain bitterly partisan, especially those pitting the leadership of the parties against one another,” said Lugar Center Policy Director, Dan Diller. “Yet the Bipartisan Index continues to find an undercurrent of bipartisan cooperation between individual members of Congress on introducing and co-sponsoring legislation.”

As in the previous Congress, the average 2019 Bipartisan Index score in the Senate was well above the historical average. The average 2019 House score sits just below the historical average, but it is likely to move into positive territory before the end of the current Congress.

The Bipartisan Index incorporates data from all Congresses since 1993. The rankings are based on the frequency with which members work with members of the other party on their bill sponsorships and co-sponsorships.

"Today, our interdependencies are more obvious and urgent than ever," said Maria Cancian, dean of Georgetown’s McCourt School of Public Policy. "While hyper-partisanship continues in Congress, our
The latest Bipartisan Index—a nonpartisan and data-driven tool—points to a crosscurrent of cooperation among lawmakers. This offers hope, as our future depends on our ability to work together across the aisle and across differences for the common good."

In 2019, Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME) extended her unprecedented run as the most bipartisan Senator. She has topped the Senate’s Bipartisan Index rankings for seven consecutive years. Her score of 4.061 in 2019 is the highest one-year Senate score in the history of the Bipartisan Index. On the House side, Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) finished first among the 437 House members scored. Like Sen. Collins, he set a new Bipartisan Index record for the highest one-year score ever recorded in his chamber -- 5.385. His impressive mark was built on his co-sponsorship of 673 bills offered by the other party. In 2019, no one else in the House had more than 237 bipartisan co-sponsorships. In the previous Congress (115th), Rep. Fitzpatrick also was a bipartisan leader, finishing in second place behind now retired Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL). Scores in the two houses of Congress are based on separate data, so the scores of House members are not comparable to those of Senators.

In 2019, 58 Senators earned a positive bipartisan score — meaning they scored better than the average Senator in their circumstances during the previous 13 Congresses (1993-2019). This is a slight improvement over the 115th Congress when 53 senators scored above the historical average. On the House side, 187 members in 2019 scored above the historical average compared to 163 members who achieved this distinction in the previous Congress. However, despite this improvement, a majority of House members — 250— were below the historical average.

In the Senate, both Republican and Democratic Senators scored above the historical average, and Republican Senators had a higher cumulative score than their Democratic counterparts. In the House, however, Democrats outscored Republicans by a narrow margin, with both parties scoring slightly below the historical average. House Republicans occupied seven of the top ten House scores, but they also had the nine lowest scores in the body, with Rep. Gary Palmer (R-AL) finishing last. For the fifth year in a row, former presidential candidate, Sen. Bernie Sanders, an independent who caucuses with the Democrats, had the lowest score in the Senate.

The Bipartisan Index measures how often a member of Congress introduces bills that succeed in attracting co-sponsors from members of the other party, and how often they in turn co-sponsor a bill introduced from across the aisle. The Index excludes non-binding resolutions and ceremonial bills. It is based on a formula applied uniformly to all members. No subjective judgments are made about individual members or bills. The Index serves as a critical resource for voters and the media and, its sponsors hope, encourages lawmakers to be more bipartisan when writing or co-sponsoring legislation.

The scores released today cover sponsorship and co-sponsorship activity during the 2019 calendar year. At the end of 2020, when the 116th Congress comes to a close, final Bipartisan Index scores for
the entire Congress will be released. Thus, members can improve upon their current score during the remainder of 2020. Bipartisan Index scores tend to rise modestly during the second year of a Congress due to Index components that reflect the accumulation of bipartisan bills and co-sponsorships.

In addition to Sen. Sanders, the Bipartisan Index offers perspective on other former presidential candidates and members receiving vice presidential consideration.

In the Senate, Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) ranked 22nd out of the 98 Senators to lead former Democratic presidential candidates. Michael Bennet (D-CO) ranked 52nd; Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) was 65th; Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) was 66th; Cory Booker (D-NJ) was 92nd; Kamala Harris (D-CA) was 93rd.

Two other Senators sometimes mentioned as potential vice presidential running mates of Joe Biden — Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV) and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) — were ranked 58th and 80th respectively.

To see current and previous Bipartisan Index rankings, click here.

About the Lugar Center:

Founded by former U.S. Senator Richard Lugar, the non-profit Lugar Center is a platform for informed debate and analysis of global issues, including nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction, global food security, foreign assistance effectiveness and global development, energy security, and enhancing bipartisan governance. http://www.thelugarcenter.org

About the McCourt School of Public Policy:

The McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown University is a top-ranked public policy school located in the center of the policy world in Washington, D.C. Our mission is to teach our students to design, analyze, and implement smart policies and put them into practice in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, in the U.S. and around the world. https://mccourt.georgetown.edu/

###