



## Wikipedia Wants to Bury the Hatchet With Capitol Hill, Tells Staffers to Play Nice

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For Capitol Hill staffers the usually slow summer months have been surprisingly eventful, thanks in large part to their juvenile online habits. In July, the Twitter handle @CongressEdits drew national attention to just how often the folks on Capitol Hill make unnecessary or biased edits to Wikipedia pages in their political purview, including some extremely offensive edits to a series of pages regarding trans-issues.

Wikipedia immediately responded by banning a number of IP addresses originating in the halls of Congress. But now Wikipedia is looking to give these bored Capitol Hill staffers a second chance to play nicely. Early this week the volunteer moderator branch of Wikipedia based in the District, Wikimedia D.C., published a blog post to bury the hatchet.

"Most press coverage of @CongressEdits has focused on acts of vandalism, and one would think we would want to chase Congressional staff away. In fact, Wikimedia DC welcomes edits by Congressional staff and the staffs of federal government agencies," the group wrote. "Government staff are experts in areas of public interest, including very new hot topics. They play a promising role in our mission to make a better online reference work, with notable, neutrally phrased, verifiable content. We can overlook minor discretions and work with Capitol Hill and all federal employees to forge a path forward."

Wikipedia's desire to bring the folks on Capitol Hill back into the fold is admirable, especially in an online climate where other companies, from Facebook to Instagram, are struggling to figure out how to deal with people who violate protocols of decency.

Two weeks ago Wikimedia D.C. partnered with the Cato Institute to host a quiet briefing for Capitol Hill staffers, encouraging them to become more active on Wikipedia, and to feel more comfortable citing Wikipedia as a reliable and accurate source. The briefing also touched on best practices, explaining to staffers that they needed to be aware of any potential conflict of interest when making edits, and to recognize that their edits are being tracked for integrity.

I think ultimately Wikipedia's response to Capitol Hill has been wonderfully mature. The company has come across as very down to earth in recognizing that a couple of bad eggs abusing the platform isn't something worth becoming a full blown scandal. The real test however, will be to see if these bored Hill staffers can keep up their end of the bargain and play nice.