

# Speaker Ryan: House Leaders present McCormack Award to Hugh Halpern, Bernie Raimo, and Austin Smythe

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WASHINGTON—At a ceremony in the Capitol on Thursday, House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) and House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)

presented the **John W. McCormack Award of Excellence** to longtime House staffers **Hugh Halpern, Bernie Raimo, and Austin Smythe**. The award, named after Speaker John McCormack of Massachusetts, was created in 1970 to recognize longtime employees of the House of Representatives who have displayed dedication and bipartisanship.

Halpern is director of floor operations for the Office of the Speaker. Raimo is counsel for the Office of the Democratic Leader. Smythe is policy director for the Office of the Speaker.

Following are excerpts from Speaker Ryan's remarks at today's ceremony, as prepared for delivery:

- *"The McCormack Award celebrates the idea that the people's House is only as good as its people: the dedicated staff who make this institution work. John McCormack was a product of South Boston who served here for 42 years. He succeeded Sam Rayburn as speaker, and led the institution during the tumultuous 1960s. His biographer described him as you would a true man of the House. He was always in the room for the big decisions, but made sure to let others take the credit. He was unfailingly kind, too. History records that his harshest insult was saying, quote, 'I hold the member in minimum high regard.' This award in his name, the highest that we as House leaders can bestow, celebrates longtime employees who have gone above and beyond in their dedication to the institution and their commitment to bipartisanship."*
- *"When I think about Hugh, two things that I absolutely love about this place come to mind. First, that it is a meritocracy. Hugh started as a driver and he has risen to the top of the institution. And he has done it by consistently being a behind-the-scenes guy, putting in the long hours, doing the nuts and bolts work, mentoring the next generation of staff. He really embodies the traits necessary to make this institution function. Second, Hugh really respects the vital role of the committees. It is just second nature to him to respect the input of both the majority and the minority. And frankly, we need more of that. One other thing about Hugh: He is often the guy who has to tell members no or explain, respectfully, why their great idea maybe isn't so 'great.' Somehow—I'm not exactly sure how—he smooths everything out without a problem."*
- *"As for Bernie, his reputation precedes him. Working for two committees and two Democratic leaders—including of course a speaker—is an impressive run. One story I have heard comes from Jennifer Hemingway, his counterpart in our office. Jennifer says that after she got the job, the first person to call her was Bernie. It is a small gesture, but I think it says a lot about his genuine commitment to being institutional partners. Bernie can always be counted on to provide his best counsel. If he gives his word, we can trust his word. And no matter what the decision is, he will see it through for the good of the institution. Also, Bernie is decidedly old school. He is known to be a fan of the House telephone book. So much so, that he has informed the clerk that if we were to discontinue the practice, he will have no choice but to retire."*
- *"When I called Austin to tell him he was receiving this award, he said, 'Hey, that's great! ... What is it?' If you know Austin, that really captures who he is. There is no ego about him, no expectation of recognition. He embodies 'service above self.' It is why, when I started at the Budget Committee as ranking member, the very first thing I did was lure him from OMB to be my staff director. And we have been working together ever since. Austin is one of those people who is always in the room for the big decisions. You can implicitly trust him to know the particulars, and work to get to yes. And when the work is done, there is no victory lap. He always moves right on to the next thing. As we speak, he is probably thinking about the next 'four corners' meeting he has to get to. Austin is someone I consider a kindred spirit. I could not be more honored—as speaker and just as a friend—to present him with this award."*