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Where the White House Scholars Went

By Ben Weyl, CQ Staff

More than 600 promising young leaders have been White House fellows since President Lyndon B. Johnson began the program in 1964. And according to a new study of the alumni, nearly four out of 10 have joined up or stayed in government service, fulfilling Johnson's purpose of giving the gifted a taste of governing.

"It shows how the White House is in many ways a steppingstone to other positions of prominence," says D. Michael Lindsay, a Rice University sociologist and author of the study by Rice and the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy.

The program has not, though, been a steppingstone to Congress. Only six fellows have served in the House or Senate, and just two of them - both Republicans - are in office now: Sen. Sam Brownback of Kansas and Rep. Joe L. Barton of Texas. Others who have come and gone are a pair of senators, Colorado Democrat Tim Wirth and Nebraska Republican David Karnes, and a pair of House members from California, Republican Tom Campbell and Democrat Lynn Schenk.

The paucity of fellows in Congress doesn't surprise Brownback, who during his fellowship worked as an assistant to the deputy trade representative in the first Bush administration. "The program is built more to people in either management or executive positions than legislative," he says. "The legislature is a different kettle of fish than running an entity."

Lindsay says that from his experience, members of Congress "oftentimes emerge out of more local politics and are closer to the ground or in community activism, as opposed to those folks who go on to become Cabinet secretaries, heads of federal bureaus or agencies, or senior leaders in the military."

The study of fellowship alumni - 78 percent responded - found that they have more confidence than the general public has in the Supreme Court, the scientific community and the military, and less confidence in the education system and financial institutions.

Motivated achievers themselves, they admire such predictable national icons as Abraham Lincoln, but when asked what single accomplishment in life they were proudest of, the overwhelming majority said parenting and family life.

Source: CQ Weekly

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